

The beliefs of teachers-to-be on teachers as well as their changing during the training and during the first years of the start of career

Abstract

Starting points

Based on the findings of international and national research projects during the last few years it can be stated, that teachers-to-be and career-starter teachers have to face and cope with the same kinds of problems at the beginning of their careers, no matter what qualifications they completed their studies with. What reasons and mechanisms result in this phenomenon? How could the training of teachers be more effective in preparing them for the profession? The current national and international pedagogy research projects, which are based on cognitive psychology and constructivism, are trying to approach the problem from the perspective of what kind of thinking drives the everyday work of teachers, and what kind of sources serve as a base for this thinking, as well as what changes take place meanwhile. The research projects focus on such so-called cognitive structures, which are long-standing and hardly changing structures. Their importance is characterized by the fact, that they have a remarkable impact not only on the acquisition of theory but also on the implementation in practice, and they influence the activities of experts. This is why the exploration, nature and possibilities of modification of teachers' beliefs as well as the role they play in teachers' training have attracted considerable attention during the past few years.

Reasoning

The aim of the research is to explore the actual content of beliefs teachers-to-be have on teachers, as well as the follow-up of the changes that take place during their training and later in the first years of their careers. The questions deriving from the aim of the research are the following:

-What categories with regard to the content can describe the beliefs of teachers-to-be on teachers?

What is the importance of each category?

-What is the correlation among the particular categories?

-What kind of changes takes place during the training and afterwards during the first years?

The aim of the training is to prepare the applicants as well as possible for the teacher's profession. In order to be able to do that, it has to respond to the beliefs occurring, especially in those fields, which according to the students are most likely to cause considerable difficulties.

The methods of the research

As the aim of my research is to explore the beliefs of students, I employed qualitative research methodology. The survey is descriptive, explorative process analysis. The first recording of data took place in 2001, the last in 2007. This way the survey covers a reasonably long period of time. As tools of research, structured interview, narration and semi-structured interview were chosen for use. The survey covered the level of assumption, level of activity and its reflection. Recording of data was adjusted to the main theoretical and practical milestones of the training.

The dates, sample and tools of the research

	number of people in the sample	tool
February 2001. (semester IV.)	24 people	structured interview
February 2001 (semester IV.)	1 person	narration
April-May 2002 (semester VI.)	24 people	structured interview
December 2002(semester VII.)	24 people	structured interview
19th February 2003.	1 person	semi-structured interview
1st June 2007	1 person	semi-structured interview

The sample

The structured interviews were implemented by the follow-up of a sample consisting of 24 people, whereas the narration and the semi-structured interviews were recorded with the participation of students included in the sample. The definition of sample-taking is a choice of comfort based on availability. (Sántha, 2005)

The recording of the interviews were performed by me, with the help of three of my colleagues. In order to provide clear identification and follow-up every student was given an identification code. The recording of a life-span narration with a teacher and the semi-structured interview were performed by me, and then all of the recorded interviews were written down using a word -processor also by me.

The process of data analysis

The classification of data were carried out by using inductive method rather than on the basis of preliminarily set up conception (*Krippendorff*, 1995; *Sántha*, 2005) as described in *Grounded theory* (*Glaser*, *Strauss*, 1967). I read the texts sentence after sentence while defining their contents. I divided every single response into text units, and then I arranged those units which were carrying the same kind of meaning into one of the several groups I had set up. This way the data (the actual responses) can be either one or several coherent sentences or part of a compound sentence. Those data carrying the same kind of content create concepts, while those concepts which are related to each other create categories. (*Gelencsér*, 2003; *Pandit*, 2004). With the analysis of the additional units and responses of the interview, the structure of concepts and categories has changed and has become modified. Different questions triggered different aspects of the particular concepts. Taking these issues into consideration, I checked over the previous interpretations, and if it seemed to be necessary, I adjusted the labeling of the concepts and categories accordingly. I consider those results to be the most reliable, which are present at those questions which were approached from several aspects and at different times.

The results of the research

In my opinion it is appropriate to call the obtained results as system of beliefs rather than how it is stated in the title due to their correlations to each other as well as their complicated nature. It is mentioned in several works of the related specialized literature that if we want to understand teachers' thinking, what we have to face is not individual cognitive items, but cognitive structures *Falus* (2006). Applying it to my research it can be said, that in the responses it is quite difficult to separate attitudes from beliefs, attitudes from behavior, and deeds. The interview and the responses for the questions can provide a more complex approach to the expectations of the candidates concerning the teachers' profession.

1. I did not find any considerable difference between the contents and correlations of structured interviews which had been recorded at two separate occasions. Similarly the assumption-based interviews and the experience-based teaching reflections showed no difference either concerning their thematic or their linguistic manifestations. So it can be assumed that the students' system of beliefs did not change during the training.

2. For the teachers-to-be a career as a teacher is considered to be a profession. The responses draw a picture made up by several aspects: tendency for providing service, skills, the union of deeds and personality, not well-defined borderline between working hours and free time, giving and receiving, altruism, responsibility, social usefulness, experiencing the joy and the results of work.

3. As far as the knowledge of the teachers is concerned, the factual knowledge of the particular scientific field is considered to be essential but not enough. Among the components of knowledge, those which can be employed in practice take up the most remarkable part.

According to related data, the two most important segments are „the ability to teach” and „the skills of dealing with children”.

A). In addition to exact specialized knowledge it is necessary that they should have the ability to pass knowledge over adequately. One of the key factors for being able to pass knowledge over is the digestible explanation. Difficulties of the ability of teaching include handling differences among pupils, which derive from the differences in attitudes, abilities, and social background. Moreover, teachers have to be able to motivate pupils. The level of achievement during the lessons very much depends on how successful teachers are in attracting as well as maintaining the attention of pupils till the end of the lesson.

The aim of the lessons is to go through the assigned material and to complete the tasks. In order to do that it is essential to keep the planned pace and time. The applicants consider the fluency and continuity of lessons important; however unplanned events can disrupt the rhythm of the lesson.

B). Teachers are also responsible for the secure, relaxed atmosphere of the lessons which enhance effective work. This requires the less possible personal space between teacher and pupil, which can be reached if the teacher is approachable, he/she does not put a stress on his/her higher rank in hierarchy, his/her authority is based on knowledge and positive personality.

4. An essential source of teachers’ knowledge is experience, primarily self-achieved experience. They consider practice-oriented subjects, classroom observation and practice at school the most useful. However work in real circumstances, self-experienced success and failure has the biggest impact. The responses of students reveal, that best source of support they can rely on is their own balanced personality and stable family background.

5. Among the several methods of approach and categories of content the concept of balance often springs up, sometimes as a link between them, as well as the need for a balanced state between the two sides of connecting phenomena. According to one approach of the profession the teacher gives and receives, the profession represents joy in work and its effectiveness in return of supporting, helping attitude and knowledge. The activity of the teacher is inspired by aspiring for balance, which bridges the gap between the ability of teaching and the skills of dealing with children. Achieving that seems to be the biggest challenge for applicants.

The teacher does not stress his/her superiority in the hierarchy; instead he/she provides a helping and supporting attitude, and gives space for initiatives. The teacher tries to achieve a relaxed, fearless atmosphere during lessons. The responses indicate, that this kind of casual behavior is supposed to encourage and maintain the task-oriented behavior of pupils, who are motivated and active and lack behavior problems. The result is fluent, continuous lessons and efficiency. Occurrence of any unplanned, unforeseen events can damage this complex balance. As a result applicants and career-starters have to cope with a remarkable emotional burden, and in this respect the responses of the students are still not very flexible. The teacher who has been teaching for four years is not so emotionally involved any longer; he has developed his own tools for tackling problems. The interview with him reveals that the teacher uses the piloting of the hierarchy of relationships, alteration of distance as well as its spectrum of tools in order to solve problems deriving from the lack of motivation and inappropriate behavior. The aim is that he should stay in charge as the leader of the process. The experienced teacher already knows that achieving this balance is not a one-off task, but it has to be adjusted to the context continuously.

Areas that should be further examined

Due to the low number of items the extension of the above mentioned statements is limited, so justifying their generalization requires further research.

- Upon analyzing the data I presume, that for teachers-to-be and career starter teachers those factors which represent the biggest difficulty are the behavior of pupils (maintaining order), motivation, differences among students and events that cannot be planned in advance. The main sources of these events derive from the other three factors, and they hinder the fluency of the lessons.
- Profession-based responsibility, taking up obligations, undefined border lines between working hours and private life, difficulties of dealing with pupils, and impact of unplanned events on the process represent a huge emotional burden for candidates and career starter teachers. That is why it is considered very important, that the personality of the teacher should be balanced and stable.
- It seems that teachers use piloting the hierarchy of relationships as well as the alteration of personal distance and its spectrum of tools in order to solve problems deriving from being unmotivated, undisciplined, and having behavior problems.
- As students will probably work in the education sector and they will not be able to avoid the impact of its operational system, the question is what solutions practicing teachers can use to solve the above mentioned problems.

Considerations for the training

The findings of the research have made the students' system of beliefs visible for the training. The main highlights of the content and their correlations have been explored; those tasks which generate the biggest difficulties have appeared. On the basis of the findings of the research it can be declared that students are rather satisfied with their theoretical knowledge, for them problems are mainly caused by their incomplete knowledge used in practice. That is why I would like to call the attention of leaders of block seminars and mentors including training of mentors to the findings of my research.

- They should help them interpret the different pedagogical situations as well as understand their triggering reasons, their correlations and their process.
- They should help them work out a complex system of tools and methods for themselves to sort out problems of different origin.
- *They should pay special attention to those areas which represent the biggest problems for students, such as handling differences among pupils, task-oriented behavior (motivation, being active), behavior problems of students, fluent running of the lessons and events that cannot be planned in advance.*
- It is very important, that candidates should understand the emotions and stress occurring in certain situations, they should be able to cease tension, to separate emotions from problems.

The before mentioned recommendations of course apply for the entire training. The theoretical foundation of areas representing the biggest problem can also provide help for students. However it is also important to employ such forms of work and assign tasks during the training which highlight the correlation between theory and practice and create the possibility for developing reflection.

Publications related to the topic of the research

- Köcséné Szabó I. (2001): Does the Teachers' Training College train teachers? Survey on career orientation at Berzsényi Dániel Teachers' Training College) In : Boreczky Ágnes (ed.): *Pedagógiai műhely : Beszélgetések : In honorem Vastagh Zoltán*. PTE Tanárképző Intézet, Pécs. 57-64.
- Köcséné Szabó I. (2002): Pedagogy of teachers (book review) *Iskolakultúra*, No.2 109-112.
- Köcséné Szabó I. (2004): A few characteristics of self-image of teachers-to-be. *Pedagógusképzés*.No.2. 45-54.
- Köcséné Szabó I. (2007): What kind of teacher will I become? Students about themselves and the teaching profession. In: Falus Iván (ed.): *A tanárrá válás folyamata*. Gondolat Publishing Company, Budapest.

Lectures related to the topic of the research

- Köcséné Szabó I. (2000): Tanárokat képez-e a tanárképző főiskola? Pedagógia szakosok 3. Konferenciája, Pécs, 2000. március 25.
- Köcséné Szabó I. (2003): Tanárjelöltek nézeteinek néhány jellegzetessége a képzés négy esztendeje alatt. III. Országos Neveléstudományi Konferencia, Budapest, 2003. október 9-11.
- Köcséné Szabó I. (2003): A tanárjelöltek tanári énképének néhány jellegzetessége. Fiatal Neveléstudományi Kutatók Napja, Veszprém, 2003. november 6.
- Köcséné Szabó I. (2003): A tanári gondolkodás kutatási lehetősége a pedagógus hallgatók körében. A Tudomány Napja, Szombathely, 2003. november 7.
- Köcséné Szabó I. (2004): A tanárjelöltek tanárról alkotott nézetei a tanári mintában és a tanári énképben. IV. Országos Neveléstudományi Konferencia, Budapest, 2004. október 20-22.
- Köcséné Szabó I. (2004): A tanári minta szerepe a hallgatók tanárképben. A Tudomány Napja - BDF TMFK: Szombathely, 2004. november 19.
- Köcséné Szabó I. (2004): Hogyan gondolkodnak a tanárjelöltek a tanárról? Kutatás közben (felolvasóülés), Pécs, 2004. december 8.
- Köcséné Szabó I (2005): Tanárrá válni. V. Országos Neveléstudományi Konferencia, Budapest, 2005. október 6-8.
- Köcséné Szabó I (2008): Tanárjelöltből-kezdő tanár. A Tanárképzés Napja-I., Veszprém, 2008 április 23.