

## The Readiness of Graduates from the Faculty of Education at Palacky University for Primary School Pupils with Behavioral Problems\*

Michal Ruzicka<sup>1</sup>, Martin Dominik Polinek<sup>2</sup> and Simona Leskova<sup>3</sup>

*Palacky University, Faculty of Education, Department of Special Education Studies, Olomouc, 77140 Czech Republic*

*E-mail: <sup>1</sup><m.ruzicka@email.cz>, <sup>2</sup><polinekm@seznam.cz>, <sup>3</sup><simona.leskova@upol.cz>*

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**ABSTRACT** The purpose of this paper is to explore if former students of the Faculty of Education, Palacky University, Olomouc are prepared for these risk situations (aggression, behavioural problems) in their classes. The following text is research-based. The aim of this research is to answer the following questions: Are the graduates from the Faculty of Education, Palacky University, Olomouc prepared to work with pupils with behavioural problems? ~Are they able to address these pupils properly? ~Can they recognize pupils with more serious discipline problems who need the care of other professionals, and do they know who to turn to in this case? The survey concludes that graduates from the Faculty of Education, Palacky University, who are ready to teach in primary schools, lack the theoretical preparation relating to discipline.

### INTRODUCTION

A graduate from the Faculty of Education has a relevant university degree and educational qualification, but lacks teaching experience. Such a graduate faces a number of issues, such as maintaining discipline in classes, maintaining the pupils' attention, pupils' motivation, resolving disciplinary issues, individual meetings with parents, group meetings with parents, and so on (Kováčová 2014; Kvintová et al. 2014). From the first day of employment, all graduates are expected to carry out all the duties to the full extent, and therefore, they need systematic help and advice. "Before 1989, newly recruited teachers were assisted by a senior introductory teacher. After 1989, the function of the introductory teacher ceased to exist in the law, so presently, this function depends on the school management or the helpfulness of experienced colleagues (Podlahová 2004: 14). In the EU, teachers just starting out have a greater support, as documented by the report of the European Commission in April 2013, which addresses the working conditions of teachers. 15 EU member states (Estonia, France, Croatia, Ireland, Italy, Cyprus, Luxembourg, Malta, Germany, Portugal, Austria, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, the United Kingdom, Sweden and Turkey), have installed mandatory introductory programs, which are designed to

provide individual support and advice, for beginning teachers. These programs are designed differently, however, they have the same goal, that is, to help beginning teachers get the initial training, and to prevent them from leaving the education sector, after a short period of time. As one can notice, the Czech Republic is not in the list of those countries (European Union 2013).

The discipline in the education is very important and complex subject. The studies from 2015 supported the fact. One of the important strategy is to figure out how together, a school district and a local union are working to ensure that educators are trained in restorative practices in order to improve school climates and keep students in school and learning (Dubin 2015). Also, other authors write about the problem of response to challenging student behaviors, the answers are not as simple as they might seem. What teachers can do also depends, at least in part, on external demands (for example, discipline codes, principal expectations, time pressures on teaching content and testing) that can either facilitate or thwart positive resolutions of conflicts (Ashley 2015)

The purpose of this research is to explore if former students of the Faculty of Education, Palacky University, Olomouc are prepared for these risk situations (aggression, behavioural problems, etc.) in their classes. The following text

is research-based. The aim of this research is to answer the following questions: Are the graduates from the Faculty of Education, Palacky University, Olomouc prepared to work with pupils with behavioural problems? Are they able to address these pupils properly? Can they recognize pupils with more serious discipline problems who need the care of other professionals, and do they know who to turn to in this case? The researchers compared two groups of graduates in our research sample. 1. Graduates from: Teaching for primary schools. 2. Graduates from: Teaching for primary schools and special education.

## METHODOLOGY

### Background

For the objectives of this research study, the following assumptions were defined.

- ♦ During their education, university students were not taught courses relating to discipline, which would teach beginning teachers, the basic methods of maintaining discipline, and procedures used to address discipline issues.
- ♦ Elementary schools do not have an introductory teacher. A beginning teacher has nobody to lean on when addressing issues with limited experience.

### Definition of Problem

At the beginning of their teaching career, the graduates from the Faculty of Education, Palacky University, who are teaching in primary schools, and teaching in primary schools and special education, have problems maintaining discipline, and are often unable to cope with the problematic behaviours of their pupils. University study addresses discipline only marginally, as part of one of the courses. At the beginning of their teaching career, teachers have little support, and an introductory teacher is missing.

### Formulation of Research Questions

1. Do graduates from the Faculty of Education, Palacky University, who are ready to teach in primary schools, lack theoretical preparation in relation to discipline?
2. Do beginning teachers know who they could turn to in the case of a pupil with serious behavioral issues?

3. Do beginning teachers have the biggest problems with discipline?
4. Do elementary schools have an introductory teacher?

### Data Collection Method

To obtain the data, the researchers used a structured interview method, which is a qualitative research method (Miovský 2006; Chrastina et al. 2015). This method was complemented with a test, which measured the tendency of a teacher to react to the pupils' behavior, because the answers to similar questions could be quite subjective. The source material that was used in processing the test was a questionnaire used in Germany, for the identification and control of changes in the behaviors of parents who took part in a parenting course (the program is called the Triple P (Positive Parenting Program), and was developed by M. R. Sanders in Australia). This test was modified and translated to suit the environment. The structured interview method is the mixture of a questionnaire and an interview. The structured interview method has a fixed schema, which is binding for the interviewer. The main advantage of this method is a personal contact and work with motivation, which might result in more valid answers, compared to vague answers in a questionnaire. One of the disadvantages is a limited time for the interviewer to develop an interesting topic, which had not been originally included, and introduce it for discussion during the interview (Cf. Miovski 2006; Svaricek and Sed'ova 2010; Chráska 2007).

The present survey cannot be considered an exhaustive research, its purpose is rather to provide an overview of the phenomenon, and encourage other researchers to perform (strictly quantitative) research. The results of partial surveys were arranged to cover the phenomenon from various research perspectives, and they were further generalized and used to formulate conclusions on the research problem. Such a design of the survey does not pose strict demands on the validity, which was determined by the saturation of answers to specific topics.

### Selection of Research Participants

When selecting the research participants, the researchers made sure that they conformed to the objectives of the research, and that every-

thing was built on their willingness to participate in the research (Skutil 2011). The research method used was an intentional selection (cf. Miovský 2006) with the following criteria decisive for the selection of the participants:

- ♦ The respondent is a graduate from the Faculty of Education, Palacky University, Olomouc of 2013
- ♦ The respondent has completed Teaching in primary schools, or Teaching in primary schools and special education
- ♦ At the time of research, the respondent is a teacher in a mainstream elementary school

The basic research sample included all graduates from the Faculty of Education Palacky University, Olomouc, who met the criteria defined above, and after that the researchers selected ten research participants. The first group consisted of five female graduates from Teaching in primary schools, and the second group, consisted of five female graduates from Teaching in primary schools and special education. It should be noted that ten is the maximum number of participants possible because last year (2013) the total number of graduates from Teaching in primary schools and special education was slightly over twenty, of which seven graduates became teachers in a mainstream elementary school, and five were willing to take part in the interview. To meet the criterion of the same number of participants in both courses, the number of participants of Teaching in primary schools had to be five as well, although more teachers in this group met the criteria, due to the fact that the number of graduates were twice as high compared to the other group.

## RESULTS

In the context of the text analysis, the researchers determined categories corresponding to the items of the structured interview, and selected first-order coding (regarding the overview nature of the survey). It included an analysis of the secondary research questions, and then each research area was analyzed together with the questions of the interview (area of study in university, area of classroom discipline, area of introductory teacher). Finally, the test was evaluated.

As already mentioned, the research included ten female respondents, five of whom graduated from Teaching in primary schools and special

education, and these respondents were marked A, B, C, D, E. The other five respondents graduated from Teaching in primary schools and were identified as F, G, H, I, J.

Teachers A, D, H, and I teach in grade 1. The researchers were surprised that the largest number of respondents taught in grade 1, as this grade is quite demanding in terms of methodology, especially for a fresh graduate. Other than that, teacher G teaches in grade 2, teachers C, F, and E, teach in grade 3, and teachers B and J, teach in grade 4. A teacher who taught grade 5 was not represented. However, this had no effect on the research.

### Area of Study in University

#### 1. *Did you take a course on discipline in the university?*

- a. *Yes: What were the benefits?*
- b. *No: Would you welcome a separate course on discipline?*

*What do you think the benefits would be?*

Teachers A, B, C, E did not take a separate course on discipline, but went through discipline issues marginally, in ethopedia classes, where they gained basic awareness of coping with the discipline issues in school. Teacher D did not have ethopedia classes in the university or any other classes that covered discipline. Teachers G, I and J 'somehow' covered discipline in educational psychology classes. Teacher F and H jointly thought that they did not have any course dealing with discipline.

*Would you welcome a separate course on discipline?*

All the teachers would welcome a course on discipline in the university, and they also agreed that this course could teach them the techniques and methods used in addressing pupils generally, and not only those with behavioral problems.

Teacher B directly answered, "*Now, when I've started teaching myself, I would consider a course on this issue, a core one. This course should provide guidance on how to deal with children who have discipline issues. I would design this course rather, as hands-on experience methods that can be used in a practical environment.*"

This is a quote from teacher F's response, "*Perhaps this course would have shown me some techniques that proved to be useful in teaching.*"

*Maybe methods such as black dots, behavior boards. Anyway, I didn't take such a course and figured it out myself. Presently, there are only a few methods of maintaining discipline, when children have more rights than responsibilities, and are always defended by their parents."*

**2. Was the teaching practice during your study at university sufficient for you?**

- a. *Yes: Do you think that you gained sufficient knowledge about discipline during your teaching practice?*
- b. *No: What did you miss during your teaching practice?*

*Do you think that you gained sufficient knowledge about discipline during your teaching practice?*

Teachers A, I and J assessed teaching practice in the university positively. Teachers A and I also agreed that they gained sufficient knowledge about discipline during their teaching practice. Teacher A said that she was lucky to have teachers, whose methods to maintain discipline in the classroom, she now uses. On the contrary, teacher J did not obtain knowledge concerning discipline during her teaching practice, because she always had well-behaved children (teacher B is of the same opinion), and therefore, she felt that students on teaching practice, should also go to problem classes.

*What did you miss during your teaching practice?*

Teachers B, C, E and F missed more frequent teaching practices. Teacher B would have liked more teaching practice in mainstream elementary schools. Teacher C would welcome less seminar papers, and more teaching practice. Teacher F was still surprised by the fact that they had solid teaching practice only from grade four, which was quite late for some students to find out that it was not an ideal profession and one they did not want to do.

Teachers D, G and H thought that teaching practice was too short. Teacher D stated that, *"Before you get into gear and before you get to know the pupils and colleagues, the teaching practice is over."* A similar idea was also presented by teacher H. Teacher G further stated that she did not learn any new methods during her teaching practice.

**Area of Classroom Discipline**

The second area includes questions that investigated the ways the teachers led their classes, with regards to a pupil with problem behavior.

**1) Who is a pupil with problem behavior for you?**

Most of the teachers believed that a pupil with problem behavior was one who constantly disturbed in class, and also the one who hurt other children, refused authority, did not complete assigned tasks, and in two cases, the teachers mentioned the vulgarity of the pupil.

**2) Do you know the causes of the problem behavior of your pupils?**

The interview indicated that in most cases, the teachers' attributed the problem behavior of their pupils, to the family, poor background, or unrestricted upbringing (teachers A, B, C, H, I, J). They also mentioned hyperactivity (teachers B, D, I, J), the need for a pupil to attract the attention of the teacher (teachers C, E), and social immaturity (teacher D).

Teachers F and G believed that they did not have a pupil with problem behavior in their class.

**3) When you think that a pupil has serious problems with behavior and your methods do not work to reduce or eliminate these problems, what will you do?**

Responses of the teachers:

- ♦ Teacher A would first consult the parents, if the problem behavior persisted, she would recommend the parents of the pupil to visit the educational and psychological counseling center (PPP), a psychologist or a psychiatrist.
- ♦ Teacher B would first consult experienced colleagues, and the school educational counselor. If this did not help, she would contact specialists who had worked with the pupil.
- ♦ Teacher C would consult the parents, if this did not help, she would turn to the deputy head and the headteacher. Then, she would advise the parents to visit the PPP counseling center.

- ♦ Teacher D would consult the school psychologist and then send the pupil to him. She would also consult the school psychologist, in order to find out if it is her inability to attract the pupil's attention, which is the cause of the pupil's problem behavior, or whether the "guilt" is on the part of the pupil. In case of the "guilt" was on the part of the pupil she would invite the parents.
- ♦ Teacher E would discuss the problem behavior of a child with a specialist, and then would, if appropriate, recommend the parents to visit the PPP counseling center.
- ♦ Teacher F would consult experienced colleagues or the headteacher.
- ♦ Teacher G would first ask the parents how they deal with their child's problem behavior at home and whether their methods work, and if not, she would turn to the school psychologist.
- ♦ Teacher H would send the parents to the PPP counseling center.
- ♦ Teacher I would try to find other methods, and if that did not work, she would ask her "helping" teacher for advice.
- ♦ Teacher J would consult her introductory teacher first, then if needed, she would consult the educational counselor, and finally would invite the parents if needed. If something more serious had to be resolved, she would like the deputy head to be present at the meeting with the parents as a witness.
- ♦ Teachers B, J said copying of a text.
- ♦ Teacher C said pupils are forbidden from a PE lesson.
- ♦ Teacher D stated that she had not punished her pupils so far, so she did not know.
- ♦ Teacher E opted for black dots.
- ♦ Teacher F said no games for the day.
- ♦ For Teacher G pupils were forbidden the interactive whiteboard.
- ♦ Teacher H stated that this was individual, and that for each pupil, the punishment was different.
- ♦ Teacher J took away special hearts from the pupils, and these hearts were traded in a special heart shop, which was a motivational contest. The children receive hearts for good behavior, and once every three months they can exchange them in the heart shop for goods supplied by the teacher.

The responses about the biggest reward, agreed more:

- ♦ Teachers B, F, G, H, I, J rewarded their pupils by means of various games or contests.
- ♦ Teacher A gave her pupils A marks or positive verbal assessment, while teacher E awarded red dots.
- ♦ The biggest reward for the pupils of teacher C, was to take part in a PE lesson.
- ♦ For the pupils of teacher D, the greatest reward was to choose from various tasks, and work on the tasks in their own way.
- ♦ Teacher J rewarded her pupils, with hearts from the heart shop.

#### **4) Do you have an overview of the relationships in your class?**

##### **a. Yes: How did you get such overview?**

All the teachers believed that they had an overview of the relationships in their class. Most responses indicate that the teachers have an overview of the relationships in their class, as a result of observation.

#### **5) Do you know what the biggest punishment and the biggest reward for your pupils is?**

The teachers' responses as to what the greatest punishment was, differed considerably:

- ♦ Teachers A, B and I said it would be an extra task.

#### **6) What is the biggest problem for you as a beginning teacher?**

Most of the teachers agreed on the biggest problem related to discipline.

- ♦ Teacher A had problems maintaining discipline in PE lessons.
- ♦ Teacher C had problems with pupils speaking during the lessons.
- ♦ Teacher D did not know how to deal with pupils, who failed to observe their duties.
- ♦ Teacher E had problems with maintaining her authority.
- ♦ For teacher G, it was difficult to find out what worked for her pupils.

- ♦ For teacher H, it was difficult to set rules that would help the pupils know what they can do and what they cannot do.
- ♦ Teacher I admitted that she had problems with maintaining discipline.
- ♦ Teachers B and J had the biggest problems with paperwork.

Teacher F stated that her biggest problem was how to organize her time in such a way that she did not have to take so much work home.

**7) *What resources do you use to deal with the problem behavior of your pupils?***

Apart from teacher J, who mostly used prior experience because she had worked with children since she was young, all the teachers, mainly used the experience of their senior colleagues. Teacher A also uses the knowledge she gained during her university education, teacher D used experience from the training provided by her school, teacher E used literature, and teachers G and H, also used their own intuition.

**Area of Introductory Teacher**

The last area investigated whether elementary schools had introductory teachers, and whether beginning teachers perceived this function as desirable.

**1) *In your school, do you have an introductory teacher to help you at the beginning of your teaching career?***

- a. *Yes: Do you think that this function is desirable in schools? What is the biggest contribution of an introductory teacher for you?*
- b. *No: Would you welcome it if the position of an introductory teacher was established in your school?*

All teachers, who gave an affirmative answer, also agreed that the function of an introductory teacher is required. The responses to the question, “*What is the biggest contribution of an introductory teacher for you?*” mainly included paperwork, class and educational issues, marking, methodology, and also the fact that they knew who to turn to if they had some problems.

The teachers who do not have the position of an introductory teacher in their school, would welcome it if this position was established. Teach-

er H was not directly assigned an introductory teacher, but right after she started to teach, the headteacher told her that she could turn to the teacher who had led her during teaching practice, or directly to the headteacher.

**Test Evaluation**

This test examined the teachers’ tendencies to react to disruptive pupils’ behaviors. The researchers calculated the overall coefficient of educational functionality, by adding all the points awarded to the statements, and dividing them by thirteen. The resulting number, then expressed the total degree of educational effect of the teacher, on the pupil. If it does not exceed the dysfunctionality border, this effect does not incite undesirable behaviors in the pupils, and mostly has a positive effect on them. The indulgence coefficient was calculated by adding all the points awarded to statements 2, 3, 6, 8, 11, 13, and dividing it by six. The resulting number, then expressed the degree of the indulgence of the teacher in an educational interaction with the pupil. If it does not exceed the dysfunctionality border, this indulgence does not incite undesirable behaviors in the pupils, and mostly has a positive effect on them. The effectiveness coefficient was calculated by adding all the points awarded to statements 1, 4, 7, 9, 10, 12 and dividing it by six. The resulting number then expressed the degree of affectivity of the teacher in an educational interaction with the pupil. If it does not exceed the alleged dysfunctionality border, this indulgence does not incite undesirable behaviors in the pupils, and mostly has a positive effect on them. Once all tests were evaluated, they were divided into two groups, according to the field of study of the respondents. In each area (indulgence, affectivity, overall functionality), for both fields of study, the researchers calculated the average values and then compared them with the numbers from the evaluation dates. The results of the test imply that with a few exceptions indulgence, affectivity and functionality, are within the standard values. The test also shows that the graduates from Teaching in primary schools and special education, approach pupils with problem behavior in a better way, compared to the graduates from Teaching in primary schools.

This test comes from Germany, which should be taken into account in the evaluation. Howev-

er, as Ondráček (2003) claims, the German, that is, Central European population is to a certain extent, similar to the Czech population.

### DISCUSSION

The research indicates that beginning teachers who teach in primary schools, face major discipline issues. However, a more extensive research study on this topic, has not been performed, perhaps because discipline issues are not so visible in primary schools, the teacher represents a sufficient authority for the pupil, and the pupils are handled evenly, using undesirable discipline-maintaining measures. An anonymous young female teacher, wrote on a discussion forum: *“Personally, I have no problems with the subjects, or with the didactics, I think the university gave us a good training on this. Rather, struggle with the behaviors of the pupils, and their behaviors towards me.”* Another teacher added, *“We were taught teaching methods in an ideal situation, that is, students listen and fulfill orders without talking back, which is very far from reality, and I have major discipline issues.”* There are a number of these comments on various teachers irrespective of the faculty the young teachers graduated from. The researchers believe that this situation could be improved, by the establishment of a separate university course on discipline, which would provide university students, not only with the practical advice on how to cope with discipline issues in their class, but also on how to properly address pupils with problem behavior. Someone could argue that every pupil and every class is different, and therefore, the theory of discipline cannot be taught. This is certainly true, but the researchers think that there is a certain set of knowledge, methods and techniques, that all teachers should master, before the start of their teaching career. In this way, they could avoid the similar undesirable discipline-maintaining measures, such as red and black dots. This discipline-maintaining measure, is relatively widespread, and most of the people experienced it in school, and believe that it fulfills its function. This could be due to the fact that most teachers who experienced black and red dots are in the group who received red dots, and they remember the positive emotions, and therefore, they decided to use this discipline-maintaining measure, in their teaching.

Another point that could lead to improved knowledge, not only in discipline but in approaches to pupils' problem behaviors, is a change in the arrangement of the teaching practice. For example, one could follow the French system of teaching practice, in which students of education, have a year-long regular teaching practice in a school. Another way of designing teaching practice, could be that from the first to the last grade, a university student spends one whole day in an elementary school every week, and various years, from grade 1 to 5. First the student would be an assistant teacher, and after some time, the student could try out teaching, which would be an opportunity for some of the students to find out early, that the teaching profession is not the right one for them, and that they would like to do something else. Today, many students come to this realization only in the last years of their study, when they start the appropriate teaching practice. University education should include seminars, during which the students share and analyze their teaching practice experience with other students. Such models of regular teaching practice, which would then be followed by several weeks of continuous teaching practice, would be the most effective. Faculties of education could argue that this would present considerable financial demands, but the researchers believe that most teachers would be happy to have a free assistant teacher, and would not have any other financial requirements. In Finland and the Netherlands, the system of teaching practice differs as well. In their tried and tested system, the students spend the whole penultimate year of their study, in elementary schools. After graduation, these students have a much better awareness of the teaching profession.

The results of this study correspond with the results from other researches and papers (Nielsen and Sobotkova 2014; Hrivnova 2014; Sarkis 2015; Harvey and Rathbone 2013; Pierangelo and Giuliani 2008; Hirschland 2015; Titrek et al. 2014).

Obviously, there are other studies that asked similar questions as this study did. For example, Ashley (2015) asked: *“What I as a teacher should do? Which strategies can the teacher use?”* His study suggested that holistic approach that focuses on teaching reflective and restorative practices should be implemented in the school systems. In addition, educators should teach their pupils coping skills to deal with feelings such as

anger and frustration. Furthermore, teachers could get a support by using The Behavior Education Program. This program successfully decreased discipline referrals for the majority students receiving the intervention and had high social validity ratings (Hawken et al. 2007). Other possibility is to use activities from the field of alternative therapies. For example, drama therapy and bibliotherapy can be used for the relationship between the teacher and pupils (Kovacova 2015).

At last we can agree with the opinion that the most effective teachers in working with challenging students had very positive relationships with them (Ashley 2015).

The researchers would like to conclude this discussion by commending the Faculty of Education, Palacky University, because it is one of the few faculties that offers Teaching for primary schools, combined with special education. In the mainstream schools, the number of pupils with special educational needs, including the pupils with behavioral disorders and specific behavioral disorders, increases every year. However, the number of teachers who are capable of dealing with these students, is the same. Therefore, a possible solution is to increase the capacity of the field of study for Teaching for primary schools and special education.

### CONCLUSION

The survey concludes that graduates from the Faculty of Education, Palacky University, who are ready to teach in primary schools, lack the theoretical preparation relating to discipline. This fact is supported not only by the answers to some of the questions from the second area of the research dealing with classroom discipline, but also by the absence of a separate university course on discipline, and the current model of teaching practice, which according to the responses of the beginning teachers, does not extend their knowledge of discipline. Beginner teachers have the biggest problems with discipline, at the beginning of their career. If, however, teachers think that their pupil has serious problems with behavior, in most cases, they know who to turn to in order to provide professional care for such pupil. The test investigating the teachers' tendencies to react to pupils' behaviors, also shows that graduates from Teach-

ing for primary schools and special education, approach pupils with problem behavior in a slightly better way compared to the graduates from teaching for primary schools. The research study further shows that the function of an introductory teacher is established in most schools, although this position is not stipulated in the law. Thus, it depends on the school management, to decide on the degree of support that would be given to a beginning teacher. Naturally, beginning teachers welcome this function. All the assumptions of the paper corresponded with the answers to the research questions, except the last one, concerning the function of an introductory teacher. The assumption that elementary schools lack the function of an introductory teacher, proved to be wrong.

In order to generalize some of the results, the research sample of participants would have to be much larger.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The researchers would like to conclude this discussion by commending the Faculty of Education, Palacky University because it is one of the few faculties that offers Teaching for primary schools, combined with special education. In the mainstream schools, the number of pupils with special educational needs, including the pupils with behavioral disorders and specific behavioral disorders, increases every year. However, the number of teachers who are capable of dealing with these students, is the same. Therefore, a possible solution is to increase the capacity of the field of study for Teaching for primary schools and special education.

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