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PROFESSIONAL SELF-CONCEPT OF STUDENTS WITHIN
FINAL PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE

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Abstract

This paper introduces research results which deal with exploring the state and development of the professional self-concept of students in context of autonomous and heterogeneous assessment of final pedagogical practices. We mapped self-reflection of practicing students through evaluating forms (autonomous assessment) and at the same time evaluation of students by teacher trainers (heteronomous assessment). We were interested to find out the level of self-reflection of students, to what level it corresponds with teacher trainers' assessment of students and last but not least we surveyed the development of their professional self-concept. The set of considered items pays attention to professional personal, didactic competences, which is in the context with the Framework of professional qualities of a preschool teacher in the Czech Republic (Syslová & Chaloupková, 2015). This was a quantitative research survey and its research tool was an assessment sheet with ten-point items for students and teacher trainers. The results of self-reflection of students show a slight understatement according to teacher trainers in all investigated items; however, the self-assessment of students was found to be on a higher level, because it ranked in the upper half of the ten-point scale.

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1. Introduction

One of the common features of successful teacher study programmes is the emphasis on fundamental importance of quality practice and the ability to reflect on it adequately. Number of hours spent during practice do not represent the quality of the experience, but also abilities of students to combine their practical experience with pedagogical-psychological theory. The emphasis on research of the reflection experience of students of teaching professions and final interconnection with theory is in compliance with the trends not just European countries, but also non-European (comp. Darling-Hammond & Lieberman, 2012).

To reflect on one's work adequately is not an easy task, especially for a starting teacher. Within the framework of final practice in the last term during three-year bachelor programme (Preschool Teacher Programme) and during the follow up Masters study programme (Pedagogy of Preschool Age) a two week long final practice programme was organised in our Faculty of Education in the University of Hradec Králové whose aim is to provide educational process in a kindergarten with the use of all professional competences gained during the study and previous practical training in previous terms. Each student in cooperation with a teacher trainer prepares his/her own educational activities and learns to reflect on his/her work. For the final reflection, an assessment form comprising two parts; Part A, to be filled by a teacher trainer, and part B to be filled by the student independently of the teacher trainer is used. Both parts of the assessment forms contain ten-point scale items, related to didactic and professional competences. This assessment form is the methodological tool of the current research aimed at identifying the students' state and development of professional self-concept.

Professional self-concept as a targeted and systematic processing of feedback information represents an effective means to create one's own image and is a prerequisite of self-improvement (Kratochvílová & Horká, 2016). Therefore, it is important to emphasise on reflective competence during teacher preparation, i.e. ability of students to reflect on their work adequately; namely to "distinguish and to reflect in a professional dialogue, what is essential in teaching, how to assess what improvements to suggest" (Slavík, Lukavský, Najvar, & Janík, 2015, p. 6). Kratochvílová and Horká (2016) found statistically significant differences between self-assessment of students and assessment of teacher trainers within a specific research at Faculty of Education PdF MU in the Czech Republic focused on students' self-reflection in the field of 1st grade primary school teacher programme at the Faculty of Education PdF MU, which was a case of more positive assessment of teachers. Similar results were seen within a research at Faculty of Education PdF UHK on students of 1st grade primary school teacher programme in 2012 (Bartošová & Pecháčková, 2012).

Now, this interest has expanded to cover the search for professional self-concept within a reflective framework in the field of preschool teaching. In order to make a summary reflection after the final pedagogical practical training programme of in field of preschool teaching, an assessment form of the researchers' own construction was used as a research tool, where students evaluated their professional competences on ten items evaluated on a ten-point scale. The assessment form also covered teacher trainers who assessed their students' level of professional competence. This qualitative expression of self-reflection of students within individual items representing a set of professional competencies is related to the practical output of the teaching profession and feedback given by the teacher trainer.

2. Problem Statement

The research issue was stimulated by the need to study students' professional self-concept as determined by their reflection within final practical training programmes during the last year of Preschool teaching fields (Bc) and Pedagogy of Preschool Age (NMGr) and its comparison with professional view of teacher trainers. Students' ability to reflect on their work adequately is based on basic competences which are prerequisites that lead to improvement of teaching practice which is a vital component of their teaching expertise. As such, this area was deemed as important to investigate.

3. Research Questions

The research is focused on monitoring professional self-concept of students within the final pedagogical training practice programme in the field of preschool teaching. Students' self-reflection and at the same time assessment by teacher trainers were investigated through assessments sheets. For the purpose of survey the following questions were used:

- What is the students' professional self-concept within final pedagogical practice?
- Is progress seen in terms of perception of professional competences since bachelor studies towards the follow-up master study programme?
- What is the difference between self-reflection of students and professional assessment of teacher trainers?

4. Purpose of the Study

The objectives of this research is to map professional self-concept of students during their final pedagogical training practice programme according to their professional skills and to compare it with professional assessment by teacher trainers. Students' ability to reflect on their work adequately is based on basic competences which are prerequisites that lead to improvement of teaching practice.

5. Research Methods

This was a quantitative research survey and its research tool was an assessment sheet with ten items for students and for teacher trainers. The assessment sheet was set up so as to represent required professional competences (didactic, communicative and general). Items related to these ten fields were preparation processing, professional knowledge, expression skills, creativity, and contact with children, motivation, educational aspects, suitability of the methods used, method characteristics and self-reflection. Students and teacher trainers expressed their attitudes at individual items on a ten-point scale (Table 01).

Table 01. Assessment tool: ten-point scale items

	Scale item	Ten-point scale
1	Preparation processing	Preparation is rather indicative – detailed preparation
2	Professional knowledge	Mistakes during explanation– explanation without mistakes
3	Expression skills	Problems during speech – fluent and correct speech

4	Creativity	Accepts usual procedures and sticks to them – ability to improvise and unique approach
5	Contact with children	Problems with making contacts – makes contacts without any problems
6	Motivation of children	Motivation is not quite effective or not convenient – effective motivation, convenient
7	Educational aspects	Random application of educational aspects – sophisticated and proportionate integration of educational aspects
8	Suitability of the methods used	Methods do not meet the goals and conditions of preschool education – methods meet the goals and conditions of preschool education
9	Method characteristics	Traditional methods – non-traditional methods or with original features
10	Self-reflection	Insufficient self-reflection – sufficient self-reflection

The research sample consisted of students of the three-year bachelor Preschool Teaching Programme (32) and follow up two-year master of Pedagogy of Preschool Age (40) and the same number of their teacher trainers; in total, 72 students and 72 teacher trainers.

6. Findings

Selected results of the research survey are presented in connection with the set research questions. Firstly, the results of professional self-concept of students within final training practice in the final years of Preschool Teaching Programmes (Bc) and Pedagogy of Preschool Age (NMgr) and then its comparison with professional view of teacher trainers are presented.

6.1. Analysis of professional students' self-concept

The comparison of data regarding preparation processing show that the bachelor programme do not differ significantly from master programme students. Some of the follow up master programme students are probably self-critical, as they assessed their preparation on the scale 1.2 – that means "rather indicative". However, it can mean that their preparations do not have to be as detailed as the bachelor students (Table 02).

Table 02. Preparation processing

Preparation processing				
Scale item	Bc		NMgr	
	Absolute value	Relative value	Absolute value	Relative value
1	0	0.0%	1	2.5%
2	0	0.0%	1	2.5%
3	1	3.1%	2	5.0%
4	2	6.3%	4	10.0%
5	1	3.1%	4	10.0%
6	4	12.5%	4	10.0%
7	4	12.5%	7	17.5%
8	6	18.8%	5	12.5%
9	10	31.3%	8	20.0%

10	4	12.5%	4	10.0%
Total	32	100.0%	40	100.0%

As far as professional knowledge and expression is concerned, there were no significant differences noted where most students marked 7 up to 9 on the scale. In the field of creativity, whether students "acquire usual practices they follow" or "they have ability to improvise and distinctive approach" in this case there was a slight shift towards positive assessment by master students, as shown in table 03.

Table 03. Creativity

Creativity				
Scale item	Bc		NMgr	
	Absolute value	Relative value	Absolute value	Relative value
1	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
2	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
3	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
4	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
5	2	6.3%	0	0.0%
6	2	6.3%	2	5.0%
7	5	15.6%	8	20.0%
8	7	21.9%	13	32.5%
9	11	34.4%	12	30.0%
10	5	15.6%	5	12.5%
Total	32	100.0%	40	100.0%

Success in the field of motivation is a crucial condition especially during planned and managed activities and here students did not exhibit low scores. None of the respondents marked the level of his/her professional competence in the field of motivation in the bottom half of scale (i.e. from 1 to 5), as shown in table 04.

Table 04. Motivation

Motivation				
Scale item	Bc		NMgr	
	Absolute value	Relative value	Absolute value	Relative value
1	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
2	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
3	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
4	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
5	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
6	1	3.1%	1	2.5%
7	4	12.5%	4	10.0%
8	6	18.8%	12	30.0%
9	12	37.5%	15	37.5%
10	9	28.1%	8	20.0%
Total	32	100.0%	40	100.0%

Results of other items achieved a total higher value towards positive assessment, mostly in the rank of 7 up to 9 in the ten point scale. It can be assumed from the analysis that professional competences of students were still being developed. For this reason we presumed that students of the follow up master programme would assess their competences even more positively, than bachelor programme students, which however, was not proven (table 05). No statistically significant differences were shown.

Table 05. Comparison of assessment by students: Bc versus NMgr field

	Scale item	Bc students' assessment	NMgr students' assessment
1	Preparation processing	7.68	6.75
2	Professional knowledge	8.03	7.62
3	Expression skills	8.12	8.07
4	Creativity	8.18	8.25
5	Contact with children	9.65	9.6
6	Motivation of children	8.75	8.62
7	Educational aspects	8.34	8.3
8	Suitability of the methods used	8.65	8.55
9	Method characteristics	7.06	7.2
10	Self-reflection	8.18	8.27

As shown in table 05, it is clear that in the first three items the assessment of the masters programme students is lower than the bachelor programme students' assessment. We can presume so called "more careful" assessment of their abilities or more critical self-reflection of students precisely because of the deeper knowledge of preschool age children. In other items, the students' assessment of both fields is balanced.

6.2. Analysis of students' assessment by teacher trainers

The analysis shows that both in bachelor as well as in the masters programme, the assessment of teacher trainers (heteronomous assessment) is more positive than students' self- assessment (autonomous assessment), in all ten items (tables 06 and 07). This could be the teacher trainers' effort "not to harm" students by lower assessment, which could negatively affect students' self-esteem. As far as the didactic experts are concerned, that positive motivation in early period of practice facilitates overcoming initial failures. Similar results were seen in studies of this sort in the Czech Republic (comp. Kratochvílová & Horká, 2016; Urbánek, 2000).

Table 06. Comparison of students' and teacher trainers' assessment in Bc field

	Scale item	Students' assessment	Students' assessment
1	Preparation processing	7.68	8.84
2	Professional knowledge	8.03	9.21
3	Expression skills	8.12	9.34
4	Creativity	8.18	9.06

5	Contact with children	9.65	9.90
6	Motivation of children	8.75	9.5
7	Educational aspects	8.34	9.15
8	Suitability of the methods used	8.65	9.28
9	Method characteristics	7.06	7.81
10	Self-reflection	8.18	9.21

Table 07. Comparison of students and teacher trainers' assessment in NMGr field

	Scale item	Students' assessment	Students' assessment
1	Preparation processing	6.75	8.07
2	Professional knowledge	7.62	8.72
3	Expression skills	8.07	9.07
4	Creativity	8.25	9.1
5	Contact with children	9.6	9.92
6	Motivation of children	8.62	9.27
7	Educational aspects	8.3	9.2
8	Suitability of the methods used	8.55	9.2
9	Method characteristics	7.2	8.45
10	Self-reflection	8.27	9.07

Although results of students' self-reflection show slight underestimation in comparison with teacher trainers mainly in items concerning preparation processing, professional knowledge, expression skills and educational aspects, we can state that students' self-assessment is higher being in the upper half of the ten point scale. In the didactic professional competences such as the selection of teaching methods and preparation processing, students of both programmes had low self-evaluations. Nevertheless, these concrete abilities are being developed depending on hours of training practice and a level of achieved experience. The work of didactic experts and teacher trainers certainly help to maintain a healthy students' self-reflection, which leads students to deeper insights into their pedagogical work and improvement of their professional competences.

7. Conclusion

The issue of reflection on professional competences has become the subject of an increased interest of research in the past years from the Faculties of Education in the Czech Republic (Slavík at al., 2015; Kratochvílová & Horká, 2016) and not only in order to gain feedback, but mainly for the possibility of further analyses and generalization, which may help to more effective pre-graduate preparation of future teachers.

Professional assessment of students (autonomous assessment) represents the ability of self-reflection of one's work, but adequate self-reflection is a matter of a long-term nature, where suitable conditions and good professional leadership should be provided (Urbánek, 2000). In our case, students expressed their attitudes towards individual items only at the end of their study fields, without any greater practical

experience. From this reason, it is necessary to presume that their professional view will be developed towards greater understanding of their professional work and themselves.

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