

The thesis of the dissertation

The integration of theoretical and practical training in the Hungarian and Romanian-Hungarian elementary teacher training system

The setting of the objectives of the dissertation and their delimitation

The analyzation and the evaluation of the quality of the elementary education though it permanently keeps in attention the political, economical, social, psychological and pedagogical factors, requires the optimisation and modernisation of the analyses of the pedagogical education formation system. We can say that the formation of the teachers mirrors the quality of the education.

The adequate training of the primary school teachers puts a serious task before the institutions and educators who do this job, especially because of the continuous abundance of the task system. Naturally, it cannot be learned what to teach and how to teach for a lifelong period. That's why it is very important in the training of the teacher trainees to acquire such theoretical knowledge, practical proficiency and skills which are functional and flexible and at the same time on which they will be able to build the actual knowledge which they get through refresher courses.

In the examination of the content variables of teachers' training (Szabo, 1998) different authors agree on in the training besides the special subjects the methodological pedagogy, psychology and pedagogy (as theoretical training) must be present. (Baller, 1993; Anderson, 1992).

The central theme of this thesis is the analysis of the pedagogical, psychological and practical training, peculiarities of the training, its functions, its organisational forms, its place in the system of training variables and its possibilities of integration, as well.

In the teaching activity the theory and practice go hand in hand. Though in the 20th c. there can be observed the divergence of practice and theory in the domain of the educational work. Pedagogy formed its multidisciplinary system, but this influenced the educational practice and contributed to the raising of the efficacy of school operation at a small extent. (Delors, 1997). We find this rupture of theory from practice in teachers' training, too, all the time. The presence of the theoretical establishments, of the statements, of the themes and principles can be considered rather rare (for example at demonstration lessons) as long as they do not influence at a proper extent the every day practice. This means as much as we are face to the "abyss" problem between theory and practice. According to Feher – Lappins (2000) very few steps are taken in order to build a bridge over this abyss. Responsible for all these is the teaching of pedagogy and the organisation of practice. **The objective of the thesis** is the mapping of those possibilities which are given by the teaching of pedagogy and psychology, by the organisation of pedagogical practice and its implementation as well as its potential integration.

Thus pedagogy and psychology have a key-role in the theoretical training of a teacher, but this does not mean that other subjects play a less important part. Besides the fact that the mentioned theoretical subjects help the formation of a pedagogical approach, they are

determinant elements of pedagogical culture and strengthen the consciousness of profession. They also have such functions as: contribute to the revelation of pedagogical reality, to the understanding of pedagogical phenomena, forming the main socialisation element of the profession. (Feher – Lappints, 2000). The authors mention it as its main function the fact, that the pedagogical knowledge lay the basis of the educational activity, of the pedagogical practice, having a developing effect on them and making them more conscious. The teaching of psychology has the same importance since it contributes to the understanding of certain behaviours of some children and of psychological mechanisms, and it also contributes to the self-cognition and development of personality at the teacher trainees. (Balogh – Toth, 1997).

The pedagogical practice or the training is so important a projection of the teachers' training process as the theoretical preparation. Practically speaking we cannot put one in front of the other concerning their importance, namely we cannot speak about the effectiveness of a teacher's work considering only the theoretical knowledge and leaving aside its practical application through skills, proficiency and ability. On the other hand, if we put the stress only on practice, on the practical skills and proficiency system, then this is groundless, empirical and less conscious. The practical training gives the possibility for the gaining of teaching experience, for a conscious pedagogical activity, for the development of pedagogical abilities.

Thus it is perceptible that the theoretical and practical training equally have functions, which are indispensable for a total training and serve to the formation of such professional competency which may be the token of the realisation of a qualitative educational work.

However, in order to fulfil these functions, the subjects must have their proper place and importance in the educational system, and they must be correlated to practice in such a way that they should help their accomplishment in a more effective way, namely to serve their aims.

The dissertation also focuses on the way the training of theory and practice is realised in different systems, which their particularities are and which their capacity is from point of integration.

Theoretical background

Considering the structural construction, the theoretical part of the dissertation is formed from three bigger parts. Our aim was to clarify the notions on one hand and on the other to go over the literature of speciality, sketching certain training projections and the theoretical problems concerning their integration. Since the empirical part of the dissertation has a comparative character the used bibliography is based mainly on Hungarian and Romanian sources. From the international literature of speciality we used mainly English sources.

In **the first theoretical unit** we would like to stress out the role of **the pedagogical knowledge** in the formation of the pedagogical competence, this is why we analysed the knowledge in general, and inside this the particularities of the pedagogical knowledge, its components, and the process of its formation. From the point of view of theory-practice integration we also sketched the relationship between the pedagogical knowledge and the practice activity as the pedagogical knowledge and practice knowledge of the teachers trainee can be separated. (e.g. Falus, 1998; Grossman, 1992). Both theoretical training and practical experiences have an impact on these, but the question is at what extent this fact is shown by the everyday teaching activity. This analyzation is indispensable in order to examine the extent at which the teachers' training institutions pay attention to the peculiarities arisen from the said facts.

We would also like to throw light on the fact that what answers we find for the characteristics of the formation of the pedagogical knowledge. We summed up the pedagogical

models, which were present in the literature of speciality, their characteristics, advantages and disadvantages. Taking into consideration the comparative character of the empirical examination we aligned the structural models, those of content and of training organisation (e.g. Szovenyi, 1933; Szabo, 1998; Ladanyi, 2003; Kelemen, 1980; Bikics, 2003; Cooper, 1992) as well as their development directions (Falus, 2002) which may serve as referential points in the characterisation of the systems of some countries.

In the second theoretical unit we analyse the role the theoretical knowledge and the practice experience play in the formation of the pedagogical knowledge. Realising the fact that the secret of their effectiveness is their integrated character, for a deeper analyzation we separately analysed on one hand **the role of the science of education and psychology in the pedagogical knowledge** (e.g. Vastagh, 1993; Feher, 2000; Baller, 1993; Kelemen, 1980; Balogh, 1997) and on the other hand we cast light on those questions and doubts which the teaching of these subjects reveal through teaching process. In the same chapter we also analyse the component which is responsible mostly for the “knowledge of doing”, **the pedagogical practice**.(e.g. Falus,1997; 2002; Stallings, Knight, Wiseman, 1992), its different levels and forms, its role and last but not least, its possibilities of connection to the theoretical training (Ben-Peretz, 1992).

In the third theoretical unit we discussed the particularities of the **integration of the training domains**, since we consider this the basic condition of the effective professional training. Within this we analyze the mechanism of integration, its levels and possibilities. (e.g. on the basis of Ladanyi, 2003; Kelemen, 1980; Lukacs, Petrine, Vamos, 2000). Finally we review the factors which make the integration difficult, hinder it or make it impossible (e.g. Nagy, 2003), nevertheless our pedagogical optimism does not let us suggest that we cannot get over these factors of difficulty. We can see from the analyzation that the elements of knowledge must not appear in isolation. The effectiveness is assured only by the organisation into a professional knowledge system, since a system is always more than a mere totality of components.

The process of the empirical research, the projection of the used methods

On the basis of reviewing the process of the formation of pedagogical knowledge and the particularities of institutional system forming it, which were already presented in the theoretical part, we can get such an ideal teachers’ training structure and content which can realise the professional training in a most effective way. However, the existing institutions differ from those, which can be called ideal in structure and content, in too many ways.

During our empirical examination we put under the microscope the characteristics of the theoretical and practical training, and its possibilities of integration, and we analysed it with a comparative character in Romania and Hungary. We have done all these on the basis of the official documents on one hand, and on the other hand we examined it from the point of view of the teachers, students, practice co-ordinators. According to this, we examined the curricula containing the elements of educational structure and content, the characteristics, which facilitate or hinder the integration, respectively, the experience of the students concerning this fact, as well as the efforts of the teachers.

The **starting point of the research** was the fact that in the framework of the Romanian educational reform, as a result of the efforts for its optimisation, the teachers’ training high schools were transformed into colleges, considering their content and structure. A new starting training system is flexible, open to changes and new ideas. However, it took with itself the traditions of the old educational system at a higher level. Since there has been no tradition for

teachers' training at a college level in Romania, yet, it is natural and necessary to turn our interest onto the teachers' training colleges from abroad in order to compare them with the Romanian system and to gain a picture about the particularities of the present training, comparing it to the experience of other countries.

The transformations which are going on at present in the higher education can also be observed in the field of teachers' training. Considering the structural transformations in teachers' training, Bollokne and Hunyadine state the following: "*On the basis of the agreement from Bologna we have to find such forms in the reconsidered higher educational structure which keep the particularities, the values of the department and through which the career building for primary school teachers may be done without a rupture from the teachers' work.*" (2003, p. 7). We can observe that the problems are concentrated around the basic question, and we may rightfully worry whether the integration of the institution has a negative influence on the system of content of the training or not, especially on its particular practical training system of which quality they determine. Perhaps it is not formulated, yet, but there is that doubt of Kiss Arpad, which we have already mentioned, that the institutional integration will favour automatically the theoretical training to teachers' training, that is, the institutional integration will operate against the integration of the training domains. (Because the analyses were done before the transformation there is no possibility to reflect in all detail on their effects, but we present schematically the induced structural transformations.)

If we approach to the problem from another point of view, the researches concerning teachers' training (Hunyadyne, 2004; Papp, 1995) when speaking about the abyss between the theoretical and practical training, often speak about the fact that their unity may be reached through more practice. The Romanian researches also point out (Ciascai, 2001) that in high school teachers' training the students participate only to 5 hours of pedagogical training, that means only 2,23% of professional training. At the same time Galton (1997) stresses out the fact that the percentage of theoretical training in the teachers' training of different countries is vary variable. In our analyzation we would like to see more clearly which the extent is at which practical training is sufficient and it serves the integration and which are the deviations we met in the shown countries.

Several arguments have led us to a **comparative analyzation of the results**. Firstly, we strongly believe that an approach towards comparative pedagogy gives the possibility to bring into relief its basic functions, and through them to offer more than a separate analyzation of the given problem in different teachers' training systems. Secondly, the teachers' training presents many similar problems in different countries of the world. (Gombocz, 2003). This is why the joint searching for solutions is reasonable, even though we live in different countries, we speak the same language. Thirdly, we can have information about the same problems through different ways, approaching paradigms. (Falus, 1992). The Romanian- Hungarian and the Hungarian teachers' training have the same roots, only the countries' borders made/make its structure and characteristic different.

Due to its comparative nature, the research has a **descriptive character** and within this it can be qualified as **problem centric comparative one**, where the central question under discussion is, as we have already shown, the integration of theory and practice, and its effect on the quality of training, respectively.

This research helps us to get a **situation report** of a part of the teachers' training from Romania and Hungary. Our results give us a **cross-sectional disclosure of facts** about the named problems.

The formulation of the problem shows at the same time the area of research, too, which is higher education, and within this the Romanian-Hungarian and Hungarian teachers' training.

The research, the survey, was done in the following institutions:

- In Romania: in the Teachers' Training Colleges belonging to the Babes-Bolyai University, and where the teaching is in Hungarian: Szekelyudvarhely, Szatmarnemeti, Kezdivasarhely, Nagyenyed, Kolozsvar.
- In Hungary: Kolcsey Ferenc Reformed Teachers' Training College of **Debrecen**, the Teachers' Training College besides the Karoli Gaspar Reformed University of **Nagykoros**, the Teachers' Training College of **Kecskemet**, and the Comenius Teachers' Training College besides the University of Miskolc from **Sarospatak**.

In the first step of our research we started questioning the students in the final stage of training as we needed the opinion of specialists. Thus the questionnaire was done by students in the third year of study in Romanian and students from the third and fourth years of study in Hungary. In the second step we didn't need to question the students from Transylvania because of the small number of the questioned persons, and in Hungary the questioned persons were entered by chance. But, because of the shortcomings of the way of questioning in Hungary the results are not generalised.

During the research we used the following **combination of methods**:

- Theoretical analyzation: after having looking through the Romanian and foreign literature of speciality and having a critical attitude towards the gathered theoretical material I used in a selective way those which are relevant and give a research reference to my theme.
- Methods of gathering data. Since the research has a deductive character, one of the basic method of the research is:
 - The analyzation of documents – at this stage we analysed and compared the valid documents of functioning of the teachers' training colleges. First of all were examined the network of syllabuses of the courses (as a document of directing and controlling of the institute), then the curricula, the analytical programmes. Besides these I looked over the directives of the organisation and realisation of the pedagogical training, the documents containing the pedagogical requirements of the students. In the analyzation of these documents I focused on the subjects which have a pedagogical and psychological character and which have a basic importance in the development of the pedagogical knowledge, on the place which the pedagogical practice holds in the training, on its proportion and on the relationship between them. I compared all these relating them to the three countries in discussion.
 - Questionnaire surveying: completes and concretises the gathered material, giving data from the point of view of those who were referred to. The questionnaires aimed at the same questions in the three surveyed groups, the problem being modulated according to groups, function and line of duty.

The empirical part structural building is the following:

We start with the characterisation of the research. We gave a detailed description of the problem being researched. The hypothesises of the analyzation examine the characteristics of the professional development components deriving from the differences between the training systems. In order to realise the examination of hypothesises, we formulated the operational objectives and tasks of the research. Through the presentation of the conceptualisation we aimed to make unambiguous those notions and conceptual structures which were used in our

analyzation. Further we name the area of our research, and present in a detailed way the researching methods and the pattern.

We classified the results according to results gained on the basis of the used methods. According to this we present the **teachers' training systems in Romania and Hungary** in the mirror of the gathered information on the basis of documents analyzation. In the examination we paid special attention to the psychological and educational science subjects, to their curricula. We analyse the percentage of theory and practice, compare the theoretical subjects and the diversity of the applied practical forms. We also show the efforts for integration, which we met at the level of curricula. At the same time we use as background information the data gained from the analyzation of documents through the interpretation of some data gained from the analyzation of the questionnaires.

In a separate chapter we present the results of the questionnaire analyzation. We classified the opinion and *the experiences concerning the training of the questioned people (the students, the teachers, the practice co-ordinators)* into sub-problems. At the summarisation of the results first we presented the data on countries and on groups. We followed with special attention the extent at which the data gained in the three groups are in accord. We compared the results not only on groups but, we also compared the results of the groups in contrast to the countries. The differences which appeared, are interpreted using the background data deriving from the analyzation of the documents.

Through the interpretation of the results we would like to give an answer to the suppositions formulated in the hypotheses. In this process we used both the results of the documents analyzation and of the questionnaire survey, and we succeeded to do the interpretation on the basis of their relationships in most cases.

The enumeration of the results

On the basis of the analysed documents and of the data gained from the questionnaire survey we can conclude the following:

- 1) Since in Romania the teachers' training at higher educational level has no tradition, the parameters of the high school level teachers' training are determinant. The names of the pedagogical and psychological subjects in the Romanian – Hungarian teachers' training colleges from are similar to those in the teachers' training high schools excepting the compulsory optional subjects in the teachers' training colleges. We can also state the fact that the pedagogical and psychological subjects are less differentiated and their content is poorer than those from Hungarian teachers' training. It is evident that the traditional philosophical paradigm (Kozma, 2001), the logical scientific system is obvious in the teachers' training from Romania, while in Hungary the "ancilla" approach dominates the "research" approach (Bathory, 1992) and there is a tendency towards the integration approach, which is mirrored by the names of the subjects. Comparing the training systems of the two countries we can say that the integration of the educational science and psychology is stronger in the Hungarian teachers' training than in the Romanian, where this fact can be observed only partly at the compulsory optional subjects. The practical training is also different in these two countries. The lack of a practice organised on groups in accordance with the theoretical subjects changes the complexity degree of the practice, the other forms of practice, excepting the local characteristics, are similar in the two countries.

- 2) The differences concerning the training period show themselves in the period of the practical training. The documents analysis shows that in Romania, where the training period lasts for three years, the pedagogical training represents only 18,19% of the whole training period, that is 402 hours. The structural proportion of the training in Hungary is similar (the duration of pedagogical training is of 19%) but the absolute training hours is of 610. If we relate the theory to practice we can state that considering their curriculum they meet the expectations of the literature of speciality (Kelemen,1980), but in Romania a part of the theoretical subjects are not studied in the foundational stage, fact which is explained by the shortness of the training period.
- 3) The proportion of the professional training influences the confidence of the students concerning their training. From the Romanian students, who have less training, only 50% feel that they are fully trained for this profession, while 75% of the Hungarian students gave a similar answer. It is important that statistically there is a significant difference between these two countries concerning the students' confidence in their training.
- 4) The results of the empirical research show that the theory exigency characterises the training systems of the both countries. (Ro – 48%; Hu – 41%) The theoretical knowledge is used more consciously in planning the lessons than in the teaching classes when immediate decisions are needed to be taken.
- 5) The proportions of the training system structure necessitate efficient techniques of integration. Considering the proportion of the theoretical and practical training we can suppose that the less pedagogical practice has a negative influence on the students' appreciation concerning the relation between theoretical and practical knowledge. Though, the proportion between theory and practice are different in the two countries, and in spite of the fact that the Hungarian students appreciate this relation as being optimal, the statistical differences are merely accidental.
- 6) Our research show that independently from the proportions of theory-practice from the curriculum, the students, the teachers and the practice co-ordinators consider that integration is very important. But in their professional training fewer students experiment integration than those who consider it important.
- 7) Having in mind the fact that in Hungary the practice co-ordinators are primary school teachers while in Romania they are pedagogy or psychology teachers, we examined its impact on the unity between the theoretical knowledge and practical experience. Statistically there are not significant differences in the given answers of the surveyed groups from the two countries. In Romania we can observe a greater preoccupation for the evaluation of the students' experience. It means that the pedagogy and psychology teacher co-ordinator function is more advantageous to the integration.
- 8) The role of the practice co-ordinator is obvious in the integration. The raising of the practice hours is not sufficient in itself for the realisation of the concordance. In the case of a lower proportion of practice the students instead suggesting definite ways of integration ask the raising of the practice hours as a possibility for the optimisation of the integration. It is clear from the answers that more than half of the Romanian students, who do less practice, would like to have more. They wish a greater prominence for practice-oriented subjects. The rest of the integration suggestions are fewer in number. We can conclude saying that the realisation of the integration has two pillars, the finding of the optimal theory-practice proportion and to vindicate the approach serving this. The teachers consider that integration depends at a great extent

on the collaboration of those who are involved in it. The existence of these conditions facilitates the further realisation of concrete integration practices, techniques and ways.

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