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## THE PRACTICAL COMPONENT OF KNOWLEDGE IN INITIAL TEACHER- TRAINING

**Diana Zhelezova-Mindizova**

University of Ruse “Angel Kanchev” – Silistra Branch, Bulgaria, [dianazhelezova@abv.bg](mailto:dianazhelezova@abv.bg)

**Abstract:** The paper studies the notion of teaching as a profession and the teacher as a professional in education and analyses the epistemology of instructional practice and role which knowledge plays in the activity of teaching. There are two different ways of producing knowledge which, for many years, have been considered separate. These are known as technical rationality and practical rationality. Knowledge generated by research attempts to establish principles and general norms. The validation criteria for such knowledge are derived from the use of principles and methods pertaining to experimental science. At the same time, the knowledge possessed by teachers with regards to teaching is ‘ideographic’, individual and particularistic in its origins. It arises from to need to understand the complexity of particular situations and it is validated pragmatically; in other words, it is true if it works in practice. This knowledge is based on a holistic and global concept of the class and of the phenomena which occur therein; these elements are often unpredictable and difficult to control. Since we are dealing with knowledge generated during school-based practice, the paper defines the concept of practical knowledge. The paper describes it as something which is changeable and tentative rather than stable and objective. We explore the idea on the premise that practical knowledge cannot be taught; instead, it is acquired through three types of learning: direct learning, meditated learning and tacit learning. It is difficult to acquire practical knowledge through verbal and expositive teaching (direct learning) since this type of knowledge is obtained through action, not through listening and reading. Meditated learning, however, does allow for the acquisition of practical knowledge to take place through the observation of others. Finally, tacit learning brings with it a type of knowledge which arises as a result of the analysis of one’s own individual experience. The relationship which exists between universities and schools can be seen to constitute an important contributory element in terms of the overall effectiveness of the teaching practice stage, and it would seem appropriate at this point to examine which aspects of this relationship are most beneficial to all involved. In this area, the paper provides a useful set of descriptors in arguing that this relationship can be characterized by consonance, critical dissonance or collaborative resonance. Consonance: In this case there is a concern with ensuring that the training which takes place at university is consistent with that which is provided in schools. In order to achieve this, it seeks to apply the results obtained from research on teaching efficacy and strives to ensure that student teachers master these skills. Critical dissonance: Here, there are attempts to promote a critical attitude among trainee teachers so that they can question and assess the realities which they encounter in schools and, in doing so, avoid the development of utilitarian and conservative perspectives. Collaborative resonance: This is considered to be the most fruitful type of relationship. Here, the aim of the teacher trainers is not only to teach students how to teach; it also involves teaching them to continue learning in diverse school contexts. In order for this to happen, there must be a collaborative atmosphere between members from both sectors, and inquiry through the participation in common projects.

**Keywords:** educational theory, practice, initial teacher-training

### 1. INTRODUCTION

If we consider teaching as a profession and the teacher as a professional in education, it would be useful to analyse the epistemology of instructional practice and role which knowledge plays in the activity of teaching. For Schon (1983), there are two different ways of producing knowledge which, for many years, have been considered separate. These are known as **technical rationality** and **practical rationality**. Knowledge generated by research attempts to establish principles and general norms. The validation criteria for such knowledge are derived from the use of principles and methods pertaining to experimental science. At the same time, the knowledge possessed by teachers with regards to teaching is ‘ideographic’, individual and particularistic in its origins. It arises from to need to understand the complexity of particular situations and it is validated pragmatically; in other words, it is true if it works in practice. This knowledge is based on a holistic and global concept of the class and of the phenomena which occur therein; these elements are often unpredictable and difficult to control.

Since we are dealing with knowledge generated during school-based practice, it would be useful to define the concept of practical knowledge. Clandinin (1986:20) attributes practical knowledge with personal characteristics and describes it as something which is changeable and tentative rather than stable and objective. According to Marcelo (1989), practical knowledge cannot be taught; instead, it is acquired through three types of learning: direct learning, meditated learning and tacit learning. It is difficult to acquire practical knowledge through verbal and expositive

teaching (**direct learning**) since this type of knowledge is obtained through action, not through listening and reading. **Meditated learning**, however, does allow for the acquisition of practical knowledge to take place through the observation of others. Finally, **tacit learning** brings with it a type of knowledge which arises as a result of the analysis of one's own individual experience.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Each of us generates a very different series of "images" or "metaphors" with regards to what a teacher is and, hence, what teacher training should involve. There are a number of important differences in the beliefs of student teachers and those of the professional teachers who welcome them into their classes. Similarly, there are also differences between what these professional teachers believe and what teachers from Schools of Education hold to be true.

Students generally come to the practice stage having been trained in what is called technical rationality. They are taught different explicative theories about teaching, they are informed about a wide range of techniques and possible courses of action and they are given instructions with regards to how teaching should take place. All of this presupposes that they will eventually use this information when it comes to real classroom teaching. Experienced class teachers, on the other hand, question the professional value of many of the theories studied at university. Instead of basing their decisions on theory, they often act on their accumulated experience through the reflection on their teaching. They have gained their professionalism by making a large number of decisions in complex and changing situations, and have established a series of routines and procedures which experience has shown to be effective.

We know that student teachers enter the classroom with a degree of training which, on many occasions, proves to be of little value. We regard the practical situation in the classrooms one which is full of complexity, uncertainty, instability, singularity. For this reason, the skills and capacities required act in this type of situation cannot be uniform, mechanical nor, indeed, totally -e-established as in the paradigm of technical rationality. As we have seen, the quality of school-based teaching practice does not depend directly on those circumstantial aspects upon which a great deal of emphasis is often placed; instead, quality depends on the extent to which educational **theory** and **practice** are joined and integrated in teaching. This is essentially what makes teaching practice necessary and useful. If this complex and enriching fusion of theory and practice can take place, and if there is a real commitment to reflective teaching, then teacher training can acquire the specialized condition which it lacks at the present moment in time.

In synthesis, we could say that school-based teaching practice is, or should be:

- ✦ The beginning of a professional socialization process of future teachers.
- ✦ An introduction to the elaboration and development of specific curricula projects.
- ✦ An initial contact with classroom action research

This is understood as a pathway which leads the future teachers to becoming professionals who reflect on action, act reflectively, Randall, M. (1999) and who consequently improve upon their practice and elaborate their own pedagogical theories. In other words, this stage enables teachers to work scientifically and to innovate in their instructional practices. "Theorizing, as an intellectual activity... is not confined to theorists alone; it is something teachers should be enabled to do as well". Kumaravadivelu (2003:20)

Trainee teachers already possess some knowledge on teaching based upon their own experience as students. These ideas can have a certain degree of influence on student teachers. In general, the objectives of university institutions in terms of teaching practice are not common knowledge and, indicates, that schools do not participate in the planning of teaching practice. Similarly, schools do not always accept the presence of student teachers as a training activity which belongs to the school; instead, they often take on trainee teachers on the insistence of universities and the educational administration and, at times, in acceptance of the individual decisions of teachers who decide to have student teachers in their classrooms.

The relationship which exists between universities and schools can be seen to constitute an important contributory element in terms of the overall effectiveness of the teaching practice stage, and it would seem appropriate at this point to examine which aspects of this relationship are most beneficial to all involved. In this area, Cochran-Smith (1991) provides a useful set of descriptors in arguing that this relationship can be characterized by **consonance**, **critical dissonance** or **collaborative resonance**:

- **Consonance**: In this case there is a concern with ensuring that the training which takes place at university is consistent with that which is provided in schools. In order to achieve this, it seeks to apply the results obtained from research on teaching efficacy and strives to ensure that student teachers master these skills.
- **Critical dissonance**: Here, there are attempts to promote a critical attitude among trainee teachers so that they can question and assess the realities which they encounter in schools and, in doing so, avoid the development of utilitarian and conservative perspectives.

- **Collaborative resonance:** This is considered to be the most fruitful type of relationship. Here, the aim of the teacher trainers is not only to teach students how to teach; it also involves teaching them to continue learning in diverse school contexts. In order for this to happen, there must be a collaborative atmosphere between members from both sectors, and inquiry through the participation in common projects.

The reform of school-based teaching practice begins to re-examine the relationships which can and should be established between the university institutions which are responsible for teacher training and the schools themselves. In this sense, perhaps one of the most important developments has been the creation of economic incentives for teachers who participate in these training activities, since the activities themselves undoubtedly create extra workloads for the teachers involved. During the teaching practice stage, student teachers learn to understand problems in teaching as **curricular** problems. They become familiar with curricular planning in specific school contexts and can analyse the different levels of interpretation that professional school teachers provide of the curriculum. They can also become aware of the influence which textbooks and other pedagogical materials have on teaching. Another level of analysis of school-based teaching practice is that of **class-room teaching**. Here, it is important that student teachers connect the teaching which they observe with the schools curricular. The analysis of teaching, as opposed to focusing exclusively on the activities carried out by the teacher, must also concentrate on the social and educational structure of the classroom, as well as on the academic structure and ask procedures. A further dimension of learning during teaching practice is that of the **class teacher** in terms of his or her initial and continuing professional development, although it is important to ensure that our perspectives are not entirely influenced by a single teacher.

Finally, teaching practice represents an opportunity for student teachers to socialize, and learn to behave like teachers. In this sense, it is important that student teachers should also analyse different aspects of the state of the teaching profession. This includes areas such as professional culture, autonomy, involvement, commitment, teaching as a career, etc.

The consideration of all of these dimensions is important in allowing the periods of teaching practice to provide real opportunities in learning to teach. However, in order for this to happen, it is necessary to have a certain degree of commitment from university teachers in the development of collaborative projects with schools.

### 3. RESULTS

One of the main objectives of school-based teaching practice, is that of encouraging an appropriate professional socialization process for the future teacher. This is defined) as a process of interaction with the professional environment through which the teacher progressively acquires the practical and personal knowledge which shapes his or her teaching behavior. We understand it as a subjective process through which people internalize the particular sub-culture of a professional group.

One of the risks involved in teaching practice, however, is that the process of socialization may lead to the acquisition of rigid and inflexible patterns of behavior. This role, which only leads to the replication of old and conventional standards by new teachers, has been criticized by some studies and may be synthesized some of the main findings of research carried out on teachers after school-based practice as:

- more authoritarian attitudes towards pupils;
- a change in attitude regarding teacher autonomy;
- greater levels of concern about classroom control;
- a sensation of having less knowledge about teaching than at the beginning of school-based teaching practice;
- a change in opinion about education from a more progressive perspective to a more conventional one;
- the loss of idealism.

It is evident that these effects depend to a large extent on the specific school contexts, classrooms and teachers who are responsible for student teachers during this stage.

### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Nevertheless, every professional socialization process has two perspectives. The first is highly adaptive; the second, **dialectic** and **dynamic**. This corresponds to what has become known as the functionalist theory and the dialectic and dynamic theory of socialization (Zeichner, 1985):

- ❖ In terms of the **adaptive** perspective the socialization process of teachers is a process in which the novice teacher is a passive individual who is entirely conditioned by institutional influences. For this reason, the process does not depend as much on the future teacher as it does on a series of critically conditioning external factors. Among these factors, we highlight the previous school experiences of the student teacher,

the influence of colleagues and of those who are to assess their performance, as well as the influence of groups of students and nonprofessional agents (parents, friends, etc.), the teacher sub-culture and the bureaucratic structure of the school.

- ❖ With regards to **dialectic theory**, on the other hand, the socialization of teachers is an evolutionary, continuous and dynamic process. For this reason, it can bring about a different series of results depending on the type of interaction which is produced between personal, institutional and environmental factors - institutions in which they are socialized. In this way, the student teachers do not necessarily undergo a merely passive and adaptive process, although they may externally adopt a "strategic submission" in order to avoid coming into conflict with evaluators and colleagues.

In the light of what has been previously mentioned, we may conclude the following:

- ✓ It is important to have an appropriate selection of schools and teachers for school-based teaching practice. However, it is even more important for student teachers to attain a certain degree of autonomy and not simply become what the socializing institution wants them to become.
- ✓ It would be useful if teacher trainers could clearly present the degree of conflict and the number of contradictions which exist within the teaching profession. It would also be useful for them to show that the possibility does exist to search for a number of different and even opposing solutions to problems in a flexible and cooperative way.
- ✓ A valid conclusion to this section lies in stating that there is a risk that teaching practice may lead to the replication of conservative perspectives, which are both rigid and uncompromising in the light of the changing and complex situations of the classroom, and which lie in stark contrast to those theories which are expounded during the theoretical stages of teacher training. At the same time, however, this stage can also allow student teachers to put into practice a whole range of theories and concepts in the real context of the classroom.

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