Supervised Practice Teaching in Higher Education of Future Teachers

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Abstract
Supervised practice teaching is an inseparable part of the higher education of future teachers and is perceived as the bridge between theoretical and practical preparation. It is also a tool for the development of professional competences of future teachers, therefore it is inevitable to pay attention to it in terms of theory, research and practice. This article introduces the position of self-reflection in the process of evaluating the implementation of supervised practice teaching done by students themselves. Through the analysis of self-reflecting evaluation of the implemented practice done by students, it presents various possibilities how to improve the supervised practice teaching in higher education of future teachers itself.

Keywords
supervised practice teaching, higher education, university student, self-reflection, analysis of text documents

Introduction
School is a social institution and is being influenced by society in various ways. Naturally, changes in society are directly reflected in the area of education. The goal of these changes lies not only in the school’s development, transformation and
improvement of its efficiency, but also in an attempt to prepare pupils and students for their active, creative and full-valued lives as much as possible. Education, that individuals receive, should enable them to apply their knowledge and experience to their work, as well as their personal lives. It is obvious that teachers play a key role here and that, as representatives of the school, they need to adjust to current requirements of the society, as well as to the new trends in teaching. This requires an ongoing self-improvement. Great attention is, therefore, paid to their higher education.

The core of professional preparation of future teachers lies in the following principles:

1. Professional preparation of a teacher will be effective if it is based on internal needs of students.
2. Professional preparation of a teacher will be effective if it is based on a student's own experience.
3. Professional preparation of a teacher will be effective if a student is stimulated to thoroughly reflect his own experience (Nezvalová, In Hupková, 2004).

Higher education of future teachers consists of four basic parts, which are: general fundamentals, pedagogical-psychological part, subject-based part and supervised practice teaching. Theoretical preparation should not be focused solely on the formation of basic knowledge, but mainly on its evaluation, analysis, comparison and integration into praxis, even into other areas. Pedagogical skills, however, cannot be acquired based solely on situational methods applied in seminars, through methodics or by applying theoretical knowledge described in literature to praxis. A student's own experience is also necessary. According to V. Švec (2000) this experience itself is not sufficient. It can be, according to him, transferred directly into praxis and thus become a routine activity or it becomes a subject of contemplation, which is very important for developing pedagogical skills. Self-reflection plays an important role in the process of forming and developing pedagogical skills.

**Self-reflection and its significance**

Reflection of current experience and self-reflection are some of the most important skills of a teacher. They constitute an important precondition of a teacher's self-improvement, self-education and self-development and are also crucial for achieving optimization and efficiency in the teaching process. This is a reason why in higher education great attention is paid to the development of reflective competencies and it is also the subject of many studies. Reflection is not a linear, but a spiral process because it is an integral part of interactive processes, changes and developments.

According to the authors the first two types have a markedly reactive character and are characterized by a moment in which they occur. They relate to situations, which a teacher must react to and solve quickly and immediately. The authors also observe that reflection for action is a bit different, because it brings the desired results of the two previous reflections. Reflection is not done in order to go back to the past or in order to become conscious of the meta-cognitive processes that had been applied, but it is done to enable better orientation in the future, better motivation to look for new methods and alternatives of influence. By applying the reflection for action, a teacher predicts problems, focuses on needs or planned changes. Students in pre-gradual study or teachers-beginners tend to focus on reflection for action, while qualified and more experienced teachers concentrate on reflection in action.

T. Svatoš (In Kompoltová, 2000) mentions three aspects of how a teacher can utilize back-perception:

a) Short-term aspect derived from the past – this aspect is significant for current correction of a professional self-image. Every teacher has his own idea of his everyday performance, but at the same time he compares the opinions of others to his ideal “me”.

b) Short-term aspect preparing the future growth – this aspect contains a view of the past activity and its analysis and helps to prepare future activities, which he tries to improve. He is aware of the mistakes he had made and tries to avoid them in future work.

c) Long-term stabilizing aspect – an accumulation of individual experience and its evaluation. It is a professional self-characteristic and allocating oneself to a certain type of teachers, for example a teacher-democrat, autocrat etc.

Self-reflection is a foundation for auto-diagnosis of a teacher's pedagogical activity and it can be seen as a diagnostic activity influencing the efficiency of the teaching process. According to E. Urbanová self-reflection is a conscious self-recognition, self-definition and self-evaluation, based on which an individual forms a relationship to himself. It is a process with a dual character – an individual is the subject, as well as the object of his own recognition. The content of self-reflection is on one hand a self-recognition and self-understanding, but on the other hand there is also a self-experience and own behavior. All the aspects of self-reflection are included in the term self-system. Professional self-reflection of a teacher is, according to V. Švec (1996, p. 77) “being aware of one's own (meaning a teacher's) knowledge and experience from professional praxis, mainly from solving pedagogical situations. What occurs during self-reflection is a description, analysis, evaluation, sorting and generalizing of own pedagogical knowledge and experience.”

Self-reflection is an important process from the teacher's self-regulation point of view in both the cognitive, as well as the affective areas. It is an internal dialogue induced by self-reflecting questions. It creates an active approach to life and it is an
important indicator of personality development. Thinking of oneself, of own procedures, work, decision-making, thought processes etc. helps to develop strategies for doing one's work as well as he can. “Purposeful self-reflection, an effort to perform self-recognition and self-evaluation are crucial for a teacher's overall development - on personal, moral, as well as professional levels. It is proven that self-reflecting teachers are more open to new ideas and changes” (Hupková – Petlák, 2004, p.15).

The importance of a systematic self-reflection lies in the fulfillment of the following basic tasks:

- It eliminates routine in a teacher's work, because the teacher constantly evaluates his work, searches for new methods, forms of his work etc.;
- It enables him to confirm new methods, the teacher compares the previous results, as well as the results acquired by different methods;
- It teaches the teacher to predict possible outcomes of his activity;
- It contributes to an informal and systematic self-education, the teacher looks for support in literature, for justification of his methods, forms of his work etc. (Petlák 2000, p.98).

The quality and the content of reflection are tied to its type. They vary by focus, resource, content and quality. D. Nezvalová (2000, p. 26-28, In. Kožuchová and co. 2011) describes following types of reflection:

Technical reflection – has two meanings. The first one has its base in the focus on the area of teaching techniques, skills. The second meaning corresponds to the quality of reflection, to regulating an activity by directly applying research into teaching.

Reflection in activity and after activity – the content rises from own unique situation, the quality of reflection is judged according to the ability to make the right decisions.

Advisory reflection – it emphasizes a decision for reflection stems from various sources: research, experience, advice of other teachers, personal values etc. A teacher reflects on his own teaching, relationships with pupils, curriculum, organization, culture and the climate of the school.

Personal reflection – a teacher's personal growth is in the centre. In their own way teachers reflect on the relationship between their personal and professional lives. They think not only about their own lives, but about the lives of their pupils as well, they reflect on how to be creative. The quality of their reflection is determined by their ability to empathize, to understand themselves, as well as to appreciate the problems of their pupils.

Critical reflection – the task is not only to understand, but also to improve the life quality of disadvantaged groups (for example socially or racially). This reflection helps teachers to change the teaching and the structure of the school, which could even out the inequality. The quality of reflection should be determined by the ability of a teacher to apply moral and ethical criteria for evaluating his own activity.
By reflecting on his own activity a teacher can evaluate the course of the teaching process, his teaching technique, as well as his approach to pupils, which enables him to plan the methods and possibilities of correcting his future educational activity. However, in the course of self-reflection very important role is attributed to a teacher’s willingness to pay attention to himself, to amend his own attitude, procedures, thinking, behavior etc. Self-reflection makes sense only when a teacher is ready to modify his activity, procedures, as well as his behaviour. Unquestionably, a teacher is most likely to contemplate his work if he finds himself in a problematic or substandard situation, for instance: when he is forced to solve a problematic situation, when students seem to have a problem with mastering and remembering a certain subject or if he notices a sudden deterioration of pupils' school results compared to another teacher-colleague, if they are asked to evaluate themselves etc. Self-reflection, however, should be an integral part of a teacher's everyday work. In this context, M. Hupková (2004, p. 84) states that “intentional and systematic self-reflection in which a teacher purposefully and systematically focuses on planning, realization and evaluation of his own work while utilizing various self-reflecting methods, helps a teacher to improve the quality of his work, enables him to penetrate deeper into various pedagogical situations, to understand relationships between several occurrences and activities.” Hupková also adds that in this situation educational procedures are not accidental, but corrected by analysis and evaluation.

The importance of reflection and self-reflection is also supported by the fact that they have become an integral part of teachers' competencies. The reason for this is that these skills contribute to the overall success of teaching. J. Řezáč (1997) defines the self-reflecting skill as a qualified view of personal characteristics and features demonstrated in experience and behaviour, in relation to the consequences of activities oriented towards other people, to the product of social activity and to consequences of mutual contacts with others with an aim of optimizing these activities and relationships.

A teacher as a professional should be an expert at reflecting his own activity and at self-reflection. This is a reason why it is important to pay attention to the development of reflecting and self-reflecting skills in the higher education of teachers. The process of conscious intentional development of self-reflecting skills is according to E. Urbanovská (2000) based on:

- the willingness of an individual to deal with oneself as an object of knowledge,
- the willingness and readiness to correct own attitudes, opinions, thoughts, behaviour etc.,
- the ability to master self-reflecting techniques,
- the nature of one's own “ME”, the character of individual self-concept,
- the level of the ideal “ME” and the required “ME” (or unwanted “ME”),
- the overall level of observation and distinguishing skills,
- the specifics of personal characteristics and causal attributions,
- the adequate number and character of self-reflection stimuli,
- the adequate amount and character of feedback.

Feedback and communication also play an important role in this process and they enable a teacher to uncover new opinions of certain matters, discuss them with others, confront them with reality, but to compare them as well. Supervised practice teaching therefore plays an important role in the higher education of future teachers.

The content analysis of textual self-reflecting statements of students about the course of their supervised practice teaching

One of the suitable methods of analyzing students' statements is the content analysis of text documents. A content analysis of self-reflecting evaluations made by students-trainees has been carried out at the Department of Pedagogy FF UCM in Trnava. The target of this analysis was on one hand to find out what students think about the course of their supervised practice teaching, and on the other hand we wanted to understand how they perceive the teaching profession itself, especially from the perspective of their own future employment. The content analysis as a research method is a procedure aiming to collect objective, systematic and quantitative description of the obvious content of communication (Švec, 1998).

The most common quantification procedure is the detection of occurrence frequency of an analytical category in a text. This quantitative procedure seemed as the most suitable for processing the written statements of our students. In the first phase we set the analytical categories of the content that formed a system of firmly set markers, which we used for sorting out the record units. Record units are significant elements of the content and they can be represented by:

- an individual word fixing a concept or a term,
- a phrase fixing a (general, typical or unique) link of terms,
- a sentence expressing a statement with a certain informative value,
- a sentence structure,
- the whole text of a document.

Record units in our analysis of the students' written statements were represented by the most frequently occurring thoughts in a form of sentence structures. These sentence structures were not expressed in the same words, but their informative values, their meanings, were equal. These were then assigned to the analytical categories, which had been set during the preliminary reading of the texts. The number of record units thus demonstrates a consensus of students' opinions on the course of their supervised practice teaching carried out during their higher education. The research sample consisted of 87 students of the teaching study programs (History, Slovak Language and Literature, English Language and Literature, Russian Language and Literature, German Language and Literature). When differentiating the research samples according to the year of their
studies, we found out that 39 students took part in two types of supervised practice teaching during their first year of the master's studies. During the winter semester the students participated in an interim supervised practice teaching at an elementary school and during the summer semester they took part in an interim supervised practice teaching at a high school. Another subgroup of the research samples consisted of the second year students of master's studies. Apart from the interim supervised practice teaching the students also took part in the continual supervised practice teaching. Supervised practice teaching carried out within the master's studies maintains two logical successions. The first succession means that the interim supervised practice teaching precedes the continual supervised practice teaching. The interim supervised practice teaching is carried out during the planned semester and year and is a part of the regular timetable of seminars or lectures. During the week a student has a set time (a day or an hour) for visitations or supervised practice teaching. The continual supervised practice teaching is carried out during a pre-determined semester and year, but it succeeds the other types of praxis. It is the climax of any teaching studies and it represents the synthesis of all the theoretical knowledge acquired until that moment, as well as of all the practical experience. The second basic succession means that the visitations precede the supervised practice teaching. Visitations are an active observation of a real lesson lead by a teacher-trainer at a training school. The task of the student is to observe the activities of both the teacher and the pupils, to write down his observations onto a visitation sheet and to perform a follow-up analysis of the lesson with the teacher-trainer. Supervised practice teaching differs from the visitation, the trainee carries out the teaching directly (for the prescribed number of lessons) under a supervision of the teacher-trainer and in accordance with the regular timetable of the training school. Visitation-style supervised practice teaching is carried out also on the bachelor's level. Both of the above mentioned successions of supervised practice teaching are strictly followed at the FF UCM in Trnava.

Gender differentiation of the research samples confirms a strong feminization of the teaching profession. Women represented 73% of the research samples, while men only 27%. This apparent disproportion made it difficult for us to come up with general conclusions concerning students' supervised practice teaching based on the trainee's gender. The submitted comparison is only informative.

As a basis for our evaluation we used students' self-reflecting statements from their supervised practice teaching portfolios. Students work on these portfolios and fill them in over the course of their studies. Based on initial reading of these portfolios we set the following analytical categories. In each category we offer a few examples of the assigned record units:

1. A student considers supervised practice teaching to be a positive and important part of his preparation for the teaching profession:
“Supervised practice teaching helped me to acquire new experiences. It is a significant asset...”
“I can’t imagine a university education for teachers without supervised practice teaching. Without it I would not obtain a realistic picture of the current teaching process at an elementary school...in my view its role is irreplaceable...”

2. A student considers the scope of supervised practice teaching to be adequate for the development of his practical experience:
“Taking into account the difficulty of the teaching profession I think supervised practice teaching was a bit short...I would welcome more hours...”
“I consider supervised practice teaching to be adequate for the acquisition of practical experience...the development of competencies that we learn so much about is possible only during the course of real teaching anyway...”

3. A student considers the form and the succession of supervised practice teaching during individual semesters of his studies to be logical and adequate:
“I am happy that I participated in the visitation praxis in the third year of my studies...I learned what to expect when I start teaching one day...”
“The ability to compare and experience both the elementary school and the high school teaching enabled me to decide where I want to teach after finishing my studies...it was nice to be able to teach first the younger children and then the teenagers...”

4. A student perceives his teacher-trainer positively and considers him to be a professional who guides the development of his professional competencies:
“My teacher-trainer was very kind and willing to help me with any issues...”
“The judgement of my teacher-trainer after my lesson was not very positive. Despite that I appreciate her criticism, because I consider her to be a professional...”

5. Carrying out the supervised practice teaching helped to increase the student's motivation to perform on his future job:
“During the course of supervised practice teaching I found my true calling. I realized that this is the exact job I want to do in the future...”
“Supervised practice teaching confirmed my choice of future work...”

After setting the analytical categories an independent analysis of the students' self-reflective written statements was carried out. Three faculty members of the Department of Pedagogy FF UCM in Trnava performed the identification and allocation of the
statements to relevant analytical categories. During the final discussion inconclusive record units were allocated to their relevant analytical categories. In the analytical category no. 1 we assumed that students perceived supervised practice teaching positively and considered it to be an important part of their preparation for future teaching profession. In bipolar comparison, the majority of students (98%) consider supervised practice teaching to be positive and important for their future profession. Qualitative analysis attempting to find the correlation between the internal motivation of a student towards the teaching profession and his perception of supervised practice teaching itself should be performed in the future. The relationship of a trainee to supervised practice teaching is also strongly influenced by his motivation towards the university studies themselves.

In the analytical category no. 2 we were searching for students' opinions on the scope of supervised practice teaching. 47% of the students thought that the scope of supervised practice teaching was not adequate for the development of practical experience and would have welcomed more of supervised practice teaching at training schools during the semester.

Similar findings were recorded in the analytical category no. 3. Although students (61%) considered the succession of the forms of supervised practice teaching to be logical, they would have welcomed some visitations before they progressed to supervised practice teaching in the winter semester at the beginning of their interim praxis. Students who stated that there was a need for an increased scope of supervised practice teaching, suggested to not only increase the amount of supervised practice teaching, but also the need for realization of visitations before the supervised practice teaching.

The analytical category no. 4 represents the trainees' perception of the teachers-trainers. 87% of students reacted positively and identified their teacher-trainer as a professional who positively influenced the development of students' professional competencies. Students also appreciated the critical comments and evaluations collected within the feedback phase of their supervised practice teaching. Positive evaluations, naturally, increased their motivation towards the studies themselves, but also towards their future profession. In the analysis of record units, we observed a linear occurrence of positive comments on the personality of the teacher-trainer, satisfaction with the evaluation received from the teacher-trainer and an increase in the motivation towards their future profession.

**Conclusion**

We need to conclude that via the content analysis of written self-reflecting statements of students we collected not only the students' opinions on the course of their supervised practice teaching, but at the same time their perception of the teaching profession itself in the context of their own future employment. Surveying the students'
opinions, opinions of the teachers-trainers, as well as opinions of the teaching graduates, who work as teachers-beginners, it is necessary for the higher education of future teachers, mainly its practical part, to be improved. Based on the comparison of these opinions we can alter the content, the scope, as well as the forms of supervised practice teaching in the higher education. The most relevant information obtained from our survey is the need for increasing the scope of supervised practice teaching and for introducing visitations even on the master's studies level. Students expressed satisfaction with the successions of the different forms of supervised practice teaching and appreciated the possibility of carrying out supervised practice teaching in the area of their residence. The praxis, thus, helped them to get to know the educational specifics of the environment they are going to work in after they graduate.

References
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