

SEVERAL COMMENTS ON CONTEMPORARY CHANGES TO PREGRADUATE TEACHER TRAINING IN CZECH REPUBLIC

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Abstract

Pregradual preparation of teachers for the 2nd grade of elementary school and high school in Czech Republic is being intensively changed at this time and this change brings a lot of problem. It is about necessity of structuration of teacher's preparation. The contribution is engaged in main aspects of structuration process and discussed reasons for and against structuration. It pointed out negatives which can be explored in connection with structuration.

Key words: *baccalaureate programmes, master's programmes, structuring of teacher training programmes, teacher training.*

Introduction

The objective of this contribution is to outline a review of one of the most sensitive issues of the current undergraduate teacher training programmes – their structuring. It was not compiled to provide an exact and unprejudiced contribution describing current experimenting in this area, as we understand it is impossible. We would like to point out from the beginning that this article presents our own perceptions and observations, based on our varied expertise – i.e. conferences and meetings with Czech and foreign professionals (particularly from the Slovak Republic), contributions in professional magazines and bulletins, our own teaching expertise (both at universities, colleges and schools), discussions and opinions of teacher training course students, and last but not least, based on the fact that we also coordinate preparation of structured teacher training courses at the Faculty of Education of Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem (and we represent the area of pedagogy, psychology and major-focused didactics). This article was designed to present another contribution to the current discussion so necessary nowadays in order to make teacher undergraduate programmes more effective (2nd grade of elementary school and high schools).

The requirement to organise the higher education of teacher studies in three cycles was basically outlined by the so-called Bologna Declaration – the statement of Ministers of Education of countries held in Bologna on 19 June 1999. Apart from other things, the Declaration enforces the following requirement for curricula and the subjects concerned: to adopt a two-cycle system - undergraduate and postgraduate. To pass to the second cycle students have to successfully complete the first cycle of study, usually in a time period of 3 years. The degree acquired upon completion of the first cycle will also be acknowledged by the European labour market as a corresponding qualification degree. The second cycle should lead to achieving a Masters Degree or completing a Doctoral thesis, or both, as in most European countries.

Structuring of Teacher Training Programmes

In the first instance, it is necessary to answer the following question: Is the structuring of teacher training courses really necessary? The XIIth conference of the Czech Education Research Association presented several opinions that professionals - pedagogues (top pedagogues in the field as well as renowned experts in didactics of specific disciplines from the Czech Republic, Slovak Republic attended the conference) cannot see any added value in the considered structuring of teacher training courses for teacher pre-graduation programmes. The requirement to structure teacher training programmes is mostly enforced by the Ministry of Education of the Czech Republic. The same was concluded at the workshop called „Teacher Training”. Apparently, the initiative is enforced by the Ministry, trying to reduce the number of failed students in Master’s programmes by converting to a modular organisation of courses. We wish to note that it complies with the statements published in the National Education Development Programme in the CR (Kotásek et al, 2001) rather than being based on long-term discussions involving the professional pedagogic and didactical public.

If we link to our previous considerations and accept the fact that the structuring of teacher training programmes shall be implemented (no matter how strange the reasons are), we should answer the subsequent question: Will the structured programme enhance undergraduate teacher training programmes, or is it rather a question of financial profitability? With some Czech universities (particularly „regional” ones, for which the new method of funding of new research programmes is disastrous) struggling for every single student to survive nowadays, the structuring will hardly always be driven by the ambition to educate better teachers. The opportunity to implement purely major-focused Baccalaureate programmes, augmented by the envisaged link to major-focused Master’s programmes as well with allocated higher coefficients than in teacher training courses, will necessarily result in prioritizing the financial aspect, so important these days. This logical chain allows us to conclude that the idea of developing structured top quality teacher training programmes will also necessarily involve other aspects. Taking into account the different levels of academia training teachers within just one institution (faculties, institutions, as well as departments), faculties will have to have more options of structuring to suit their needs, and at the same time, they should be able to cope with it in terms of their professional, academic and pedagogical background (in compliance with so-called minimum standards). Without impeaching the variability of the offer (particularly if driven by demand) we suspect this can increase the chaos at faculties preparing teacher undergraduates and also make it impossible to create specific combinations of teaching qualifications. The disciplines in major-focused Baccalaureate programmes will be restricted as far as combining them with disciplines focused on education and vice versa).

The study presents the content analysis and follow-up comparison of different principles and models of structuring the undergraduate teacher-training programme. However, attention is also paid to the structuring of non-teacher training curricula. The study analyses the structure and content of the curricula and branches of study (including their plans) at Faculties of Pedagogy of Czech universities. The focus concentrates on the comparison and importance of the modules in the new concept of teacher training:

- technical elements of the major subject or combination of subjects;
- pedagogical-psychological core subjects;
- major subject didactics;
- practical training of teachers;
- generally enlightening subjects (philosophy, physical education, foreign languages)

Structuring Principles

As we have already stated, the teacher training programme structuring concept is being examined nationwide. Every faculty providing teacher training courses is seeking to design its own scheme to be pursued in the future that is acceptable for the Accreditation Council of the Czech Republic supervising the whole selection process. Notwithstanding that, different methods of the available structuring have several common features. The below stated hopes to summarise them:

- Three-year Baccalaureate programmes and the linking two-year Master's programmes will be structured. Consequently, the length of 2nd grade of elementary school teacher training courses will equal those for high schools.
- Number of hours over the whole programme (without regular courses and traineeship) shall not exceed the current maximum of hours a week, i.e. 234 hours in total, and 26 hours a week. Conversely, the prepared future minimum standards for teacher training courses will result in a reduction in tuition (a model of 180 hours over the scheme in total).
- The number of hours for those studying the didactics of specific subjects shall not be strictly specified. On the contrary, they will differ according to specific disciplines. There is a concern that the reduced number of tuition hours of majors will be compensated for at the cost of major-focused didactics. However, the Baccalaureate programme has introduced major-focused didactics comprising traineeship (for courses focused on education) bringing students closer to real school life, which is a positive trend.
- Continuous traineeship in majors will only be involved in the linking Master's programmes. Interestingly, the length of continuous traineeship for students in 2nd grade of elementary school teacher training courses is greater than that for students in high school teacher training courses. However, the insistency is the same in both types of programmes. This model works even in the current conditions of non-structured studies.
- Common (university) background courses will be integrated into the Baccalaureate programmes.
- It is assumed that students decide to enrol in teacher training courses once they have completed their Baccalaureate programme (which applies with restrictions depending on the focus of the Baccalaureate programme).
- The undergraduate tuition in Baccalaureate programmes is the same for 2nd grade of elementary school and high school teacher training courses.
- The undergraduate tuition in Master's programmes is the same for 2nd grade of elementary school and high school teacher training courses, or it is divided pursuant to the type of school into 2nd grade of elementary school teacher training courses and high school teacher training courses. The latter case requires sufficient differences between both programmes.

The items above summarise a few common issues identified in the current concept of structured teacher training courses (also derived from a similar process at the Faculty of Education of Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem). We wish to analyse the last three items. The effort to secure students who decide to study a teacher training course is driven by the opportunity to recruit more students, since those who would not like to become teachers would transfer to the linking major-focused Master's programmes. To defend this concept, we hear that such concept will only be selected by students who really want to become teachers. However, the research done in 2004 at the Faculty of Education of Jan Evangelista Purkyně University shows that nearly 70% of students in the 2nd grade of elementary school teacher training courses really want to teach, 20% had not yet decided, and only slightly more than 10% were sure they did not want to become teachers). So, is it then worth training students in teaching skills and competences over the whole period of the programme? Let us take an example of a law faculty student who does not decide until the fourth year whether he really wants to become a lawyer or not. Could the two years of the linking Master's programmes (rather 3 terms) really prepare teachers and develop competences that will allow them to cope with (and work effectively) in current real life? We are afraid that undergraduate teacher training courses will rather represent a programme providing free additional courses in pedagogy.

Various opinions and discussions also show (e.g. Mareš, 2004) the necessity to differentiate between courses for 2nd grade of elementary school teachers and high school teachers. We do not mean that high school teachers should study "an extra major". The difference is rather in pedagogy and psychology courses, and courses in major-focused didactics. That is why we think that teacher training courses preparing students for both types of school should be differentiated, at least in the contents of the linking Master's programme (or in the focus of the Baccalaureate programme).

Our ambition is not to provide a detailed analysis of specific models of the structured teacher training courses currently implemented nationwide. Just out of interest, this is an overview; based on the internal document „Development of Structured Teacher Training Programmes at the Faculty of Education of Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem”:

1. Cut model – a double-major variant.
2. Cut model – a single-major variant (Note – training teachers in just a single major is not welcomed by the Ministry of Education, it is pursued mostly in teacher training courses in languages, music and arts).
3. Liberec model – just a double-major variant (major and minor).
4. Brno model – a double-major variant (Baccalaureate programme focused on preparing teaching assistants in the specific discipline, Master’s programmes focused on providing qualifications to teachers of specific disciplines).
5. Brno model – a single-major variant (focused on foreign languages).
6. Plzeň model – a transition variant (single- to double-major) – studying major and minor.
7. Pyramidal model – a single- and double-major variant.
8. Professional model – a single-major variant (specialised professional Baccalaureate programme).
9. Y model – a single-major or a double-major variant (close to the Cut model, however, missing the psychology and pedagogy courses in the Baccalaureate programmes).

The aim of this article is not to provide detailed characteristics or an assessment of the above stated models. Our opinion is that the training of 2nd grade of elementary school teachers should differ from that of high school teachers. However, both types should involve more extensive tuition in pedagogy and psychology, the didactics of the specific disciplines and, certainly, traineeship. We do not oppose the fact that teachers should get excellent training in their disciplines as well as a broad cultural overview and knowledge of current trends. However, having merely “excellent professional” does not give the student many chances to cope with the current school life. As the expertise shows, schools prefer trained teachers to graduates of professional disciplines. Competences in pedagogy (particularly special and social pedagogy), psychology and didactics, including a good command of the Czech language (rhetoric, as well) and a general overview are the most essential things teachers need nowadays.

Consequently, having accepted the need for structured teacher training courses, we firmly believe the most suitable model for the training of 2nd grade of elementary school teachers is that where also the education-focused Baccalaureate programme (or pedagogical assistants, although we are aware of the legislative and practical problems connected with such a position – particularly in terms of its financial assessment). High school teacher training courses could consider purely courses aimed at training in selected majors within Baccalaureate programmes, with major-focused training in pedagogy, psychology and didactics introduced in the linking Master’s programmes. High school teachers (many times honourably addressed „professor“) shall be teachers first of all, so the education-focused Baccalaureate degree is not contra-productive at all.

Conclusion

We understand that our article represents another contribution to the current intensive discussion. However, the plurality of views can help elicit the urgently needed solution to the current situation. We all understand that the structuring of teacher training courses will involve not only issues of the higher quality of undergraduate programmes. Yet, our preferential task is to train teachers (for both 2nd grade of elementary school and high schools). Hence, our belief they should be trained for such

a demanding profession already at the early stages of their courses. Not to mention the controversial issues of the need for top-quality teachers. It is time to be open and clear in saying that academia should stop believing and perceiving their role of training teachers as second-rate or a “virtue of necessity”.

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