Theses of doctoral (PhD) dissertation

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF HUNGARIAN TEACHERS IN ROMANIA – NARRATIVES FROM INSIDE THE SYSTEM

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Research goals, problem statement

Quality education and efficient schooling have been recognised globally as key points for the last decades. Both education experts and education policy-makers have realised that teachers are the key factors in systems of education (Day et al., 2007; Hermann et al., 2009) and in educational reforms (Fullan, 1994; Darling-Hammond, 1996; Hargreaves & Evans 1997;). International research results (Donné, Fraser, & Bousquet, 2016, Hermann et al., 2009; OECD, 2014b; 2016b) have proved that on the individual level, the quality of teachers' work is influenced by factors that are hard to detect with quantitative measures, such as teachers' own practice, experiences, the assessment of professional support received, their impressions of professional knowledge and development, and the satisfaction with work, the effectiveness of pedagogical competencies, school climate and collegial cooperation. Ergo teachers' professional development should be interpreted not only at an individual level, but also in an interactional space.

By applying socio-cultural theory (1978) we state that the educational systems nested in social, historical, cultural contexts and the organizational structures mediated by interpersonal relationships have a combined effect on teachers' identity and thinking.

In the light of the social constructivist theory, we study teachers' professional development by applying the theory of informal workplace learning, situated learning, collaborative knowledge-building and the theory of professional learning communities. Situated learning is very important in teachers' informal workplace learning (Eraut 2004), yet this is hardly researched as the phenomena to be examined are difficult to access. According to the theory of situated learning, by collaborating with peers and the more experienced in community activities, people learn to solve situations that need more complex individual contribution and deeper involvement (Rogoff,

2005). Supporters of collaborative learning say that as opposed to implicit learning, a learning process occurs of a higher-level quality if knowledge-building discourses with colleagues allow situated learning content to emerge and build in on a cognitive level (Scardamalia & Professional learning Bereiter, 1994). communities cooperative knowledge-building by sharing knowledge and practice for professional development. In professional learning communities, responsibility for others' development, management are shared, meaningful meetings and frequent social interactions establish a trustful climate that provides space for discussing uncomfortable issues and reasonable reflections on colleagues' practice (Stoll et al. 2006; Samaras et al., 2008).

In Hungarian literature researchers often investigate the individual factors of professional development. Bacskai (2015a) and the TELEMACHUS 2014 inquiry have a different point of view. Using social capital theory they try to explain teachers' professional development with institutional, interpersonal and contextual factors too. Engler (2015) emphasised that teachers' learning is embedded in communities, and that the different members of various communities and teachers share correlated learning motivations. Collegial intergenerational relations are important as they influence the development of school climates that support further trainings. In schools of disadvantaged compositions, forced teacher cooperation can become the key to successful education (Bacskai, 2015). Pusztai (2015) highlighted training institutions' impact on professional socialisation and retention, while Bocsi (2015) stressed the culturally determined nature of teachers' child rearing values.

The dissertation allows us to look inside the Hungarian teachers' world living in Romania, which world is largely influenced by pauses, losing of goals, start overs of Romanian educational reforms (Jigău, 2009; Stark, 2014; Zoller, 2014, 2015; Bordás, 2015;). Accredited, sometimes compulsory further teacher trainings alone without systematic planning, and systemic thinking, cannot solve the problems

implied by Romanian students' school achievement. Of the numerous elements of the system of education, we examine Romanian teachers' professional development, the obstacles of utilising the ever growing investments in professional development, and indirectly, the reason of education efficiency being stagnant.

When examining professional development, we differentiate three levels, based on the model of situated learning (Rogoff, 1995): the macro-level of the system of education, which is the result of the history of education policy and management decisions, and is palpable as community, institutional or systemic traditions, community practices; the meso-level of the institutional system and the interpersonal relations in institutions, which necessitates the examination of interactions prescribed for professional development or opportunities for bottom-up initiatives in communities; and the micro-level of individual teachers' professional development, which can be examined in individuals' notions.

The result of the individual-level research shows us how teachers live, create and interpret their own professional identities in the light of continuing professional development. Motivations, thought, emotions, behaviours, learning activities and the stories of professional identities focusing on change can be interpreted in the contexts of the systems of education and further trainings, from the perspective of practicing teachers. The events and situations of professional development emphasized by teachers are important because of the content acquired during situated learning.

The scientific gain of the interpersonal level is the application of concepts novel for the Hungarian and Romanian academic literature while examining teachers' professional development, such as collaborative knowledge-building and communities of practice. The utilisation of such concepts shapes our perspective and emphasizes the examination of situations that are missed by most research projects, while these are important in the system of education regulation. We study the impact of institutional professional communities, district and

county methodological gatherings, further trainings and bottom-up professional initiatives realized via interpersonal relations, those joined attempts that teachers share. By studying communities we can also examine individual notions, motivations but also, the patterns that characterize different Hungarian teacher communities in Romania in terms of reasoning, elements of knowledge and notions that are created in the communicative process of finding and collating meaning.

By considering the conclusions and explanations of the above two levels, the problems and solutions articulated in the community, institutional traditions and their inheritance mechanisms can be interpreted on the system-level, for example, the problems of implementing the education policy and regulation guidelines that influence teachers' professional development, the issues of the efficiency and efficacy of the system of education, which can primarily be detected in international comparisons. Here we can study bottom-up initiatives, activities and events – that are almost invisible and uncontrollable to education management - that the system of education or some institutions permit, offer or make compulsory for teachers to support their professional development. Traditions, mechanisms detectable on the system-level are often the traces of a hidden view unrecognisably prevailing in the entire system of education, and their examination offers conclusions of not only some communities but the entire system of education as well.

By studying and comparing the three different levels we aim to explain how these levels impact one another, how these interrelationships influence teachers' professional development directly, and indirectly, the transition and efficiency of the entire system of education.

By analysing the education policy and management documents that regulate the teacher training and further training system in Romania we found signs of adjustment to European Union requirements in contextual, institutional and content-related variables.

The transformation of the right for further training into an obligation, the development of an entire system for ensuring the quality and accreditation of further trainings, the diversification of the system and content of further trainings, and the bureaucratization of the system of education and further trainings are all the results of this process. Content variables show an interesting dichotomy: while periodic further trainings and the promotion system have changed by each decree, changes have less affected the rigid, so-called current further trainings, methodological and pedagogical gatherings that were from the heavily centralised system of education inherited management. In a world of continuous changes and transitions, the constraint for adhering to the already existing (for example, teachers' promotion system), traditional [for example, the constant restart of primary school teacher training institutions (ISCED 3)], and the certain (for example, pedagogical, methodological gatherings) can be detected on the level of the entire system of education. The disharmony found in contextual, institutional and content variables affect the entire system of education.

During the last 25-30 years, the various combinations of teachers with different levels, forms, content and quality of education, qualifications and further trainings have created a fragmented society of teachers in Romania that cannot be assessed in a standardised way. This fragmentation is palpable across school subjects, activities, and the different levels of education. However, the dual training of primary and pre-school teachers, schoolteachers with double majors, the interoperability offered for teachers in grammar schools and lyceums, and the identical training content prior the Bologna system all counteract this fragmentation. Institutional and content changes have created a vertical dispersion depending on the institutions teachers were trained at, the human resources that had been available in those training institutions or teachers' motivation while being teacher training students. Vertical fragmentation continues on the level

of further trainings and education institutions, thus defining the entire system of education.

In the light of the problematic contextual, institutional and content variables of the education, teacher training and further training system in Romania, the TALIS (2013) research project and the PISA-TALIS link conclusions raise a number of issues. Most important of all, the contradiction between teachers' feelings of preparedness for teaching and satisfaction with school climate, which scored significantly high, and low PISA outcomes.

International research projects have produced frequencies and correlations, however, answering problematic issues necessitates a deeper analysis of meaning behind numbers. We aim to achieve this by identifying, exploring and analysing the events of professional development.

The structures left idle in teachers' further training in the system of education in Romania (institutional, district/county pedagogical, methodological gatherings, further trainings) raise the question: how would the formation of these into professional learning communities contribute to teachers' professional development and the improvement of the efficiency of education.

Applied research methods

We applied the qualitative interpretative research method that is based on intersubjective knowledge-construction and the social construction of reality, emphasizes subjective meaning constructions, and the analysis of contexts, different perspectives and the invisible, implicit rules and patterns that guide everyday life. We analysed group, pair or individual interviews conducted with 51 Hungarian teachers in Romania, with the Atlas.ti 6.1 software. First, we used a code system based on academic literature and the specialities of the system of education in Romania to code interview texts. Later, we

included the codes based on the meaning created from these texts into this code system.

During the analysis we found the narratives that teachers articulated of their own professional development, and the discourses that prevail in closed teacher communities. To structure reality, we describe narratives of different topics. Narratives are not the re-telling of some teachers' concrete stories but are made of repeating actions, motivations, story elements that are typical of the reality construction mechanisms of the teacher communities involved. The exploration of these narratives and discourses offers a deeper analysis and understanding of reality.

Theses of research results

Answers to the individual-level research questions

In the making of teachers' professional identity, three dimensions occur. Among the formal contexts of the professional dimension, further trainings, of the informal contexts, everyday pedagogical practice dominate the making of identities. The effect of prescribed institutional methodological meetings, district or county pedagogical and methodological gatherings is more powerful via the informal channels than the formal ones. Strongly correlated with the professional dimension, the elements of the personal dimension also occur, namely, the personality traits that teachers assess as the most important: self-confidence, self-assurance, self-knowledge, tolerance and flexibility. Although the elements of the career dimension (qualification, promotion exams, specialised professional roles) are the most visible and eligible socially in professional development, their role in the making of identity is expressed only via their actuality.

Some social and professional discourse elements, and their effect on teachers' thinking can be identified in all the three dimensions. In the career dimension, the topic of training advantages and disadvantages is expressed in professional learning activities, namely, the assessment of the visible and invisible mechanisms compensating for disadvantages, and the social identities of the former students of pedagogical training institutions (ISCED 3) that now have become teachers. In the formal further training context of the professional dimension, one main discourse covers the need for distinguishing 'real' and 'fake' further trainings, which also creates the social professional identity of those who attend further trainings. In the classroom context of the professional dimension, the commitment for professional development, and most important, the demand of motivation for further trainings, are expressed in the discourse over routine and the fight of trying/experimenting. In the institutional and inter-institutional context, the discourse of reality versus demand is emphasized, and the demand for belonging to professional learning communities is articulated most here. In the personal dimension, the demand for involvement, emotional impact, regeneration is expressed related to further trainings, and the demand for supporting communities ensuring security is articulated related to the institutional and inter-institutional context.

For their own professional development, teachers think that challenging classroom situations that allow for experimenting, the horizontal forms collegial supportive different of learning, emphasize both professional professional communities that development and social relations, pedagogical gatherings that utilise learning opportunities, and further trainings that truly contribute to teachers' theoretical and practical knowledge are supportive factors. The obstacles to professional development are mostly shortages: the lack of some personality traits, shortages in some competencies and the resulting uncertainty, the lack of supporting collegial communities, and the content, methodological and organising shortages of further trainings and pedagogical/methodological gatherings.

For their own professional development, teachers think that situated and horizontal learning activities are more efficient, and they use these more frequently than individual learning activities. Such individual learning activities (reading academic literature, writing) are primarily related to the trainings and exams of the promotion system, and are less induced by challenging classroom situations or further training circumstances. In all three cases, the occurring professional learning is best described by the acquisition metaphor but teachers think that it is effective only if it is accompanied by a high level of awareness, and without this, it is only a useless waste of time. Teachers mentioned situated learning activities (active presence in situations, trying, experimenting) typically in classroom settings or further training situations that scored high due to their interactive organisation. In both cases, experiencing events and active experimenting are important because of their emotional effect: in classroom settings, these activities promote the utilization of opportunities for professional development with a motivating effect, and in further training situations, such activities induce the utilization and adaptation of the items learned. Depending on teachers' reflectivity, satisfaction with their professional self-efficacy, the demand for learning implicitly, or consciously, deliberately, cooperatively is related to the participation metaphor. Horizontal learning activities (observing colleagues' practice, sharing their own practice, following patterns, discussions, collaboration) are obviously dominant in formal and informal institutional and inter-institutional contexts. At meetings that lack content and are of low efficiency, collegial discourses undertake the role of professional development activities and turn out to be the sole opportunities for development. Discourses here denote implicit forms of learning, which is related to the knowledge acquisition metaphor. In pedagogical/methodological gatherings, discourses are meaningful and often develop social relations, and in addition to collegial discussions, those forms of horizontal learning that require more intensive participation, mutual dependence and that ensure more efficiency, such as collaborative learning.

Answers to the interpersonal-level research questions

In the interviews, story-telling and scanning were mentioned most often, which are the least assessed forms of collegial interaction types in academic literature. Independent of context, this interaction interweaves teachers' everyday lives, teachers' professional discourses are created in these discourses and get inherited by generation to generation or get spread from institution to institution. We should not underestimate their impact. The occurrence of those collegial interaction types that require mutual dependence and more intensive involvement (offering help, support, sharing, joint work) need well-organised, structured activities, trustful climate and a higher level of teachers' awareness. Where these conditions are missing, interactions become story-telling, the scanning of colleagues' practice. We found out in our research that when observing and assessing peers' practice, teachers avoid conflicts for the sake of sustaining good collegial relations, and apart from some cases, disagreements are considered as sources of conflict, rather than opportunities for learning. Sharing or preparing teaching materials together, joint work are less typical of our interviewees, such activities are induced by special situations or belong to the traditions of some school subject matter communities in given institutions. We also found that the quality of personal relations, teachers' individual activities and joint work explain the interaction types that become traditions in teacher communities in great detail.

We did not found any signs of the conscious building of professional learning communities in our interviews. However, we found traces of temporary professional learning communities that were created to solve concrete problems. Professional communities, which are considered as positive by teachers and exist either in further training, or in institutional or inter-institutional context, can be described by some characteristics of professional learning communities, they have the potential to become professional learning communities but this requires conscious planning. Although the

structure of teachers' further training and the system of education management allow a potential framework for professional learning communities via the pedagogical/methodological gatherings and school subject matter communities in institutions, these are not enough for the commitment and initiatives to create learning communities even to begin. Professional learning communities are more easily occur parallel to or outside the official system. In the making of professional learning communities, personal factors (motivation, expertise, etc.) and interpersonal relations are more important than the frameworks and opportunities provided by the system.

Answers to the system-level research questions

Traditions typical on the level of the system of education (for example, fake administration, pretended activities, avoiding conflicts, refusing responsibility) counteract professional learning communities, and teachers' professional development and the efficiency of the system of education in general.

The contradiction of the comforting TALIS outcomes in terms of professional development and the worrisome PISA outcomes in Romania may be partially explained by the traditions of the system of education and the different interpretation of concepts. Satisfaction with pedagogical, methodological practices in a fragmented society of teachers in terms of qualification seems to be a sign of avoiding conflicts and refusing responsibility rather than suitable preparedness. Teachers have to participate in further trainings that often lack proper content and organising but whether they want to or are able to utilise what they had learnt in their own teaching practice is rather accidental. Colleagues, institutional climate and discourses in institutions are important in professional learning.

The discourses we explored among the closed teacher communities are significant for the system of education as these guide teachers' system of values and thinking. The narratives on professional development suit these discourses, thus defining the

commitment, awareness and responsibility for professional development.

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Candidate: Andrea Bordás Neptun ID: XJ2U9E

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