

# Cross-curricular connections

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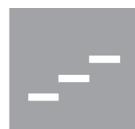
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## **Improving Self-knowledge and Social Culture in Teacher Training – Presentation of the Present Practice and Recom- mendation of a Possible Model**

### **The Importance of Improving Self-knowledge and Social Culture**

Deep professional knowledge of the subject is only one element of effective teaching. The success of transmitting knowledge – using a psychological phrase: the authenticity of the message – depends on the personality of the teacher, therefore this personality is a teacher's most important asset (Bagdy 1997, Klein 1998). Self-knowledge, our awareness of who we are, a realistic, accurate assessment of limits and possibilities may be the most important tool for the improvement of one's personality, for maintaining appropriate mental health. The dominant concept about knowledge acquired at school is that of 'lifelong learning' It applies to self-knowledge as well: the knowledge about ourselves is increasing, renewing and changing continuously. This thesis may be relevant for any profession, thus it is of outstanding importance to enable teacher training students, already as part of their training, to improve the various elements of self-knowledge and social culture, and let them deepen their knowledge consciously and systematically. We also see how these have made their way as skills into more recently developed Anglo-American curricula ([http1](#), [http2](#)). It is also important because teacher training (Túri 1996, Kádár and Szarvas 1999) takes place at the age when both self-knowledge and social culture have especially important roles in personality development. The elementary and personal demand for this is worth being served even during training and relating to the process of becoming a teacher (Tókos 2007). Of course this process can only be com-

plete and long-lasting through the whole career of a teacher if it does not finish with the end of the studies. There shall be an opportunity to follow the path of conscious self-knowledge, so that the experience gained could be applied and serve as feedback in the pedagogical work. In this present paper, we try to introduce the present situation from the ideas and training objectives expressed in the National Curriculum (NAT), through the training programme of higher education institutions that train teachers for the two main levels of public education, to the actual course units. During the understanding phase of this task, we realised that the framework for improving the students' self-knowledge and social culture skills is similar to improving the personalities of the pupils as it is defined in NAT. Limitations of space allow us to discuss only part of what we find important to say about our topic: this paper will be a short survey of our conclusions. These conclusions and results summarised here were obtained by analysing the topics of curricula from various levels of teacher training, and by interviewing instructors from universities and colleges, teachers from secondary schools, and teacher trainees.

### **Improving Self-knowledge and Social Culture according to NAT**

According to NAT, self-knowledge is the basis of social culture, since we can only adapt to a group or community, and after all to society, if we know ourselves, our skills, knowledge and personality. It is not only important because we should be aware of our positive features, negative characteristics and qualities, and try to find our place and tasks accordingly, but it also has a strong influence on our personal relationships, our status within a community and the acquisition of certain roles. Appropriate self-assessment and social relationships provide a favourable atmosphere for mental development, improving optimal skills and other types of literacy. That is why NAT puts a special emphasis on these skills: although there are no lessons for them, they are built into other subjects. To develop them is also important because it helps to establish a learning environment in class that makes students feel comfortable, motivated and able to concentrate on their studies. Both skills – especially self-knowledge – is strongly connected to lifelong learning, creating appropriate and realistic future plans in order that failure can be avoided. It is summarised as follows: "Self-knowledge

– as a skill based on **personal experience** and **acquired knowledge**, a continuously developing and improvable skill – is the basis of social culture. The students' **favourable mental development, optimal improvement of skills, expression of their knowledge** and **competences** must be enabled. Students are to be encouraged to **express their emotions authentically, develop empathy** and **mutually accept each other**. So that students participating in the teaching-pedagogical process could **get a realistic self-reflection** based on the acquired skills and knowledge, they need support throughout the whole teaching-learning process. It is important in order that they could be **aware of** the fact that they are the ones who **can shape their own/personal development, faith and career**. A well-established self-knowledge contributes to a **moderated personal and social lifestyle, the understanding and respect** towards others, and it helps to establish **loving personal relationships**" (Magyar Közlöny (Hungarian Journal), 2012: 10642).

In practice, the improvement of self-knowledge and social culture takes place mainly in the so-called 'form master's classes', community activities both inside and outside school (competitions, games, trips, etc.); of course the form master has the most important role in these activities. Apart from this, it can be seen that such activities are embedded in other competence areas: for example in local or national history, in defining national identity, preparing for adult roles, communicative skills, developing mental and physical help; actually, being aware of the level of knowledge regarding each area of literacy belongs to self-knowledge. Classes that put more emphasis on communal activities rather than theoretical knowledge – such as sport games in PE lessons, or singing in a choir in Music lessons – provide excellent grounds for social culture. Effective cooperation, arguing, conflict-management, understanding and empathy (and the possibilities for their application) are acquired in these lessons in a hidden way. Self-reflection and self-knowledge belong to the emphasised areas of development: "The values and competences that are mentioned in the National Curriculum can only appear in the students' self-reflections and become influential factors if the students themselves participate in the identification of the values, are aware of their consequences and the operation and usability of the acquired knowledge and skills. So that the students could integrate the acquired knowledge, skills, learning-enhancing attitudes and motivation into their self-reflections, it should be provided that the students feel more and more

competent considering their responsibility for their own development, faith and career. Self-knowledge and self-control, independence; the demand for self-improvement and the activities enhancing it, and human dignity – as the result of them – can serve as basic objectives in shaping the person's attitude to himself or herself" (NAT (National Curriculum) 2012 – 13).

The concept of self-knowledge is easier to define, since it has easily comprehensible and developable features. Social culture is a more complex, more difficult phenomenon, and it can be stated that the mapping of some elements of self-knowledge in society constitutes that part of the social culture that is an important area for development according to the National Curriculum (NAT). There is a similar situation in international practice as well, as exact reference to the improvement of social culture can be only found in New Zealand.

## **Appearance of Improving Self-knowledge and Social Culture in Institutional Trainings**

### **I. Course units regarding essential, topic-based psychological studies**

- a. General Psychology: Courses including topics of general psychology can be found in the teacher training programmes of both institutions. Although the subjects have different names, they function as the first steps of psychology courses, they are typically introductory type lessons.
- b. Personality Psychology: The other course unit that is part of both teacher training programmes is the so called "personality psychology" that deals with basic personality psychological phenomena and processes. These course units are essential for getting closer to self-knowledge.
- c. Social Psychology: The presence of social psychology is also a uniform feature in teacher training programmes. The understanding of the basics of psychic phenomena created through social relationships is important for both self-knowledge and social culture. It can also be essential in such special training programmes in which social psychological phenomena

are in the scope of the studies (communication, groups, personal relationships, etc.).

- d. Developmental Psychology: A huge deficiency of modern trainings is that a course unit dealing with the development of different psychic phenomena, skills and abilities is not a general feature in these training programmes. It is sometimes emphasised, for example in primary school teacher training (very rightly), but it is absent from certain programmes.
- e. Course Units Focussing on Special Phenomena: Such psychological and pedagogical subjects belong to this category that focus on both self-knowledge and social culture in a direct or indirect way. Course units about different deviant behaviours or social problems are good examples.

## **II. Training Sessions**

- a. (General) Development of Teacher Personality: This is a very aptly titled course unit. Although there are usually special objectives, these are quickly overridden by the students' overwhelming desire of self-knowledge. Since psychology is not a compulsory feature of public education, most students encounter this method that requires special qualifications and sometimes even special circumstances for the first time. This method is very difficult to be adjusted to the 45 minutes of the Prussian educational system, but it is a good way to start a conscious journey into self-knowledge (Marlok and Martos 2006).
- b. Training Sessions Improving Different Social Skills: These sessions have more traditions either because of the organisational psychology from the labour market or thanks to certain elements (questionnaires, tests, exercises) spread by the media or the Internet. It can be also added that these sessions are popular because they are not so intimate, so there is less personal risk involved. It is possible to take such sessions in both institutions. They are usually centred around important phenomena of social culture such as communication or conflict management. These sessions

do not only contribute to the improvement of personality, but also serve as methodological sources for teacher training students.

- c. Mental Hygiene-type Training Sessions (stress-management, etc.): This is also an important method that can be available. It has a significant role in attitude formation and socialisation, both of which are essential in a teacher's career. Both self-knowledge and social culture are included in these sessions; they have direct and indirect effects (Szőke-Milinte 2004).

### **III. Subjects Focusing on Special Groups and/or Problems**

These are mainly typical in Special Needs Education, and in the case of subjects concerning children with special needs. Multicultural values (tolerance, empathy, the need to learn about and accept one's own and others' culture, the development of citizenship skills and the possibilities of such development) are acquired at these courses. They are really method- and practice-oriented course units, but they may be considered as a borderline between traditional seminars and training sessions concentrating on experimental learning.

### **IV. Courses on pedagogy**

The lecture on Didactics and its associated seminars could not be left out of the programme, since it is here that students learn how to teach and stand up in front of a class; they visit other teachers' classes, evaluate themselves and each other; they learn about and experience the process of teaching. Teaching how to learn also belongs here, and it is aimed specifically at development. What place and role a person, a child, the family, a community, ourselves have in society is also something students learn at these pedagogical classes (The social foundations of education, Social pedagogy). In addition, there are other courses explicitly about preparation for the role of the teacher: The profession of teaching, The complex questions of a teaching career.

## **Strengths and Weaknesses**

Compared to the Bologna Process-type training, undivided teacher training has been modified not only in how many semesters it takes up, but in its content as well. It is a positive feature that although the number of course units in the pedagogy-psychology module has decreased at the College of Nyíregyháza (it has increased at the University of Debrecen), more emphasis is put on the development of the students' self-knowledge and some elements of their social culture in the courses. They also appear as expressed objectives in course descriptions. Another important factor is that the changes of the contents of particular subjects resulted not only in different titles and the emergence of new course units, but a demand arose for developing a number of competence areas within them.

Gaining practical knowledge or preparation for one's own developing tasks are more emphasised than in a Master programme or in the compulsory courses of Bachelor programmes. On the level of theories, the students of undivided teacher training acquire the same knowledge as in the Master programme; however, undivided teacher training offers more methodological knowledge and more methods for developing skills. Perhaps less attention is paid to the opportunities to develop the students' self-knowledge, coexistence and cooperation, and to shape effective team work, and there are also fewer courses focusing on concrete exercises and practice in both institutions. We have no experience concerning professional practice in undivided programmes so far, but it can be highlighted as a positive feature that there are two terms for the students to familiarise themselves with the tricks of teaching, the internal world, structure, institutional systems of schools, and it provides an opportunity to meet everyday school situations and problems. Seminars and practice are preferred to lectures. Psychological training sessions enable students to know their own and their pupils' personalities better. However, it seems to be a deficit that the acquired knowledge cannot be tried out in a professional practice (explicitly as a psychological practice), because that course disappeared in the Bologna Process. It is of outstanding importance to provide practice for the students, not only in their final year, so that they could experience what is ahead of them. The discussion of the experience and cases learned during professional practice is favourable in follow-up seminars (or a similar, but only optional course, called Pedagogical Case Studies) that provide help and support for the students

to cope with possible problems, and also for a deeper acquisition of experience. There is a demand arising from these discussions that the seminars preparing students for the teaching practice should be held by an experienced instructor. On the basis of the interviews it can be concluded that putting theory into practice is the most difficult for students. One possible reason for that can be that there is less time and energy to complete the pedagogical objectives described in NAT, because students concentrate on the syllabus of the subjects. In both institutions, having researched the course unit networks of master and undivided programmes alike, we can state that the protection of physical health gets less attention than developing psychic and mental health. Among the categories we have studied, we have to highlight the concept of sustainability, which is also included in NAT; however, it was not identified during document analysis. The development of the sustainability of physical and mental health and creativity are not or just briefly mentioned in course descriptions. Concerning the fields of social culture, neither training programme included such topics as the importance of representing one's own interests, how this skill can be improved and transmitted in a way that self-interest is still behind the interests of the community. The family as the dimension of social needs only appears in the subject called Improving the Pupils' Personality, while the students are at an age when it is necessary to gain proper knowledge about healthy personal relationships, sexual life and responsible family planning.

## Summary of Experience

Summarising the document-analysis and the opinions of the interviewees – the instructors, students and other workers of the teacher trainings of the institutions in question –, it can be seen that both the instructors and the students are satisfied with the training, believing that they gain appropriate knowledge from both professional and pedagogical-psychological aspects to be able to work as teachers. Nevertheless, the most prominent factor is still the professional practice, when students may experience real-life situations and test their knowledge. Since these mean the greatest progress in the preparation, it should be very important that the students may take part in practice as soon as possible, even

if these lasted less than a term (two terms in undivided programmes). Only those teachers who started their career long ago think that the preparation of the teachers-to-be is insufficient, but generational differences may also contribute to this opinion. Regarding the improvement of self-knowledge and social culture, it can be concluded that they can be realised through the dimensions relating to the students' own self-knowledge and social culture. This is the method to prepare students to develop children in these fields. We have to be aware that the development of these competences takes place latently, thus teachers-to-be cannot pay enough attention to bringing this field up to date – if they can at all in the beginning.

## **A Recommended Model for Improving Self-knowledge and Social Culture**

Our objective was to set up a model that is in harmony with the elements and social aims of self-knowledge and social culture as it is defined in the law (NAT). It should be adaptable to the teacher training programmes in progress at present, and generally it should be suitable for the circumstances, conditions and opportunities of teacher training, post-gradual teacher training and (public) education. It should try to gather the main ideas and methods regarding self-knowledge and social culture – that are mostly part of the present system as well – into a coherent progression. At the same time it should meet those professional expectations, conditions and protocols that are required for the professionals of other sciences dealing with the phenomena. We are convinced that the conditions of effective information exchange are present, but sometimes the lack of appropriate professional communication (social culture!) or the rigid and unrealistic rules for tenders and accountancy, or other factors that are not dealt with in this present paper may hinder this process. In elaborating the recommended model connected to pedagogical objectives, we tried to review the requirements and directives of the National Curriculum (NAT) regarding self-knowledge and social culture.

## The Available Training Background of the Model

**In general:** On the basis of the information collected, it can be stated that a major part of the material concerning the two groups of phenomena that is applied in pedagogy can be found in teacher training at present. It provides opportunity to construct a training for teachers that is similar to the method-specific training of the psychologist profession:

Theory → One's own experience → Training → Supervision

Current teacher training and its institutional framework is able to accommodate this.

### I. Teaching Relevant Theories in the Recommended Model

According to the information available, BA, BSc and MA, MSc teacher training students, as well as students of the undivided programmes acquire the basic knowledge that is necessary to understand the phenomena through the psychology subjects of the training programmes.

- a. General Psychology: The most important concepts for self-knowledge and social culture: emotion, will, motivation, attention, memory, learning
- b. Personality Psychology: The most important concepts for self-knowledge and social culture: structure, development, functions of personality, psychological approaches, tendencies
- c. Social Psychology: The most important concepts for self-knowledge and social culture: perception, attribution, communication, attitudes, values, group, attraction theories
- d. Developmental Psychology: The most important concepts for self-knowledge and social culture: socialisation, development, maturing, periodization, regression
- e. Course Units Focusing on Special Phenomena: The most important concepts for self-knowledge and social culture: deviant behaviour, social problems, health psychology, psychopathology, processes in the psychology of organizations

## **II. Access to One's Own Experience in the Recommended Model**

In the case of methods affecting personality directly, one's own experience about the given technique is of basic significance for the acquisition and authentic and effective application in the future. The number of lessons of one's own experience is usually the same as the recommended number of lessons of the particular method (20-50 lessons). The time and formal framework of the training session called the Development of Teacher Personality is absolutely suitable. It applies to most training sessions that are offered in teacher training and post-gradual teacher training.

## **III. Providing Preparation in the Recommended Model**

If a teacher would like to acquire the whole technique, it is possible to gain the relevant methodological knowledge in a preparation group. If there are enough applicants, it could be a post-gradual module. If there are not enough applicants, it is possible to take part in a group organised by the professional association teaching the technique. The successful performance of this must or should be accredited in the post-gradual training system.

## **IV. Providing Supervision in the Recommended Model**

The students' progress culminate in their first steps with professional assistance. It is relatively easy to provide this kind of assistance. In pedagogical work, two types of professionals (may) have such competence: teachers, since this activity is carried out in the field of education; and psychologists, as both the method and the topic are related to psychology. It would be necessary to employ a school psychologist in almost every school, so it can be another item of argument to be forwarded to the makers of education policy. If they have enough time for this task, psychologists of pedagogical special services can be employed too. In this activity, the partner of the psychologist is a well-trained and experienced teacher, who is suitable because she/he has spent a long time in the profession, taken part in extra-school activities with children, and completed trainings of relevant topics. It can be possible even in the teachers' career model that is being compiled at present: the status of a "supervisor teacher" may

be included, or the scope of work regarding “mentor teachers” may be extended in such directions. The basic conditions could include training and certificates in certain elements of self-knowledge and social culture, 10 years of relevant experience as a teacher, 2 cycles of experience as a form master, or equivalent extra-school activities with children. Some elements should be integrated into the model, while other elements need some amendments:

## I. Existing Basic Elements of the Model:

- a. **In Teacher Training:** Course units, training sessions, pedagogical and teaching practice, observations regarding the topic in the present teacher training system.
- b. **In Public Education:** Relevant lessons, form teacher's classes and extra school activities regarding the topic; the status of a school psychologist, services of the pedagogical special service.
- c. **In the System of Post-gradual Training:** Methodological and information-based courses, trainings, supervisions
- d. **In the Teachers' Career Model:** Scope of activities for leading teachers and mentor teachers.

## II. Recommended New Elements

- a. Introducing the subject called “Self-knowledge and Social Culture”
- b. Discussion of teaching practice and observation from aspects that are *not subject-specific*
- c. Providing contact with children outside of classes earlier than the teaching practice takes place
- d. Compiling and publishing a handbook with a production title of “Improving Self-knowledge and Social Culture in Pedagogical Work”
- e. For the complex teaching and learning of method-specific techniques (e.g. self-knowledge training session, etc.), the whole training spectrum

- (theory, one's own experience, preparation, supervision) should be required and provided
- f. Raising the number of lessons and the professional fee of training-type courses
  - g. Introducing the supervisor teacher's scope of activities and/or extending the scope of activities of mentor teachers with supervision competences in the teachers' career model
  - h. Making efforts to employ a school psychologist in almost every school.

The analytical explanation of these recommendations was carried out in our research study paper, but of course the limitations of space do not allow a detailed discussion here. According to our principal objectives, we have grounded our recommendations upon the elements existing and functioning in teacher training at present and the elements that can be found in post-gradual teacher training. We tried to make our recommendations more effective by using relatively few new constructions and little capacity need; we concentrated on restructuring, topic-categorisation, systematisation, revision – with labour input in short – regarding the new aspects. The professionals also agreed with our approach.

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