ROLE OF SCHOOL IN ADDRESSING DISCIPLINARY ISSUES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF NOVICE TEACHERS

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Abstract

The paper presents partial results of the research project Readiness of students and fresh graduates from the Faculty of Education, University of South Bohemia in Ceske Budejovice, for solving educational problems of students (GAJU 154/2016/S). The presented findings are based on a mixed research conducted in the Czech Republic using a questionnaire survey and interviews. The research sample consists of primary school novice teachers (up to 5 years of teaching experience). Quantitative data were collected from 312 novice teachers and qualitative data are based on 10 interviews with novice teachers. The text gives an insight into the role of a school in addressing disciplinary issues, how novice teachers grasp them, who they address if they face the issue, when and what kind of help they need. Novice teachers do not feel sufficiently prepared in this area of their work and they look for solutions of disciplinary issues mostly intuitively. To ensure more complex view of the presentation on the role of a school in relation to discipline, the paper also uses findings from analyses of 30 school prevention programs.

Keywords: school discipline, novice teacher, teacher, prevention.

1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of the paper is to bring to light partial results of the research that was carried out within the framework of the research project Readiness of students and fresh graduates from the Faculty of Education, University of South Bohemia in Ceske Budejovice, for solving educational problems of students (GAJU 154/2016/S). The research intention responds to situations that arise in connection with the increase in educational problems at primary and lower secondary schools. We are particularly interested in what situations teachers need to address and how they feel prepared in this context. We also look at how these circumstances are experienced by the teachers who are at the beginning of their career, what role the school plays in addressing disciplinary issues. The reason for the project submission was the fact that in the Czech Republic there is a decrease of the interest in teacher training study programs and work in schools is seen as a not very attractive opportunity by students and fresh graduates. One of the causes of this state is the fear of novice teachers of educational and disciplinary problems and of the socially problematic behavior of children and youth. Confrontation of inexperienced teachers with aggressiveness of children, pupils with addictive substance abuse, or with other forms of risky behavior is a significant burden and it discourages graduates from entering school practice.

Why the school ceases to fulfill its educational mission, can be explained by many views. Superficial view may provide an impression that the school, as an institution, keeps and passes the results of human spiritual and material culture relatively efficiently. The school anchors them in its curriculum, and repeatedly provides them to every new generation in order for the results to be understood. However, if we think about the overall emancipatory effort of the school, and monitor not only the students' knowledge, but also the area of the formation of students' values and attitudes, then, we encounter a number of problems. Although the school, through its specific socialization and acculturative activities, cares about the continuity of the collective identity, it is very difficult for teachers to intervene positively in the personality and social development of a child.

Child's personality matures in social roles that are fulfilled and developed in the social environment of the school. But the school is not closed to the transformation of the social reality of the whole society. Contemporary society with its characteristic features of time fluidity [1], with its global openness, information interconnection, growing individualism and intolerance, changes the social world of school. For example, changes in social forms and structures seem to be destructive for the child's education.
The ways of behaviour are changing, and social institutions cannot maintain their shape for longer time, they disintegrate, dissolve, and therefore they are neither a certainty nor a model for children's behavior. Therefore, it is logical that, in addition to its educational tasks, the contemporary school is beginning to offer incentives to create a stabilized attitude and value orientation of the child. Only then will the child be able to handle the path through the complex labyrinth of this world.

The theoretical starting point of the research is the view of the social importance of the school and the school class in which the educational process takes place. In this context, the school is perceived as a social environment that is increasingly burdened by the effects of anomic social processes [2]. These processes disrupt the effectiveness of school education, negatively interfere with the pupil's personality [3], but also degrade the educational relationship between the teacher, the pupil and the parent. Consequently, the reality of contemporary school puts unexpected problems in front of teachers that threaten their authority [4] and disrupt the discipline that is essential to achieving educational aims and goals. The gap among social freedom and individualism, and the school requirement for discipline [6] is growing. Pedagogy learns once again to understand the essence of the relationship between freedom and responsibility.

The response of the school as an institution to these problems is the effort to intervene in the socialization processes at school and to orient the curriculum also towards educational and preventive topics. The inevitability of direct entry into the process of socialization is realized through social learning mechanisms - Social Learning, Soziales Lernen [7], where opportunities for the development of positive social relationships are sought by involving elements of group and social forms of teaching, cooperative teaching [8] and democratic behavior, which facilitates the social integration of children. The outcomes of school education are defined in the areas of social skills with emphasis on the ability to solve problems in the group, to mediate and to receive information. It therefore appears that the school as an institution has created effective mechanisms for coping with the education and socialization of pupils.

However, a specific problem arises when a novice teacher faces a socially disintegrated team of children. The beginning of a teacher's career is, in general, a period that is associated with a certain shock. Teacher trainee, whose training for the job was predominantly theoretical, becomes a teacher who must find solutions to various educational situations on a daily basis. As Alan [9] states, the novice teacher is confronted with three areas of contradictions. They are a contradiction between knowledge and experience, between personal aspirations and the needs of the institution, between the current status and their future prospects. In addition, they are expected to perform as if they are professionally qualified experts [10], who have full responsibility for the preparation, management, organization and results of the educational process from the very beginning. Yet, the first years of practice is the most important time for teachers. On the basis of their experience, thoughts and responses, novice teachers evaluate their activities, teaching and education, opinions, attitudes, and so on. This is a major interference with the personality of a novice teacher and the process of their formation and self-regulation [11]. This period is also important for them when deciding whether to leave or remain in the profession. In this respect, it turns out that the first three years are the real break point. Out of the Czech schools, for example, in the early years of their career, up to 35% of young male and female teachers leave, most of whom will never return to school [12].

The text provides an insight into the role of the school in addressing educational and disciplinary issues. We monitor what the novice teachers use, who they are turning to, when and what kind of help they need. We are interested in understanding the role of the school from the point of view of novice teachers, and the role of the school in relation to the solution of the disciplinary problems.

2 METHODOLOGY

The text is based on partial results of a mixed research conducted within the framework of the research project Readiness of students and fresh graduates from the Faculty of Education, University of South Bohemia in Ceske Budejovice, for solving educational problems of students (GAJU 154/2016/S). This project is ongoing and therefore, the paper presents only the results from the first phase of the project. The research sample consists predominantly of primary school teachers. The first battery of questions was answered by 191 novice teachers, the second one by 88 novice teachers. In the paper, we also present data from the research survey, in which 87 teachers took part, with the number of 33 novice teachers in this group. The data from this survey characterize the situation in the whole school, i.e. also in the primary school level, which is the first five years of school attendance in the Czech Republic. We use data obtained from the entire sample of respondents (for

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the sake of clarity, see the specific research samples in part 3 - Results; they are always in the text or in the table). Data were processed using the SPSS software program. Results are presented using absolute and relative frequencies. In the next part of the research, 10 interviews were conducted with primary school novice teachers and 30 primary and lower secondary school prevention programs were analyzed. These programs are created by the teachers themselves and they should include topics based on the prevention strategy of a particular school.

3 RESULTS

The results presented below are based on three partial research surveys carried out within the framework of the research project Readiness of students and fresh graduates from the Faculty of Education, University of South Bohemia in Ceske Budejovice, for solving educational problems of students. Primary school teachers are in majority of cases women (out of the total of 312 novice teachers there were 296 women and 16 men). Discipline problems were solved by 203 novice teachers (65%) in the early years of their work at schools.

The question about how novice teachers feel prepared and ready to tackle disciplinary issues was answered by 190 novice teachers. The feeling of readiness was designed to be evaluated by using the classification system common in Czech schools (1 - excellent, 5 - insufficient). The highest frequency occurred in the "grade" 4 (38%), 5 (30%), 3 (28%), but the "grade" 2 was assigned only by 5 respondents, and 1 just by one respondent. The average value is 3.94, which can be considered to be a very negative rating. We also investigated whether, in the context of pre-service education at teacher training institutions, teachers had a course or subject that would prepare them for solving disciplinary issues. Out of 277 respondents, 232 (i.e. 84%) of them answered "no". Those who answered "yes," said that those subjects were mainly theoretical ones, which lacked practical experience, and concrete examples.

In the next part of the research, we were interested in how the novice teacher was taken care of during the first years of his/her work at school. The results are presented in Table 1 (n = 88 primary school novice teachers).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The way to “take care of” a novice teacher</th>
<th>Absolute frequency</th>
<th>Relative frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>no way, I was so to say &quot;thrown into the water&quot;</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>36 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>my colleague introduced me to pedagogical environment</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>22 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I asked for an advice from university teachers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mentor-teacher was assigned to me</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>33 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other way</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the table presented above, we can see that novice teachers can rely on their mentor-teacher only in 33% of the cases, and so to say "thrown into the water" was 36% of novice teachers. Assistance from a colleague was mentioned in 19 cases (22%). The teacher who was teaching them during undergraduate studies (university teacher) was addressed only by two novice teachers. As for the other ways, the following ones were mentioned: "In a small village school the head teacher introduced me personally and then mentor-teacher was assigned to me"; "I was assigned to a mentor-teacher with whom we were unable to find common speech and understand each other, so another colleague helped me - so-called "thrown into the water", "over time I have been learning from my colleagues (I had to ask a lot)"; "mentor-teacher was no good for me"; "she needed a place, where she could talk a lot"; "none, but I’ve had a lot of practice at that school"; "My colleagues helped me."  

When questioning about what kind of support novice teachers were provided by their primary or lower secondary school in the area of solving disciplinary problems in classroom, 191 respondents answered to that the second questionnaire. No support was received by 83 novice teachers (i.e. 44%), prevention programs containing topics and activities relevant for prevention were provided to 73 teachers (38%). There were 39 teachers (20%) who used specialized books, and 31 teachers (16%) were given the possibility to participate in further education. Colleagues counseled 16 teachers (8%).
Further, novice teachers were asked whether and where they were looking for information on disciplinary issues. Each teacher will definitely encounter disciplinary misdemeanors in the classroom, so it was of interest to us to find out whether and how novice teachers get ready for such situations. Out of the 191 addressed teachers, 149 (78%) chose the way to search for the necessary information in internet sources, 125 (65%) searched for information in books and other publications, 28 teachers (15%) found help in special lectures and 11 (6%) "elsewhere" (they did not state where exactly) and 13 (7%) of teachers have never searched for information.

In the research, we also found out what kind of disciplinary problems the primary school teachers encounter. Disturbance was the most frequently reported phenomenon, but it is very subjective, as everyone has the limit of "disturbance" set out differently. In addition, such expressions as "disobedience", "denial of work", "aggression" occurred.

How do novice teachers solve the discipline problems, whom they ask for help are listed in Table 2 (n = 88).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who, or what helps a teacher to solve a disciplinary problem? (Absolute frequency)</th>
<th>definitely yes</th>
<th>rather yes</th>
<th>rather not</th>
<th>definitely not</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educational counselor helped me the most</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I found a solution in professional literature</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My colleague advised me on the solution</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My head teacher advised me on the solution</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking to the problem student personally helped me</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School educational board helped me</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School prevention methodologist helped me</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School psychologist helped me</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogical and Psychological Counseling Center helped me</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center of educational care helped me</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have intuitively solved everything myself</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 shows that teachers deal with a specific disciplinary problem mainly on their own with the student himself. They rely on the experience they have already gained, or they deal with problems intuitively, and only then do they consult their colleagues. The least frequent are responses saying that teachers look for help from counseling institutions.

In the next part of the research, interviews with novice teachers have shown that they are not entirely prepared to deal with disciplinary problems. More than relying on themselves, they rely on the advice of older colleagues. Some of the interviewed teachers are afraid of encountering disciplinary problems, but they claim that they have managed to solve everything intuitively for the time being. At the same time, they described their feelings of readiness as average. Interesting was the statement of a communication partner, who stated that during the induction phase he was primarily focusing on trying to integrate himself into the group of school staff, and therefore, he did not have much time to notice all the disciplinary problems in the class. When he fully integrates himself, perhaps he will probably have a bigger opportunity to focus on this issue. Another female novice teacher, on the other hand, said: I feel ready. I think I'm just going through the school office which is preparing me straight for my practice. Another participant made a statement about the feeling of readiness as follows: Well, I can say, I'm worried every day about what will happen ... It's not like I'm sure I'll cope with anything, that is certainly not so. Perhaps having some experience and knowing that I totally failed would be worse.

In order to objectify the results, it is important to note that in primary schools in the Czech Republic there are school counseling centers where such experts as educational counselors, prevention methodologists and, if financially possible, school psychologists, school special and social educators...
work. This counseling center is available to teachers in situations when they need advice, but the counseling experts work also preventively. Each school also has specially trained teachers responsible for preparing and implementing the school primary prevention program. These so-called prevention methodologists design school prevention programs, but the question is how teachers are then informed about these prevention programs.

In another questionnaire survey, in which 87 primary school teachers took part, the following question was asked: "Do you know about any prevention program at your school in this school year that has informed pupils about risky behavior?" The answer "no" was recorded in 26 cases, three teachers stated that they have prevention programs in their schools, but just for the lower secondary school, four questionnaires were not filled in, and one respondent marked "does not know yet", 52 (60%) teachers answered yes, in one case the answer was "other" - "problem students are not interested in programs ..." The questionnaire survey showed that prevention programs are focused mainly on bullying, crime, cyber-bullying, drug programs. Topic, which could be referred to as "pro-social behavior", was reported by 11 respondents. These statements are very surprising, as prevention programs started to be prepared and implemented by each school as early as 2000. The program must include activities for all grades of school. The results point to problems in team communication at school and reflect the ineffectiveness of induction programs for novice teachers. This finding has led us to analyze prevention programs in schools. The subject of the analysis was the thematic focus of programs. The analysis covered 30 primary school preventive programs. The results indicate that the topics of the programs are mainly oriented towards individual manifestations of risk behavior, which mainly affect higher grades of lower secondary school. Information is primarily focused on illegal drugs, smoking and alcohol use, partly on bullying, especially on cyber-bullying. It turns out that programs track problems that are rarely the case in primary school. However, they neglect topics that are important for building a harmonious relationship between pupils and teachers. The programs thus lose the opportunity to promote a positive climate in the classroom from the start of school attendance. Yet, the quality of the relationships between the actors of school life is important for the prevention of later manifestations of risky behavior.

4 CONCLUSION

In connection with our research, it should be noted, that the legislation is currently being amended in the Czech Republic. It includes, among other things, support for novice teachers by mentor-teachers. The results show, that novice teachers do not feel prepared and ready for dealing with and solving disciplinary issues. They solve disciplinary problems in their classes rather intuitively, or they seek advice from their more experienced colleagues. Another question is connected to this: Is it possible to prepare teachers for the solution of disciplinary problems? According to our experience, from students' feedback, they lack the sense of certainty. They are afraid to make any decision. Teacher trainees would like to have more teaching practice at different schools and less theoretical subjects as part of their undergraduate training. They would introduce teaching practice to the lowest possible years of study so that the practice shortly precedes the theory. After completing a longer-lasting practice in one school, novice teachers are more motivated to learn also theoretical information. Svoboda [13] states, that the best teacher trainer is sharing experience from practice.

The results of the research showed some interesting findings. Firstly, it appears that teachers, after they start to work at schools, feel to be inadequately prepared to be able to solve educational and disciplinary problems. An alarmingly large number of respondents from schools said that they had to deal with all kind of problems on their own from the outset of their career without any significant support. However, it turned out to be an important issue for novice teachers to share and discuss their views and problems with their colleagues from school. At the same time, it is clear how the behavior of the novice teacher shapes their own experience and the experience of resolving educational problems with their pupils. However, these experiences can be negative, frustrating, they can lead teachers to solutions that are not effective [14, 15, 16]. Respondents, however agree, that they should not be scared to address their mentor-teacher, other colleagues or head teachers and ask for help.

To help with educational problems, support for novice teachers could be available within school counseling centers. Above all, teachers could expect that their pupils, starting from the first grade of primary school, will be through the prevention programs systematically introduced to the spirit of discipline promotion, positive climate in the classroom, and personal and social development of children. The research results, however showed, that novice teachers are not well informed about the programs, and the topics are mostly oriented only on solving the most serious behavior problems in higher grades of lower secondary school. The difficult situation of a novice teacher at primary and
lower secondary school is, therefore, not addressed sufficiently. There is a lack of a clear adaptation process, collegiate support and in relation to educational problems with pupils also a lack of systematic school prevention.

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