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The value of education for students that are preparing for the teaching profession

El valor de la educación en estudiantes de educación

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Abstract

The contribution focuses on the interpretation and reflection of two levels of the process preparing young people for the job market. We point out the schizophrenia to which the educational system has been exposed. On the one hand, educational institutions are under social pressure to prepare individuals to be flexible within the job market, and on the other hand such institutions legitimately defend themselves against actions which reject educated union members. The status of an educated person is no longer bound to social status; and this is also the result of continuously increasing commercial pressure on educational institutions. The pressures lead to perfunctorily acquired information without deeper understanding of the educational content. The objective of this article is to discover and cast light on the attitudes to education assumed by students preparing for the teaching profession.

Keywords: value of education; teacher profession; job market; educational institutions

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Resumen

El documento se centra en la interpretación y la reflexión de los dos niveles que se preparan a los jóvenes para el mercado laboral. Señalaremos la esquizofrenia, a la que el sistema educativo está expuesto. Por un lado, las instituciones educativas bajo la presión social para preparar al individuo para que sea flexible y de amplia empleabilidad en el mercado laboral, por otro lado se opone razonablemente a las medidas que llevan a rechazar a la personalidad sindicalmente educada. El estatus del hombre educado desde ya hace mucho tiempo no se vincula al estatus social, y esto ocurre también debido al incremento de la presión comercial sobre las instituciones educativas. Esta presión lleva a asumir superficialmente la información sin comprender más profundamente los contenidos educativos. El objetivo de nuestro trabajo es investigar y aclarar las actitudes hacia la educación que asumen los estudiantes que se preparan para la profesión docente.

1. Introduction

We become more and more persuaded by the media, political and academic worlds that we live in the knowledge-based society that should be characterized by a predominance of rationality over irrationality, of a judgement and deliberation over chaos, of critical reflection over pride and pretentiousness (Liessmann, 2008). We live in the times when education and an educated person are the driving power of social and economic growth (Keller & Tvrdý, 2008). It shows mainly that investments in education will pay off positively and will bring the society some profit. In this respect, it is a paradox that financial support for schools from the state budget decreases yearly and it is argued by the fact that a school environment is an environment that may be compared to commercial businesses. It is therefore on the schools whether they will be maintained not only within the competitive pressure but also within the pressure of the market economy (Bačuvčík, 2010).

The school is not a business (even though it shares many common features with business companies); and a special attention is paid to marketing of the school environment, and even despite the aforementioned facts, we still speak primarily about an institution providing training and education to the forthcoming generations (Šramová, 2013); to the generations that will be, thanks to classical education, capable of empathy for attitudes of people from different social layers of the society, as well as from other cultures. It will have a positive impact on increasing tolerance not only on the national but global scale.

University education has certain specificities that have been changing as a result of the global and reformatory pressure (Giroux, 2014). It is no longer an autonomous institution intending for the growth of a potential of every educated person, but is politically pushed to averaging, standardization and increase in monitored quantitative indicators. Universities under pressure of the economic and political spectrum are no longer free institutions independent of the state budget, academic balances and reforms (Readings, 1999). University education should have the same degree of freedom and is more than economics and technology (Liessmann, 2008). K. P. Liessmann (2008) points out, education in history, esthetics and morality plays a significant role in cultivation of a personality. Education that is as an adequate understanding, i.e. understanding of the historical and systematic contexts, not only acquisition of mere pieces of information (Giroux, 2014; Stehr, 1994), is the result of the European university reform being shifted towards the edge of interest. The European higher education reform, known as the Bologna process, was launched to make higher education studies in individual European countries comparable, and to simplify the way of transferring students and teachers among schools. The process, however, has gained a number of opponents who emphasize the fact that mobility of students and teachers does not increase in comparison with the past, and that the comparison of bachelor and master degrees among different countries is not that explicit (Liessmann, 2008).

The criticism is directed also towards the uniform length of study across disciplines regardless of their complexity, whereas the two-degree educational model is a mere formality for some of the disciplines (for instance teaching, psychology, history, and so on). The university is primarily an academic workplace, however, pressure on

bachelor education (the first higher education degree) plays in favor of the fact that universities are becoming places preparing quasi-educated individuals with a negligible chances of successful employment in the practice (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). It is merely a specific form of a crash course responding to the job market. For this reason, some European universities have been returning to the four-year master study programs (e.g. in Germany) with the emphasis on the educational institution to fulfillments of the task, not just to be an institution providing information (Liessmann, 2008).

Political and economic pressures have caused that schools make efforts to maintain themselves within the educational market by accepting a higher number of students to study those favorite disciplines and thus inhibit or even cease the less favorite ones (Šramová, 2013). This causes that some disciplines, even those with a long-time tradition, disappear from the list of the studied subjects. Different rankings of universities, of students' successes, of employment opportunities for the graduates, etc. are generated. And schools tend to meet these ratings, they search for evaluation processes opportunities within the institution, they generate really complex evaluation coefficients and pressure the educators in the terms of increasing their quantitative performance. They mistakenly believe that in this manner they would increase the quality as well as the level of education of their recipients. Lately, we have been witnessing different types of evaluation at universities which are announced as monitoring of the higher education quality, however, their principle lies in monitoring the quantitative indicators. And this is the way in which different variables are measured, such as for instance the number of publications within impact journals, the number of projects received, the number of students participating in an educational process, etc. It is often argued that there is the necessity to bring up flexible individuals who are easily adaptable to the continuously variable job market only by lifelong learning (Slaughter, & Rhoades, 2004). However, to think this is a great mistake.

According to K. P. Liessmann (2008) the idea of the knowledgeable society has become a rhetorical device and the idea of humanistic scholar W. Humboldt is not being fulfilled in the way as is described in his *Theory of Human Education.* K. P. Liessmann (2008) openly speaks about a current European trend of so called higher education reforms leading to perfunctory acquisition of information, not to its understanding and not at all to linking the pieces of information and to search of a particular context. The internal consequence and causality in describing individual phenomena are lacking. In his *Theorie der Halbbildung* T. W. Adorno (1959) pointed out the danger of superficially acquired information, and knowledge without the educational spiritual content that is significantly supported also by the mass media. Education and learning must not be reduced to the mere necessity to "be fit for the job".

According to E. Poliaková (2013) the education should be a process of cultivation of one's personality, including the cultivation of language. E. Poliaková (2013) highlights one of the scientific premises relating to education of Wilhelm Humboldt who emphasized the significance of a language as the national identity, and who incorporated the need of cultivation of specific national skills into the philosophy of education. At the same time she points out (Poliaková, 2013) that it might be a problem for us to identify the specific national skills and incorporate them in the educational programs. Even in spite of the fact that in 1992 in Slovakia we came to implementing several school reforms under different titles such as for instance "School Spirit", "Constantine", "Millenium", whereas new and new educational programs are still being created. It makes an impression as if every minister of education created their own education projected to their own image. And thus we are confronted by recommendations for pupils to ensure their bright futures and to choose one of the vocational secondary schools that will assure them a good job (well, work); i.e. not an adequate education, accomplishment, personality growth, but only what is said to be sufficient for them – skills, communication abilities and knowledge of teamwork (Liessmann, 2008). According to us, to "make" literate and educated young people from our youth is a dangerous resignation. Just like the market has not solved any problems of the society, it will not solve any problems of education and literacy. Even though efforts to do so cannot be denied, for instance efforts to rouse an interest in education by offering so called alternative forms of education in the form of entertainment.

We agree with K. P. Liessmann (2008) that knowledge cannot be consumed and that knowledge cannot be acquired by play as to learn needs to make some effort of thought. Incorporation of the cognitive apparatus when acquiring a specific piece of knowledge is actually unavoidable. Of course we realize the psychological contexts and the consequences of the presented problems. And at the same time we realize that we are at some certain transitional

period and we desperately search for the starting points from the hinted education marasmus and from marasmus of the lack of education and/or lack of sufficient education.

We realize that there are immense requirements and demands, and transferred family competences posed onto current schooling. F. Nietzsche (2007) had already called attention to the fact that school is changing from an educational institution to an arrangement for a life necessity. In some cases, school is expected to substitute for a parent role. School is expected to realize preventive programs raising awareness in the area of violence, drug-abuse; to enhance health literacy, sexual behavior awareness, as well as environment-friendly behavior, etc. What becomes forgotten is that for pupils school is no longer a place of tranquility, concentration and joy of learning. School has thus been ceasing to function as an educational facility, a facility with a high level of solidarity (Keller & Tvrdý, 2008). The pursuit of uniformity of education, achieving prescribed quantitative indicators, acquiring positions in various rankings and charts (e.g. PISA) degrade the individual's personality to a uniform mass (Liessmann, 2008). Within this system, also consultancy institutions are well-founded including career consultancy. The concept of self-efficacy has been coming to the centre of attention recently (Bandura, 1997). Its purpose is to bring a young person to the knowledge that almost every goal is possible to achieve if they believe in their own skills and abilities. It may well be the reason for some authors who express their doubts about the efficiency of consultancy services and they mainly emphasize the inevitability to lead a young person to independence and responsibility for their own actions and decisions. And it seems that we will head back to the social cognitive theory as a tool for problem-solving in the area of training and education.

It is a well-known fact that the school social world is filled with violence, bullying and the increasing syndrome of risk behavior. The media environment contributes to this by drawing the attention to violence in the social world on a daily basis, as well as by the emphasis on commercialism, the necessity to "have" and not the need to "be" (Šramová, 2014). On one hand, the new information technologies increase communication opportunities of a person, speed up and spread the information flow; on the other hand they contribute to diffuseness of attention, lack of concentration, alienation, problems of identity, social interaction problems, and so on. The education reformists tend to use the terms such as: flexibility, mobility and the success rate (mainly in the PISA test) in comparison with the aims of education of the Enlightenment like: autonomy, self-confidence and mental penetration of the world (Liessmann, 2008). This rhetoric is supported by different modern means of communication as they potentiate a higher level of flexibility, mobility and team-work (thanks to the networks).

The classical school function which above all is to put an emphasis on education, personality growth of an every individual pupil, must be transformed into the form of formal institution passing information without any depth, range and with no guarantee of the context grasping. It resigns on self-education of a person, on their growth and forming that would be for the benefit of the society. Even the future teachers at universities have been confronted by these ideas during the training for their future career. Therefore we were interested in their attitudes towards the university education, and their career training which becomes, in a certain sense, their life mission.

Our research goal was to map and analyze attitudes of the future teachers (i.e. the students of faculty of education) towards the training for their future career. The objective was to find out what the sources of their attitudes are and what influences their aspirations.

Based on the research goal, we set the following research questions:

1. How was education in the environment of the future teachers perceived?
2. How is education in the university environment of the future teachers perceived?
3. What are the specific features of university education in the training for their future career?
4. What is their motivation to study at the faculty of education?
5. What are the applied strategies to manage university studies?
6. What are the applied strategies for university subject selection?
7. What is the demand for courses that are not offered sufficiently or are not offered at all?
8. What are the professional aspirations of future teachers?
9. Are there any perceived obstacles for the exercise of the teaching profession?

To determine the target areas we chose an exploratory research with the emphasis on capturing the range of relevant topics concerning the researched issue in view.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

The participants of the research were the Slovak students of the Faculty of Education at Comenius University in Bratislava, who participated in group interviews (Table 1). There were six focus groups of 5 students each. Three groups (N=15) comprised of fourteen girls and one boy (AM age= 22.5) who study the internal form of studies. Other three groups (N=15) comprised of students who studied for future teaching career in the external form of studies and who are employed. They were thirteen women and two men (AM age=35.6), out of who one half worked in educational facilities and they were gaining their qualifications at Comenius University in Bratislava. In total six discussions were carried out.

Table1. Structure of participants of the research

Total					Female	Male
Internal form of studies	5	5	5	15	14	1
External form of studies	5	5	5	15	13	2
				30	27	3

2.2. Measures

Focus groups were the selected research method (Wilson, 1997; Stewart, Shamdasani & Rook, 2007). The interviews were performed in six groups of students training for teaching career in the form of internal (N=15) and of external studies (N=15). The individual topics were: education, preparation for future career, motivation, strategies applied to manage university studies, life and professional aspirations, success rate and potential in the job market, were formulated as questions for the students and were asked in the focus groups. We used recording device and handwritten notes by observers.

3. Results

The results of the research were processed with the help of thematic content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004). In the analysis we proceeded according to the modified method of the grounded theory (Strauss, Corbin, 2008). When describing the individual findings, we will proceed by individual topic areas.

3.1. Education

The results and outcomes focused on monitoring of the attitude to education answered the questions concerning the support of education within the domestic and university environments. The analysis of the group discussion showed the accentuation of the mission included in the work as well as the teacher's attitude. *"A teacher does not finish his or her work upon their leaving school. They think of their pupils, methods that would make the curriculum more attractive, etc."* (P1: a student of the internal form) *"Work with a pupil's personality is a full-time work and I do not mean that it is a full-time job only. A teacher often deals with a pupil's problems and thus stands for the parents."* (P5: a student of the external form). The analysis pointed at the support of education at a university from the side of the closest people (parents, brothers and sisters, partners) as well as the teachers at the faculty of education who support the student motivation trend. The students were pointing at insufficient contact hours with the lecturers (mainly those students who studied the external form) and at the emphasis put on the theoretical disciplines.

3.2. Preparation for the profession

The monitored topic was aimed at finding answers concerning specific features of higher education in preparation for the teaching profession. Teaching profession as seen by the faculty of education students emphasizes managing didactic procedures and methods of work with pupils, which the students consider to be positive while preparing for their career. What they evaluated as negative is the insufficiency of training for managing of group processes within a school class and mainly managing pupils with behavioral and learning disorders and disabilities. For instance, *"I am interested in learning to work with different procedures and methods. However, what I am afraid of in the practice is how to manage teaching a class and especially how to build up a respect from my pupils and the staff."* (P2: a student of the internal form). *"In my education and training I miss deeper focus on work with problem children, some practical exercises with examples. We absorb a lot of theory which I will not be able to utilize in my practice."* (P4: a student of the external form). It showed that the students are aware that to obtain a required amount of theoretical knowledge is necessary, however, they would put more emphasis on managing so called practical skills, which they lack in their preparation for the teaching profession. Even here we can observe perception of an educational institution as an institution that only passes information on the basis of a crash course required for the practice.

3.3. Motivation

The monitored topic focused on finding answers concerning motivation to study at the faculty of education. The outcoming analyses showed that there are following factors of motivation: interest in the work with children and the youth, interest in creative, non-stereotypical activities, the need of university education, the wish to change one's life, the absence of science-oriented courses. Motivation to study at the faculty of education was internal (i.e. to change something in one's life, to acquire a better job, to have a university degree, social as well as financial security), as well as external (pressure of employers and parents). The following statements may serve as examples: *"I have always enjoyed working with children. You can influence them, they are sincere, not spoilt by our times"* (P2: a student of the internal form); *"there is no mathematics and physics and there is not so much to learn in comparison with for example medicine or technical subjects"* (P1: a student of the internal form); *"It is important to have some proof of education for me to have a higher salary and to be able to stay where I am"* (P5: a student of the external form); *"to learn foreign languages and to leave for working abroad but not in education sector"* (P2: a student of the internal form).

3.4. Strategies applied to manage university studies

The monitored topic focused on finding answers concerning strategies applied to manage university studies. We particularly aimed at finding what strategies students choose when selecting subjects within the frame of credited studies. The analysis of the data revealed that strategies are subordinated to the main objective, i.e. to achieve some performance, manage the studies. These are not always ethical, bound to learning process, or to acquiring knowledge. Even this strategy has been marked by superficiality as the students do not refer to the basic literature when studying for examinations and tests but they rather consult their brief notes that they have put down themselves or somebody else has done so. The cheating strategies are not unusual (e.g. *copying during an exam, use of plagiarism, etc.),* and the students use these to achieve positive evaluation marks on the exam or credit exam. The students "justify" such a strategy by a *fast life pace, busyness at work, the lack of time, etc.* To make their studies easier, they choose subjects that, according to them, are *less demanding for preparation and managing.* Unfortunately, we again encounter the dangerous trend of fast and simple managing of unavoidable duties without full grasping of the context and relations.

3.5. Life and professional aspirations

The monitored topic focused on finding answers concerning the understood need of courses that are offered insufficiently for the training for future career following the life and professional aspirations of the students. The

results of the findings showed the differences in life and professional aspirations of students of the internal and the students of the external form of studies, which may be related to different levels of life experience. In the students of the internal form, a higher degree of enthusiasm was found out. E.g. "*When I successfully graduate, I will establish a private school which its pupils will look forward to coming to*" (P:2, an internal form student). In the externalists, a higher level of pessimism occurred (*"I will travel abroad after graduation and I will never teach as I do not see any outcomes of my work"* (P:6, an external form student).

3.6. Success rate and potential in the job market

The next question was focused on how the faculty of education students perceives the teaching profession in the intention of their potential in the job market. The results showed two levels of the perception of the students' potential in the job market. One level was optimistic and was linked to the joy of work with children. For instance, "*I am looking forward to being influential on children lives, to supporting the child's personality potential*" (P:3, an internal form student). The other level prevailed and conveyed a pessimistic spirit in itself. The students of internal as well as external form of studies highlighted ever repeating statements of the politicians being often overheard in the media. Their concerns were mainly related to inadequate value of the profession in the eyes of the public, poor financial security, increase of the social-pathological phenomena at schools, constant pressure on performance, constant education reforms, etc.

4. Conclusion

The article points at the current trend in the educational environment. The trend that focuses in high rate on quantitative indicators and is subject to political and media pressure. It is primarily dangerous fetishization of performance measurement expressed in quantity. This is how educational institutions become mere providers of inevitable information and they are not educational institutions fulfilling the tasks of cultivation of forthcoming generations.

Upon the analysis of the attitudes of students preparing for the teaching profession, we discovered that they regard their future career as their mission. Their motivation for studying is both internal as well as external and they are supported in their studies by their closest relatives. To achieve certain performance they also subordinate strategies, which are unfortunately not always ethical, and cheating strategies occur. They require a higher number of so called subjects that will prepare them for the practical life and will increase skills in working with children. The students perceive an educational institution as an institution that should prepare them for the needs of the market, although they are aware of the fact that they should acquire a broader outlook and perspective. They will, however, not achieve this without involving the cognitive apparatus, which only few of them realize. The students of education link their futures with an optimistic perspective of their functions in schooling facilities, as well as pessimistic expectations of certain threats which will divert them from the particular occupation to another economic sphere. By those threats especially the following are meant: lower social status, poor financial situation, instability of the educational sector and increase of the number of pupils with problem behavior in classes.

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