

# **ABSTRACT OF THESIS**

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## **KINTERGARTEN TEACHER-TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT OF PEDAGOGICAL SKILLS**



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## **Preface**

Childhood is a very important period in our lives. Kindergarten teachers and teacher-training colleges have therefore tremendous responsibility.

In Hungary every fifth teacher is a kindergarten teacher. There are approximately 30 000 of them. Kindergarten teachers have been trained for 35 years at College Faculty of Education of the University of Debrecen, in Hajdúböszörmény. Based on the latest report of accreditation control commission we can proudly state the kindergarten teacher-training is of high quality in Hajdúböszörmény. Efficiency of kindergarten teacher-training demands the development of pedagogical skills and character traits.

This thesis attempts to examine the changes of students' pedagogical skills at a kindergarten teacher-training college.

### **I. The goals of thesis and presentation of theme**

1. This thesis attempts to introduce a background of Hungarian kindergarten-teacher training, its beginnings, history, present and future. The place and role of a kindergarten-teacher in our society has been different in each era. There have been times when authorities overseeing education considered children's education a field of cardinal importance and consequently managed to achieve the highest standards. As an outstanding example, we might mention that even today it seems impossible to surpass Klebelsberg Kunó's 1926 decree that established a system of a three-year theoretical training followed by a fourth year of practice. At present the restructuring of our higher education system based on the Bologna model presented an opportunity for adopting such a system of training. Because of students' increased workloads and compulsory language examinations, there seems to be a demand for such a course of action, since all these requirements leave hardly any room or time for an improvement of pedagogical skills and abilities. I can well imagine a semester- or even a full year-long practical training at the Masters level of kindergarten-teacher training. Furthermore, I am certain that all kindergartens would welcome the idea of having an extra helping hand.

2. This essay's another goal is to present and systematize theories concerning teacher-research.

a) To begin with, I have presented Rókusfalvy Pál's work in order to give an overview of pedeutology, a complex field of study that examines teachers' personality. Despite the fact that neither the word „pedeutology”, nor this field of study itself has managed to receive the scholarly attention it deserves, teacher-research has always been a popular science.

b) I have also presented a comprehensive system of research regarding teachers, based on alternatives of becoming one. Among the qualification criteria for teacher training, the following suitability checklist may be considered a starting point for analysing the process of becoming a professional teacher. The necessary criteria may be divided into three main categories: 1) knowledge; 2) skills and abilities; and finally, 3) personality traits, such as attitude, character and vocation. Among these three areas of competence, only the first one is measured at any extent during the selection process – except in the case of kindergarten and primary level-teachers, where in addition to physical or musical abilities, if they are unable to sing or speak properly, they may also be disqualified. It is no accident therefore that many researchers emphasize the need for career aptitude tests – since a teacher's most important asset is their character, proper skills and character-evaluations are necessary in the training institution for graduating professional, mature and able teachers.

It is very sad that during the teacher training process, character- and skills development receives so little attention – as opposed to the immense emphasis put on acquiring knowledge and facts. Although almost all training institutions have added teaching skills development courses to their curriculum, the sad reality is that there is hardly any time left for them. Many researchers have carried out effect-examinations, which all seem to indicate that short-term training sessions and courses result only in a slight, short-term improvement in the targeted skills. This opinion receives further credit from people working in the field, those in the teaching profession, who feel they are unprepared in this aspect and would require further courses about conflict-management, communication- as well as empathy-development.

c) I have also mapped out the results of teacher-research in a historical perspective. This presentation gives an excellent overview of the development of psychology and pedagogy. At the beginning the concept of the perfect teacher was defined by their desirable qualities. Later these qualities and further necessary traits were grouped into categories. These theories were based on subjective opinion rather than empirical research. The pursuit for objectivity later formed the basis of developing various methods of examination, which also made it possible to objectively examine a teacher's character traits and skills in an exact, detailed way. At present a quick expansion of research is hindered by either a lack of exact methodology, or a difficulty in precisely arriving at a professionally acceptable definition of a number of skills

we wish to examine. Fortunately, results achieved in different disciplines can be of assistance in this respect, consider talent-research for example, which has recently developed more rapidly than teacher-research, but many parallels can be drawn between the two sciences, based on their historical and methodological backgrounds.

3. The next goal of my thesis is to present a comprehensive list of the pedagogical skills and character traits that I consider necessary for a career in a kindergarten setting – and which can be well defined and precisely measured. This is why I have chosen organization skill, creativity and empathy, as well as educational style.

4. My thesis attempts to examine the changes – and possible improvements – of students' pedagogical abilities at a kindergarten teacher-training college.

I have presented the results of my research focusing on the trainees' development of career-orientation, organization skill, educational style, creativity and empathy during the teacher-training process. Is there a difference between full-time and correspondence students? With the latter, I also examined whether those with any educational experience show any difference regarding the above skills. By comparing curricula, I also wished to find out the difference of focus, if any, among kindergarten teacher-training institutions concerning their development of pedagogical skills and educational styles. Furthermore, I was also seeking to find any correlation between the factors examined, in order to find out more about the nature of these phenomena. My objective is to assess the overall efficiency of kindergarten teacher-training in the areas of developing pedagogical skills and character traits, and in light of my findings, to put forward a number of propositions for a possible improvement.

## **II. Hypotheses, research and methods**

### **1. Hypotheses**

1. Answers to my hypothesis regarding career-orientation (vocation and assessment of the profession):

- a) I supposed that career-orientation, that is one's vocation and assessment of the profession would show an increase in the case of full-time students during their training.
- b) In the case of correspondence students, I was not expecting a similar increase.

- c) I believed that correspondence students who have some educational background will have a more acceptable attitude toward assessment of the profession than those who have none.

**2. Answers to my hypothesis regarding organization skill:**

- a) I supposed that 3rd year students would perform much better in this area than first-year trainees.
- b) Mental abilities may also be a factor in the successful completion of organization skill.

**3. Answers to my hypothesis regarding educational styles for conflict-management:**

- a) I assumed that as a result of more kindergarten-teaching experience, higher-year students will be more successful at conflict-resolution than their younger peers.
- b) I assumed that students in higher years would be less likely to give indifferent, aggressive, or helpless answers based on inertia. In other words, they would find the correct solution more quickly (restrictive and cooperative answers).
- c) I assumed that correspondence students with experience of education (either as a parent or as an educator), will be able to handle conflict situations more effectively than their inexperienced peers.

**4. Answers to my hypothesis regarding creativity:**

- a) I assumed that students in higher grades will be more creative than their younger peers.
- b) I assumed that because of their experience, correspondence students with a background in education will probably be more creative than correspondence students without such background.
- c) I assumed that more creative people will react more cooperatively in a conflict situation.
- d) I believe that at semantic differential-scale, creative teacher trainees will show an unambiguous acceptance of children, kindergarten teachers and education.

**5. Answers to my hypothesis regarding empathy:**

- a) I assumed that students in the higher grades will score higher on the empathy scale.
- b) I assumed that due to their experience, correspondence students with a background in education will also have higher empathy scores than correspondence students without such background.
- c) I assumed that choosing teaching as a profession will require strong empathy.
- d) I assumed that in solving a conflict situation, emphatic teacher trainees will prefer a cooperative solution.

**6. Answers to my hypothesis regarding full-time and correspondence training:**

- a) I assumed that full time students will perform better than correspondence students of the same grade.

7. Answers to my hypothesis regarding teacher training institutions:

- a) I assumed that I will not see a significant difference between institutions, since qualification criteria are the same at each college.

My survey involved 509 full-time and 191 correspondence kindergarten teacher trainees at four training colleges, in Sopron, in Szarvas, in Sáropatak and in Hajdúböszörmény. The time required for the examination varied between an hour and 90 minutes. Applied psychological methodology:

I examined the career-orientation by semantic differential-scale, the organization skill by G-SZ test, creativity by TKBS test, empathy by Deutsch-Madde scale, and educational styles by KNHM-method.

I used SPSS programs, Spearman-correlation analysis, variance-analysis and cluster-analysis for statistical analysis of the data..

### **III. Presentation of research's results**

1. Regarding the changes and development of career-orientation during teacher training, I have come to the following conclusions: trainees' career-orientation is strong from the first year onwards. More than 90 per cent of students would welcome a possibility to prove themselves in the field. Assessment of the profession is very high in an absolute sense, and what is more, it does get stronger as their training progresses. The current teacher training framework is therefore suitable to shape students' career-orientation, full- and part-time alike. However, their career-orientation's development training reaches its zenith by the end of their second year. It might be worth examining whether it is important to keep up such development in Year 3, and if so, how can they become more effective.

2. Organization skill shows an increase only in the case of full time students during their training. This fact may lead us to believe that full time training, more contact hours, more practical fieldwork in kindergartens, more independent tasks, as well as more opportunities to prove themselves in front of their peers will result in considerable improvement in organization skills. We might conclude therefore that our present part-time training

methodology of fewer contact hours does result in less significant development of organization skills.

We can state that practical fieldwork should receive much more attention in teacher training. Instructors should require the successful completion of more complex activities. At the same time we should examine instructors' grading methods and preferences in order to see which are the pedagogical skills, that these criteria shape. It is possible that instructors and teacher mentors are also partly responsible for the fact that students' organizational mental abilities are not developed to the fullest of their potential.

3. Kindergarten teacher-training is highly effective in shaping trainees' conflict-management skills. This fact can be seen in the increasing numbers of students using cooperative conflict resolution techniques. During their training, students learn various methods of solving problems with a compromise. It is likely that students' practical experiences, their fieldwork in kindergartens is responsible for their development of a more effective educational style. Teacher training therefore shows trainees correct conflict-management, teaches them the rules expected and drawn up by society in Year 1 and 2, but knowledge of the self and of personal capabilities comes only with practice. Students have to face the fact at this point that some of their deeply rooted conflict-resolution skills may not work at all therefore they have to get rid of them during practical fieldwork in a kindergarten.

Furthermore, we may wish to consider adopting a certain system of personality-development trainings and seminars. Drama-pedagogy and its methods are immensely effective in familiarizing students with useful conflict-management strategies – which would perhaps result in more effective educational styles.

Correspondence students with more educational experience did have a higher number of effective conflict-management mechanisms. However, their previous experience with children's education does have a more important impact on their developing a better educational style than their training at the college. Consequently, teacher training and practice are inseparable and are both needed for students to work out a desirable educational style. We can deduce therefore that college curriculums should reflect this increased need for kindergarten practice and training seminars, to enable students to learn effective ways of handling conflict situations.

4. We can state that neither their training, nor their previous practical experience results in development of creativity necessarily. As for training, the answer probably lies in a strong



emphasis placed on performance, or in trainees' task-oriented attitude, which is not conducive to the development of abilities making up creativity. The introduction of a credit system and the obligatory language examination are partly responsible, as they have placed burden on the backs of already overworked students. At present the restructuring of our high education system based on the Bologna model did not provide an opportunity to re-establish the profession and to extend the curriculum for 7 semesters. What is more, students now have to take an extra 30 credits for a degree. It means that regarding requirements, the college now has 7 semesters, the trouble is that students have to finish it in only six. A more relaxed curriculum is therefore impossible, so the only way to improve trainees' creativity is by organizing training seminars with a relaxed atmosphere, or by reorganization of studies that somehow require creativity.

5. Cooperative reaction shows correlation with creativity. In order to put the results in a proper perspective, we will need to analyse the dynamics of a conflict situation – an integral part of which are a teacher's situation-assessment and decision-making abilities. Integrating studies of this field into the curriculum would be an excellent starting point for achieving the goals of teaching effective conflict-resolution skills in teacher-training. It might be beneficial therefore to integrate a course that presents students with a detailed examination of decision-making processes in an educational setting. I wish to look beyond conflict-solving situations and extend the scope to all sorts of decisions that may arise in an educational process. It is hoped that such a course would significantly improve students' creativity, since if we consider the full sample, skills-development appears in only three fields: independent thinking, forcefulness and complexity preference. As we can see, there is room for improvement in this area.

6. Empathy does not seem to improve at all, either during teacher training, or during kindergarten fieldwork. On the other hand, it is true that the average score is fairly high and there is hardly any dispersion. We can deduce therefore that teacher trainees already have a lot of empathy, but their training does not result in any more improvement. It seems that at college level there are no courses that would improve empathy. Kindergarten fieldwork also requires abilities that help students to effectively carry out their educational tasks, rather than empathy itself. The strict requirements of kindergarten practice should be relaxed so that trainees' and children's relationship could become more emphatic.

7. Cooperative reactions show a strong correlation with empathy. These results can be interpreted easily if we accept the fact that fully understanding a situation will lead to better way of solving it, therefore cooperative answers and empathy go hand in hand. In summing up empathy, we can state that we should introduce courses into the curriculum to focus on developing it. Moreover, kindergarten practice should be reformed in such a way that perfectionism is abandoned and a relaxed, easy-going attitude is developed with children. At the same time we have learnt that empathy is an important pedagogical asset in the hands of students who use a cooperative educational style. Development of this skill should be an integral part of teacher training so that conflict-management techniques become more effective. Looking at this statement backwards, we can also propose that developing students' techniques for effective handling of conflict situations will result in just as much an improvement in empathy.

8. Pedagogical abilities do not improve solely as a result of more contact hours. My interpretation is that more contact hours do not necessarily ensure higher quality of either subject matter of a course or student-instructor time at either section as regards development of pedagogical skills. In order to prove this hypothesis, every course syllabi and requirements, as well as pedagogical methods of all instructors should be compared among the full-time and correspondence students of each institution.

9. After having compared all training institutions, the only difference appeared in the grading system used with professional subjects, of both theory and practice. Pedagogical skills-development is very similar at each college, which may be due to the fact that kindergarten teacher-training has the same qualification criteria, similar subject-matter and requirements, even a similar schedule.

10. My research has enabled me to put forward a large number of practical proposals. Below I wish to highlight some of the most important ones.

Beside facts and knowledge, as two of the core competences defined by the qualification criteria for teacher training, we should introduce into the curriculum a number of courses that develop pedagogical skills, abilities and character traits that are required for this profession. I propose to introduce a career aptitude test at the entrance examination, an effective system of which was put forward by Papp János, among others. During the training process we should make an effort to put greater emphasis on courses and seminars that enable students to make

use of, and consequently, to improve, the desired pedagogical abilities, at the same time abandoning perfectionism and pressure to perform. I am thinking in terms of communication- and conflict-resolution techniques, of ability- and personality-improvement training courses, a wide spectrum of which have been carried out at the University of Debrecen, Department of Educational Psychology, the lecturers under the leadership of the head of department, Dr. Balogh László. In addition, I wish to mention courses where students play an independent, yet active role in mastering the tricks of kindergarten teaching profession, such as game-pedagogy at our college, or visual methodology studies, which both require creativity, that trainees make that extra effort. Furthermore, the importance of practical fieldwork cannot be stressed enough. I propose raising the number of hours spent at a kindergarten and relaxing today's strict requirements. Finally, college instructors' pedagogical methods should be improved, including that of myself, so that trainees do not fall back on passive reception or mechanical rote-learning during neither the teaching nor the examination phase. We should allow students to improve their abilities of communication, of seeing connections, of logical thinking, and to carry out independent work when performing their tasks.

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