

# KWARTALNIK PEDAGOGICZNY

ROK LXVI: 2021

NUMER 4 (262)

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## Contents

<b>Editorial</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<hr/> <b>A R T I C L E S</b> <hr/>	
Martin Hagan – Learning in the Practicum: Shaping Professional Identity in Initial Teacher Education .....	11
Aranka Varga, Fanni Trendl, Kitty Vitéz – Strengthening Identity and Social Responsibility among Roma University Students .....	33
Yesha Mahadeo Doorgakant, Radha Rani Baichoo – Collegiality as a Fundamental Professional Value in an Academic Setting: A Case Study in a Teacher Education Institution in a Small Island Developing State .....	52
Dana Hanesová – Development of Transversal Competences: A Current Challenge in Teacher Education .....	71
Elena Hohensee, Stephan Schiemann – Health and Health Literacy in Teacher Education: Comparative Analyses of Student Teachers and Teacher Trainees .....	92
John Paul Mynott, Katrina Foy, Faye Hendry, Lorna Stewart – Virtual Observations: A Situational Analysis of a Technological Response to Practicum Assessment During a Pandemic .....	116
Lea Oksanen, Felicity Healey-Benson, Elin McCallum – Take a Chance on CPD! How One School Put its Faith in the EntreCompEdu CPD Programme and Developed Whole-School Collective Entrepreneurial Education .....	138
Jack Whitehead, Marie Huxtable – A Living Educational Theory Research Approach to Continuing Educational, Professional Development .....	163
Jolanta Galecka – Combining Storytelling with the Performing Arts of Natya Shastra to Support Comprehensive Development of Children: Reflections from India and International Comparisons .....	187
<b>Notes on Contributors</b> .....	<b>213</b>

## Editorial

A significant feature of contemporary theory, research and practice in education and teacher education is the consensus on the values of exploring the diversity of international experience for understanding the dynamic process of development of the education systems and teacher education programs at universities in different parts of the world with a particular focus on the role of the teacher, teacher education, professional values of teachers, teacher competencies, and the conditions of teaching and learning. The scientific articles in this issue of *Kwartalnik Pedagogiczny* ("Education Research Quarterly") were selected from papers presented at the the 45th Annual Conference of The Association for Teacher Education in Europe (ATEE) held in September 2021 at the Faculty of Education, the University of Warsaw, Poland with Professor Joanna Madalińska-Michalak as the Chair of the Scientific Committee of the Conference and Professor Anna Zielińska as the Chair of the Organising Committee.

The Association for Teacher Education in Europe (ATEE) is a non-profit European organisation, with the aim of enhancing the quality of Teacher Education in Europe through active dialogue and international exchange of research and practice in initial and in-service teacher education. The ATTE supports the professional development of teachers and teacher educators at all levels. Each year the ATEE organises a three-day Annual Conference with a specific theme on teacher education. The ATEE annual conference is a forum at which European researchers and teacher educators from all over the world could learn from each other. The ATEE annual conference combines inspiring keynotes, a wide variety of papers on research and practice of teacher Education, and active working sessions organised by the Research and Development Communities (RDCs).



Researchers from almost 30 countries from Europe, Asia, Africa, North America and South America presented their research and engaged in lively discussions about their work, their concerns and their visions for education, teachers and teacher education at 45th ATTE Annual Conference. The Conference theme, “(Re)imagining & Remaking Teacher Education: Identity, Professionalism, and Creativity in a Changed World” further opened the debate related to the main three conference subthemes: (i) “Professional values, professional teachers and professional teacher educators: understanding today – building tomorrow”, (ii) “Development of teacher competencies for inclusion and social justice in a changing world”, (iii) “Addressing current challenges in pre-service and in-service teacher education”. These three subthemes focus the conference debate on explorations of personal and professional values of teachers and their implications for teacher education, teachers’ professional learning, school leadership, and educational policy; on teachers as a promoters of inclusion and social justice in a changing world and teachers’ social and ethical competencies; and on changes taking place at school, its surroundings, and expectations towards teachers formulated by parents, principals, policymakers, and civil society as well as the current challenges in pre-service and in-service teacher education connected with those expectations.

The conference keynote speeches presented by Prof. Qing Qu, Prof. Anna Wiłkomirska, Prof. Gert Biesta, and Prof. Ferre Laevers, the conference panel discussion “Current Issues in Teacher Education”, as well as papers presented at parallel conference sessions and poster sessions showed that particular attention should be paid not only to what happens in the classrooms but first of all to the world, which is adjusting to new ways of living and working. This requires engagement with truly difficult issues including deep-seated challenges to equality, diversity and inclusion, teaching for teacher education, artistry of teaching as a robust alternative for narrow, evidence-based understandings of the complex work of teaching, teachers’ professionalism and creativity, teachers’ shared professional values and their professional development and learning over the course of their professional lives, teachers’ resilience and quality, and at the same time the personal, professional, organisational and policy conditions of teachers’ work and lives, and the development of teacher educators and the reforms of teacher education programs are again on the rise.

The papers selected for this issue authored by experts in their field of teacher education provide us with insights, perspectives, and policy initiatives on re(imagining) and remaking Teacher Education in their respective countries.



In his article Martin Hagan focuses on the initial stage of teacher education and provides for an improved understanding of teacher growth in the first stage of career development. The presented research results show that engagement with pupils, other teachers, and visiting tutors during practicum greatly impacts professional identity development in the initial stage of teacher education. Furthermore, it changes student teachers' perceptions of the participants' constructs on teaching and perception of themselves and others as teachers.

Aranka Varga, Fanni Trendl, and Kitty Vitéz, in their study point to the factors related to the influence of the academic community and training programs on strengthening individual and group identity and developing social responsibility. Furthermore, they show how academic education can enhance student teachers coming from a specific background, in this case, the Roma community. Nowadays, developing a sense of empowerment and intersectionality, as well as resilience are crucial elements of teachers' education, not only in the group studied by the authors.

Yesha Mahadeo Doorgakant and Radha Rani Baichoo draw attention to the importance of collegiality as a fundamental professional value in an academic setting. Collegiality means for authors more than joint efforts to optimise work results but also social and emotional intelligence and well-being in work-life among academics in higher education institutions. The study results show that collegiality eliminates age and gender limitations, facilitates starting work in a new environment, supports effective professional development and a sense of belonging and identification with the organisation. In addition, it directly translates into the quality of work and an atmosphere that is particularly important in educating young people.

In the context of a changing world, for teacher education it is necessary to develop not only professional skills but also such transversal competencies as critical thinking, intercultural competence, time and project management, teamwork, plurilingual and interpersonal communication. In her article, Dana Hanesová presents the results of the experiment transforming the curriculum of a traditional language teacher training course towards developing student-centredness and cooperation between students, also in an international perspective. Equipping teachers with communication and ICT skills, critical and reflective thinking skills, and such features as open-mindedness and flexibility seem to be a condition that, in the realities of the modern school, will enable them to start working in the profession and stay in it despite adversities.

It is also necessary for in-service teachers to develop health competences that enable health-promoting behaviour in an individual context and constitute an essential aspect of prevention and health promotion among students after they start professional work. Elena Hohensee and Stephan Schiemann present the study results on health competence among student teachers and teacher trainees. They emphasise the need to promote health literacy, especially in self-regulation, mindfulness, and social support, being a critical health resource for communicating one's state of health and accepting help.

The importance of health literacy became even more critical during the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to ensure the safety of teaching students, it was necessary to modify the curricula to maintain the quality of education. John Paul Mynott, Katrina Foy, Faye Hendry and Lorna Stewart present the results of a study on conducting virtual observations to assess student teachers of the early education department. A critical evaluation of the use of virtual observations as an assessment tool allows the tool to be refined for future use, opening up new opportunities for teacher education.

A tool supporting the development of key competencies for functioning in the modern world can also be the continuing professional development programme (CPD) of adult education in the digital online EntreCompEdu entrepreneurship education. The article by Lea Oksanen, Felicity Healey-Benson and Elin McCallum presents one school's experience in implementing this program in educational activities. The condition for the effective implementation of such activities is the collective engagement of the entire school staff, which enables developing creative, innovative, and risk-taking abilities into teaching practices and influencing the entrepreneurial practice on student learning and the culture of a whole school.

Jack Whitehead and Marie Huxtable, in their study, present Living Educational Theory Research, as the valid, values-laden, and evidence-based explanation of the practitioner for their educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others, and in the learning of social formations. The authors' argument about the impact of this approach on continuing educational professional development is based on the belief that the analysis of one's own practice enables its fuller understanding and continuous improvement. The effectiveness of such an approach is confirmed by the cited examples from England, South Africa, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India.

Jolanta Galecka, who describes the activities of the non-profit organisation Katha, also refers to the example from India. Katha's goal is to satisfy the diverse personal needs and environments of women and children living in

challenging life circumstances. It is possible through access to literature and – more broadly – stories, which enables, among other things, access to education for children from the poorest families. A comparison of research on the functioning of stories and storytellers in the culture of Western countries with Indian experiences and those from South America confirms that it is a universal tool that can be successfully used in pedagogy and education.

We would like to thank the authors of the presented papers for accepting our invitation and submitting their research papers, and at the same time we would like express our deep gratitude to the editorial board and reviewers, who have been working tirelessly to ensure that the quality of the publication matches the highest standards in academia. We believe that this issue of *Kwartalnik Pedagogiczny* (“Education Research Quarterly”) offers a forum for an unbiased discussion in the field of teacher education, facilitating cross-border knowledge sharing and expanding the boundaries of our understanding of the developments in the field.

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## Learning in the Practicum: Shaping Professional Identity in Initial Teacher Education\*\*

### Summary

This study considers the role of the practicum in supporting professional identity development in the initial stage of teacher education. Employing an interpretative paradigm and a qualitative methodological approach (Lincoln & Guba, 2000), data were collected from a purposive sample of student teachers ( $n = 6$ ) in the first year of study, using individual semi-structured interviews and episodic documents. The findings show that emerging teacher identity was informed but also challenged by the participants' engagement with pupils, other teachers and visiting tutors. Collectively, these influences effected shifts in the participants' constructs on teaching and prompted change in their perception of themselves and others as teachers. The study provides for an improved understanding of teacher growth in the first stage of career development. By so doing, it makes a valid contribution to the discourse on initial teacher education to better inform teacher educators and policy makers in relation to teacher professional learning.

**Keywords:** practicum, teacher education, professional learning, professional identity

### Introduction

Interest in teachers' professional identity began to develop from the late 1980s, primarily in Europe, North America, Australia and to a lesser extent, the UK (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004). Akkerman and Meijer (2011) suggest

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that this was partly due to a reaction against an emerging discourse of teacher learning as an objectified, linear process which does not take into consideration the role of the teachers themselves, their contexts and how they make sense of their professional lives. Perhaps more significantly, if the nature of professional identity is a key determinant of a teacher's sense of efficacy, motivation and effectiveness (Sachs, 2005), then consideration of the factors which play a part in its construction must be worthy of serious consideration.

Whilst the acquisition of teaching competence is undoubtedly important, Dall'Alba and Barnacle (2007) and Dall'Alba (2009) suggest that professional identity is not only an epistemological process, but also an ontological one, in which an individual actually engages in a process of self-transformation to 'become' a teacher. The value of research which adopts this more holistic perspective can help individuals understand this process of transition, the influences upon them and the challenges and opportunities they encounter.

Understanding teacher identity is not straightforward however and one of the first challenges is trying to find an adequate definition of the phenomenon (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Olsen (2008) refers to identity as a label, used to describe a sociocultural process in which a teacher negotiates their professional growth and development. Others (Smagorinsky, Cook, Moore, Jackson, & Fry, 2004) agree, suggesting that the social and professional contexts which individuals inhabit have a significant influence upon how teachers perceive themselves and others. Clandinin et al. (2006) refer to these contexts as "the landscapes past and present" (p. 4) which contribute towards the development of the professional self.

With these perspectives in mind, this study focussed on the practicum experience of a group of student teachers in the first of a four-year primary teaching programme. The study explores how the placement schools and their engagement with host teachers, pupils and tutors, influenced their perception of themselves as teachers and their emergent sense of professional identity.

## Literature Review

### The dialectic self

Interest in the importance of identity to teacher development goes back to the work of Mead in the 1930s (Mead, 1934/1962). He suggested that an



individual's sense of self, and therefore their sense of identity, rather than being fixed, is a relational phenomenon, dependent upon context, environment, place and time. Therefore, identity emerges within a social setting in which we learn to take on the role of others and begin to see ourselves from the others' perspective. Mead (1934/1962) suggests the concept of the 'I-Me dialectic' to help understand these phenomena. The 'Me' is the phenomenological understanding of a person within a given socio-historical context in relation to their age, gender, profession or role; an example being 'teacher'. The 'I' is the personal or individual self which responds to the concept of the 'Me' thus establishing a reflexive, interactive process or 'dialectic' which can affect change in either or both. Exemplifying this idea, Beijaard (1995) suggests that a teachers' sense of self in terms of feelings of adequacy/ inadequacy (the 'I') is often reliant upon teacher/pupil relationships and how pupils perceive them as teachers (the 'Me').

An obvious site for shaping a teacher's identity is the workplace (Leeferkink, Koopman, Beijaard, & Schellings, 2019). Smagorinsky, Cook, Moore, Jackson and Fry (2004) point to the importance of the practicum as providing a forum which can either promote or detract from the sense of agency and identity which emerges. In addition, Kelchtermans and Hamilton (2004) suggest that the practicum can also make a significant contribution to the development of the values, attitudes and dispositions characteristic of practicing teachers.

Alongside context is the influence of other professionals (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009). Friesen and Besley (2013) suggest that when there are shared similarities with others in defined social groups social identity emerges. Whilst either social or personal identity may become more salient under different circumstances, they also suggest that, in similar fashion to Mead's (1934/1962) 'I-Me dialectic', personal and social identities also interact to the point where the characteristics of one may be adopted by the other.

For pre-service teachers, "they are creating their world while also being shaped by it" (Cooper & Olson, 1996, p. 83) and so their professional identity is fluid and this can lead to tension. Reynolds (1996) agrees and proposes that for early career teachers, the natural inclination is to 'blend in' and be recognised as a 'good teacher', reflecting whatever norms are apparent at the time. Because of this, the importance of exposure to a diversity of experience is important to allow teachers to construct, deconstruct and reconstruct their teacher identity within different contexts (Coldron & Smith, 1999).

### The dialogic self

The literature considered to this point has focussed on a range of dialectical positions on identity development. Wegerif (2008) adopts a more dialogical stance emerging from the post-modernist thinking of Bakhtin (1981) and suggests that identity is more the product of differences in perspectives which may be incompatible and which do not need to be synthesised.

MacLure (1993) adopts a similar stance, suggesting that commonality of characteristics does not necessarily suggest commonality of meaning as teachers may experience their environments in completely different ways. The value of MacLure's work is that, whilst not underestimating the importance of context, it addresses the importance of the individual's unique interpretation of their context, their agential and reflexive reaction to it and the subsequent influence of that on the formation of their identity.

Amalgamating both Modern and Postmodern perspectives, Akkerman and Meijer (2011) suggest that, 'being someone who teaches', or 'teacher identity' cannot be seen as an end point, but instead should be defined "as an ongoing process of negotiating and interrelating multiple I-positions in such a way that a more or less coherent and consistent sense of self is maintained throughout various participations and self-investments in one's (working) life [sic]" (p. 315).

Their model of teacher identity suggests three continua: multiplicity and unity; discontinuity and continuity; social and individual. Within each continuum, moves the 'I' (Bakhtin, 1981; 1986; as cited in Akkerman & Meijer, 2011, p. 311) which can be typified as being both unified and multiple; continuous and discontinuous; and individual and social. This dialogic conception of teacher identity in which multiple and sometimes conflicting 'I' positions are recognised, is helpful to understanding how student teachers construct their identity as they mediate the transition from 'pupil/student' to 'student teacher' to 'teacher'.

To support this identity transition, Ryan (2005), underlines the importance of 'systematic', 'epistemic' and 'methodological' reflexivity through which teachers not only reflect inwardly on their beliefs, practices and behaviours, but also outwardly, in relation to all the interpersonal, social, cultural, and other forces they encounter. Lay and McGuire (2009) agree and suggest that there is a developmental trajectory which moves from introspective 'reflection' towards critical thinking and ultimately, 'reflexive practice' which leads to a more critical stance, challenging existing ideas to affect change and improvement.

### **The ontological self**

Beyond the importance of context and dialectical and dialogical interactions, Mutton, Burn and Heggar (2010) emphasise the transformation of the individual in terms of becoming a teacher in terms of disposition, attitude and approach to their professional learning and development. This reflects of the work of Dall'Alba and Barnacle (2007), who suggest that knowledge determined as essential for teaching professionals cannot be removed from practice within given social, historical, cultural or political contexts. Knowledge and practice therefore become ingrained within the core professional identity and 'being' of the individual as they progress through their unique professional journey.

With these dialectic, dialogic and ontological positions in mind, the purpose of this study was to explore the range of influences on the professional identity formation of a sample of student teachers during their first practicum.

### **Methods**

Through asking open-ended questions, seeking views and perspectives, examining contexts and eventually deducing meaning (Crotty, 1998), the purpose of the study was to understand the range of influences upon the professional identity development of a sample of undergraduate student teachers in the first year of their teacher education programme. As such, a qualitative, interpretative research design, embedded within a co-constructivist paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 2000) was employed.

### **Context of the study**

The study took place in Northern Ireland where teaching is well regarded and where recruitment or retention problems are not as apparent as in other jurisdictions in the UK (Hagan & Eaton, 2020). The discourse on teacher education is that teaching is a complex, value-laden activity which is culturally and contextually sensitive and which is dependent upon the forging of effective relationships across a range of different dimensions (Cochran-Smith, 2004; La Paro et al., 2018). The participants were in the first of a four-year programme for prospective teachers wishing to specialise in primary education. As the



focus of the study was concerned with the influences upon identity formation, sampling from this purposive group (Newby, 2010) was important as the students were not only trying to acclimatise to the new learning environment of the university, but were also trying to navigate the transition from being a pupil to a teacher. For this group therefore, any influences on their sense of professional identity were likely to be highly significant.

The practicum involved serial-day visits to schools and a seven-week block of school experience. During the placements, the students were set a range of analysis tasks which they recorded in a structured reflective journal (Shavit, 2019). Students received three tutor visits during their block placement from two college tutors: two from a main tutor; and one from the second tutor. Additional support was provided by the host classroom teachers and in most cases, a school mentor.

### Participants

The participants were drawn from a cohort ( $n = 95$ ) of students who had entered the programme in September of the year in which the data collection took place. The complete cohort was provided with an overview of the study and invited to participate and six responded positively. Whilst this provided for a very small sample it also allowed for a more in depth and closer consideration of the influences upon each participant.

The participants were all female and each was given a pseudonym. Rose and Lily were both 19 and had strong academic profiles along with previous voluntary experience working in primary school contexts. Fleur was exceptionally strong academically and was the oldest of the participants at 21. She had previously spent time on two different, non-teaching university courses but, despite being successful in each, decided to leave in order to pursue a career in teaching. She too had extensive experience of working with children prior to entering the programme. Violet and Daisy were the youngest participants at 18. Along with strong academic backgrounds they expressed a deep desire to work as primary school teachers. Iris, whilst having a good academic profile, was not as strong as the others and did not have prior experience of working with children before entry to the programme.

### **Data collection and analysis**

Data were collected over one calendar year from October to October and were captured from two sets of semi-structured interviews with each participant along with the material they had included in their reflective portfolios. The rationale for this approach was to determine the ways in which the students' sense of professional identity had developed as a result of their enhanced understanding of how pupils think and learn, their exposure to the work of teachers and schools and their role within their particular context.

A thematic, hermeneutical, dialectical and interpretative approach was adopted to the data analysis (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). Such an approach is appropriate if the analysis is sensitive to the context and if the analyst fully understands its specificities, subtleties and nuances (Bryman, 2012). As the researcher was a tutor on the programme on which the participants were enrolled, this seemed appropriate. The themes identified were reflective of those in the literature review and focused on the processes of dialogical and dialectical learning gained through the adoption of reflective and reflexive orientations in relation to the participants' host teachers; pupils; and university tutors.

### **Ethical considerations**

Ethical permission was obtained from the institution in question along with full consent from the participants themselves. At each stage of the data collection, there was close adherence to the British Educational Research Association [BERA] 'Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research' (BERA, 2018) and also to the ESRC framework for research ethics (ESRC, 2017).

### **Findings and analysis**

The literature reviewed on identity development from both dialectical and dialogical positions, suggests that the influence of others can be particularly pervasive for student teachers (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009) and in this study, the data would confirm that position. Collectively, the participants' engagement with others in the particular socio-economic and cultural practicum contexts, challenged preconceived notions on the work of teachers and schools;

developed understanding of key aspects of professional practice; and provided support in terms of enhancing self-belief and confidence.

### **Learning from pupils**

Before entering ITE, the participants all displayed an altruistic desire to work with children. They were excited by the prospect of going into schools, but also slightly overwhelmed by what lay ahead. Their areas of concern related to: socio-economic issues; behaviour management; Special Educational Needs (SEN); and meeting pupils' learning needs. These concerns would be largely reflective of those found in other studies of student teachers completing a practicum experience (Kyriacou & Stephens, 1999).

Given the particular participant profile, part of their anxiety arose from the fact that they were placed in schools in areas of high socio-economic deprivation. For some, this presented a cultural 'shock' in terms of trying to understand the issues faced by some pupils and families in these contexts. Following her first serial-day visit, Iris commented,

In my primary school everyone was from a happy home. It's not like that in the school I've been in. Even something as simple as their lunch... some of them came in with a bar of chocolate and a can of coke. That's just something I'm going to have to get my head around because it's really alien to me.

Fleur was similarly taken aback by her experience in the inner-city school. She reflected,

Some of them have really troubled backgrounds, even a parent was punched in the school recently. These are things that I, never in my wildest dreams would have thought about because I went to a small country primary school and everything there was really nice. It really has opened my eyes.

Here we see the social and cultural gap between the students and the pupils they were teaching. Whilst there is a significant body of literature on the concerns experienced by student teachers as they enter the practicum (Capel, 1997), there is less which highlights the socio-economic and cultural divide and the extent to which this may challenge many of the preconceptions student teachers may have (Baldwin, Buchanan & Rudisill, 2007).

A second area of concern related to behaviour management. Like the others, Lily's personal experience of school had been exceptionally positive.



She reflects nostalgically and somewhat naïvely and contrasts this with her experience in the inner-city school during her serial-day visit. She states,

Maybe it's just in inner-city schools, but there seems to be a lot of behavioural disorders. It wouldn't have been like this when I was at school... when the teacher said to do something no one would have questioned it.

Lily was clearly challenged by what she had observed as it contrasted sharply with her existing personal constructs.

Rose too was concerned about the behavioural issues she encountered but she adopted a more considered and reflective approach. In her first interview, she showed understanding of the classroom and the relationships therein as a system; one in which she had arrived and was conscious not to disrupt. She indicates shock at what she observed, but goes on to say that it was due to her own lack of confidence rather than her being intimidated. She also illustrates her admiration for the teacher in terms of the complexity of their work in trying to assist the pupil and shows understanding of the behaviour in a positive way in terms of something to be managed rather than punished.

There was one boy who was on the spectrum and I remember finding that a bit shocking... how I would deal with that? I don't like the word 'intimidating'... I lack confidence in that area and I wanted to make sure that the teacher dealt with it because I didn't want to get it wrong. Also, for a teacher having to work out that behavioural plan and get it perfect so that the child manages their difficulty is really incredible.

Issues around SEN and differentiation according to ability were particularly prominent and provided a third category of challenge for the participants.

Iris, who was placed in a composite class of 7- and 8-year-olds, reflected in her journal,

I noticed the difference between the ability levels within the class. There was one SEN student who needed a classroom assistant with him for most of the time and there was an EAL [English as an Additional Language] student who had extremely good English. I also noticed the difference in ability levels between the different ages.

It seemed that as successes of the school system themselves, there seemed to be a dissonance in terms of trying to understand their pupils' particular life circumstances. Similarly, in terms of learning capacity, the participants were faced with children who did not have the same ability.

motivation and engagement with school as they had when they were pupils. As they became more familiar with the school settings however, they also seemed to become more understanding of the experiences of others and more resilient in themselves. In a very personal reflection in her journal towards the end of the year for example, Violet wrote,

I have come to realise that many of my pupils will come to school with baggage which can make their start much more difficult. From my own struggles I have developed a sense of empathy for the pupils who do not cope well ... the show must go on.

### **Learning from teachers**

Host teachers played a significant part in bridging the divide between the participants' personal experiences and those of their pupils by helping to broaden the concept of the role of the teacher. Mrs M. for example had a profound influence upon Iris' understanding of the teacher's role in an area of very high socio-economic challenge.

...every Tuesday afternoon Mrs M. visited the homes of students and future students. She explained that she visits homes to provide help with homework and to help parents filling in application forms for their children to attend school. These parents don't have the skills to do so themselves.

This extract highlights the value that exposure to an unfamiliar context provided for Iris in terms of helping her see the multifaceted and highly complex role of the teacher.

The teachers also helped the participants gain practical insight and knowledge in terms of actually 'being' in the classroom and understanding the nature of teaching. Like Iris, Rose began to see how 'teaching' was not a simply a didactic activity, but rather an interplay between individuals, with each dependent upon the other. She wrote in her journal,

...they do not simply teach whatever lesson or skill needs to be taught, they immerse themselves in the classroom and act as a facilitator of learning, who changes and adapts their plans to fit the needs of the children. They are a guide to learning, who themselves are guided by the pupils' abilities and skills.

A second key learning area related to planning and preparation for teaching, not only as a necessary activity, but also as a means through which

a teacher can exercise their values in terms of ensuring all pupils are treated equally and fairly. In her journal Daisy wrote,

Mrs P. had a range of schemes to suit groups and individual pupils. This was something I hadn't previously considered. I didn't realise that sometimes one scheme cannot work for all. As a teacher I realise it is my duty to embrace each pupil's best effort and cater for their individual needs.

Here we see Kelchtermans and Hamilton's (2004) more holistic perspective on the importance of the practicum in terms of inculcating certain value perspectives clearly in operation.

Through planning and the other activities, the participants were able to develop their understanding of reflection and its importance to continuous improvement. Rose for example, began to see planning as a fluid activity which involved the engagement of others as well as the personal reflection of the teacher. She stated, "The teacher is constantly modifying lessons because of the ever-changing nature of the classroom. She finds it particularly useful to speak to other teachers who have taught similar lessons and discuss their reflections together."

Not all of the experiences gained from working with teachers was positive however, and it was because of the more challenging episodes that the participants began to develop a more dialogical stance, prompting deeper reflection and more critical evaluations of practice. One example was provided by Daisy who was made feel uncomfortable as a result of the teacher's approach to discipline. She stated, "I didn't like how she tended to give off to the child in front of the whole class as this seemed quite intimidating. This made me feel quite uncomfortable."

Daisy determines her own approach as a result of her ability to empathise with the pupil. In this sense, she is beginning to formulate her own script for managing discipline in her classroom when she is teaching.

Iris seemed to have the least positive experience of all. After her initial placement with Mrs M. where she witnessed the teacher trying to cater for, and accommodate the needs of all pupils, Iris embarked upon her block practicum with Mrs B. Here, Iris witnessed a different practice which was clearly upsetting and very frustrating for her. She wrote in her journal,

I was surprised to see that Mrs B. didn't have a range of levels in the class; it was clear that the pupils are not all working to the same level. She didn't differentiate the pupils'



work to suit their ability. This makes me feel very frustrated as these pupils cannot move forward despite their best efforts.

Iris displays a very values-driven perspective here. She sees the difficulties for some pupils in the class and she is frustrated by the teacher who seems to be oblivious. In the following extract, she provides a most insightful analysis of an observation of a lesson taken by Mrs B. Iris' sense of outrage is evident as is her determination NOT to become a teacher like Mrs B.

The divide between the class became very clear when Mrs B. invited the pupils to the carpeted area. The pupils at the back were off task and completely disengaged. At one point, four of the pupils were lying on the floor, staring at the roof or crawling around. If anyone NEEDS to be engaged, it is these pupils as they were not contributing and not gaining anything from the lesson.

Observing other teachers seemed to have a powerful ontological influence in terms of the participants' sense of their own identity in terms of the kind of teachers they wanted to become. Daisy was particularly self-aware and was able to reflect on her observations from a critical stance.

I'm starting to form my own views on the kind of teacher I want to be. I don't necessarily agree with everything that I have seen some of the teachers do so far. It's not that that the teacher is wrong, it's just that I'm starting to formulate my own opinions.

From this we can see the importance of the practicum in providing a space which can allow for an ontological shift in how student teachers perceive themselves. They begin to develop their sense of professional identity through the dialectical and dialogical exchanges and processes, with other professionals and the pupils they teach. The challenges this presents reflect Cooper and Olson's (1996) perspective on the balance between their identity as students and as quasi-teachers, subject to range of influences: some from themselves and their desire to be successful; and some from others and the contexts within which they find themselves.

### **Learning from tutors**

Visiting tutors also helped the participants manage their developing conceptual understanding and changes in their sense of identity. To do this, a coaching and mentoring approach was adopted, which gave consideration



to the relational, developmental and contextual dimensions of the practicum (Ambrosetti, Allen Knight, & Dekkers, 2014).

From a relational perspective, Wang (2001), highlights the importance of how supportive and directional feedback can boost confidence and develop professional agency. The concept of professional dialogue, engagement and support was initially difficult for the participants to grasp as they were still coming from the perspective of being a 'pupil/student teacher' being assessed by a 'university tutor' rather than embracing the idea of the professional mentor/mentee relationship. At the outset, the participants were obviously nervous about being observed and in the case of Fleur, her anxiety actually had the potential to detract from her practice. In her second interview she reflected,

I was really nervous about the tutor visits because I felt that everything had to be perfect and I made a mistake of trying to micro manage the pupils. I was trying to think of all the different possibilities of things that could happen and it made me freak out. And then it came to it and it wasn't that bad. I think I just made such a big thing of it in my head. My tutors were really lovely and they really put me at ease.

Lily, whilst still anxious, was more broadly typical of the others.

The tutor visits were daunting at first, and a relief to get over. They were very, very beneficial though in terms of giving me an idea of where I am and where I could be. They also boosted my confidence greatly in my first year experience.

The importance of the relational dimension was also echoed by Rose, who reflected on her lesson observation and feedback, showing how the tutor had built her confidence.

Overall this tutor visit give me belief in myself. It was the first time I had been assessed on teaching and it proved that if I work very hard I have the ability to become the best teacher I can be.

Whilst the support and affirmation received from tutors was welcomed, it was also important for them to provide direction to enable the students to meet their professional goals and expectations. This developmental dimension, presented some challenges to the participants' sense of professional identity. Lily for example, was so focused on her actual teaching that she did not place sufficient emphasis on planning. She was subsequently taken aback by the feedback she received.



He explained that whilst he thought the lesson, my relationship with the children, classroom presence and teaching standard, were very good, he said my file was very light. He had checked my progress to date as 'Requires attention'. Although I could get upset over this, it will not do me any favours. Instead, I am going to work extremely hard to have my file up to a high quality standard as soon as possible.

Given Lily's previous academic record, it was a shock for her to be told that an aspect of her work was below standard. Illustrating Kelchtermans and Hamilton's (2004) view that professional dialogue can develop resilience however, she was determined to improve and she later reflected,

Looking back on this visit I can confidently say that, although at the time I thought it was a very negative experience, I found the tutor really helped my development as a student teacher as he gave me a clear target where I wanted to be.

Brandt (2008) proposes that feedback needs to be authentic to enable students to improve their practice and the response of Lily was reflective of this as she did seem to appreciate that the feedback was given for the right purposes.

The learning gained from pupils, teachers and tutors as outlined above collectively highlights the importance of the contextual dimension of their practicum, and the need for students teachers to develop their awareness and understanding of the range of issues which may be beyond their immediate experience. Through their interactions, the students gradually realised that whilst there was much joy in teaching, schools can also be very difficult and challenging places. As they became more familiar with the school contexts, they developed greater understanding of the experiences of others. In her journal towards the end of the year, Iris wrote, "I have come to realise that many of my pupils will come to school with baggage which can make their start much more difficult. Teachers cannot afford to crumble in the face of adversity."

## Discussion

The findings of this study are largely reflective of the literature on teacher development which suggests that teacher identity emerges by adopting



reflective and reflexive orientations to engagement with others within given contexts.

Central to this process was the challenging socio-economic contexts in which the students found themselves. The interactions with pupils for example, presented a range of challenges to the participants' preconceived notions which led to a shift in their understanding and identity. Behavioural concerns and the ability to cater for the increasingly diverse needs, are issues which are always at the forefront of student teachers' thinking as they prepare for a practicum experience (Capel, 1997). In this study, these concerns were enhanced by the fact that the children they encountered had completely different life experiences to themselves. Through exposure to the different social contexts and working alongside experienced teachers however, the participants were able to develop their conceptual understanding of difference and diversity and the extent to which this influences the role of the teacher.

Regardless of the social and experiential challenges in evidence, what was particularly interesting was the values perspective exhibited by the participants and the fact that they saw themselves as being there to help and support all pupils to the best of their ability. Placing student teachers in practicum placements beyond their immediate familiarity clearly presents a range of challenges but is nonetheless of the utmost importance. Edwards and Protheroe (2003) point to the fact that learning in classrooms is highly context-specific and Beijaard (1995) suggests that the culture of a given school context will have a significant bearing upon the identity formation of the teacher within. As such, for those in the process of developing teacher competence and identity, there is a need for a variety of experience in a range of different types of schools and classrooms. The participants in this study displayed a strong degree of commitment to their chosen career, which it could be argued ensured that, whilst disconcerted by some aspects of their experience, they remained resilient and not diverted from their path. For others less committed however, exposure to difficult pupil contexts too early in their ITE could lead to disengagement and eventual exit. The study raises questions about the organisation of practicum experiences within teacher education programmes and the necessary support mechanisms required to ensure that students gain the optimum placement experience.

The processes of supervision, guidance and mentoring are regarded in the literature as key activities to support the development of reflective capacity, understanding and practice (Boreen et al., 2002). Teachers were the focus for observation and analysis and from a dialogical perspective, the data show that

the participants were not only able to recognise both good and questionable practice, but were also able to go beyond the reductionism of curriculum delivery and recognise the importance of values and the adoption of a holistic approach to the care and support of their pupils as crucial elements of the teacher's role.

In terms of developing reflexive orientations, some of the participants did reflect upon some aspects of their experience from a very critical stance and this was encouraging in terms of evidencing what may be regarded as the early stages of dialogical thinking and the emergence of the 'activist' teacher (Giddens, 1994). Daisy and Iris in particular were able to recognise what they regarded as bad practice. This evaluative ability is in line with the findings of other studies (Roberts & Graham, 2008) and illustrates the extent to which other teachers play a significant role in helping to shape the identity of those beginning to teach.

In similar fashion, college tutors are central to supporting students develop their teacher identity (Tang & Chow, 2007). Whilst tutor visits appeared daunting at the outset, it seemed that in the case of these participants, their tutors played three roles: one of affirmation; one as the critical friend; and one as assessor. Interestingly, when discussing their tutors, the participants did not refer to assessment, but rather focused on the affirmative and critical friend dimensions of the relationship, both of which were regarded as highly significant. This supports the work of Urzua and Vasquez (2008), who posit the importance of the dialogue between supervisors and mentees as being future-orientated and focused on action-planning.

In summary, this study supports the assertion that ontological change in terms of professional identity is highly influenced by the dialectical and dialogical interactions which take place in the ecosystem of the practicum. It is illustrative of the work of Priestley, Biesta and Robinson (2013), who suggest that agency is always informed by personal and professional history; is forward-looking in terms of objectives and values; and is rooted in the concrete contexts of the present which are underpinned by discursive, material and relational resources which can either enhance or constrain the development of agency. The data reflect the 'iterative' dimension in that the participants came to the programme with a set of preconceived ideas about teaching which were largely informed by their previous, personal experience. This, along with their engagement with others and exposure to the different dimensions of school life coupled with their personal motivation and willingness for critical



engagement, began to influence their degree of agency and influence their sense of teacher identity.

The participants also showed how much they aspired to do the best they could for their pupils. When the reality of achieving these aspirations was challenged, for example in the case of Iris' observations of Mrs B., or Lily's feedback from her tutor, the participants adopted more determined positions to ensure positive outcomes in the future. This reflects the second dimension of Priestly et al.'s (2013) model: the 'projective dimension' which is concerned with the individual's level of aspiration and its influence upon professional identity.

Finally, how an individual responds to given situations relates to the 'practical-evaluative dimension' and is concerned with the "day to day working environment within which teachers work" (Priestly et al., 2013, p. 6). The degree to which the 'personal' individual is able to negotiate the extreme complexity of 'the professional' life of schools and classrooms is a key determinant of teacher agency. For these participants, high levels of complexity were apparent, but through considered engagement and reflection, they managed to navigate the challenges to positive effect.

## Conclusion

The aim of this study was to better understand the dialectic and dialogic processes inherent in the practicum and the extent to which they influenced an ontological change in professional identity in the participants. It was hoped that this would in turn better inform teacher educators to support students and contribute to the wider discourse on teacher professional learning. This is particularly relevant to the UK context where very contrasting perspectives have emerged in relation to the roles and relationships between schools and universities in supporting teachers to develop their identity, understanding and competence.

The findings affirm the importance of the practicum as highlighted in other studies and make a contribution to the understanding of teacher development in the early stages of professional learning. The study points to two specific issues which require further consideration: the need for experience in a range of diverse practicum settings to challenge existing beliefs and bridge the divide between teachers and those they teach (Cochran-Smith, 1991); and

the importance of understanding and interpreting the dialectical and dialogical interactions through close observation of the practice of others and structured, critical, future-orientated challenge provided by mentors (Brandt, 2008). As such, teacher education programmes need to maximise opportunities for co-learning, collaboration and cooperation between the key players in order to draw upon the range of strengths apparent and contributions that could be made to encourage more critical and dialogic approaches to professional learning and development.

Whilst there is merit in the study, there are also limitations. Of greatest significance was the nature of the sample. It was unfortunate that no male participants were involved as this may have provided for interesting comparisons. The relative homogeneity of the final sample however, was reflective of the wider cohort of student teachers engaged on the programme and did allow for close consideration of the impact that the different professional learning activities may have had upon their individual development (Cresswell & Plano-Clark, 2011).

The research design and methods employed were appropriate in that they provided a series of narratives, written and verbal, which presented a picture of each participant as they progressed through their first year of study. By the same token, the data were collected only at certain points and related to particular aspects of each participants' experience and were therefore inevitably limited in providing a complete picture of the teacher development narrative and the key influences upon it.

The study does not make a claim to generalisability, but does to resonance with others involved in the process of teacher education (Bassey, 1981). The participants were very committed students and perhaps this was also a motivating factor for their participation in the first instance, and not unrelated to the generally positive findings of the study. As such, there is room for further consideration of professional learning for students who experience significant challenges such as failure in the practicum or lack of engagement, not apparent here.

A third potential limitation relates to the nature of the data. The documents from which data were generated were part of the normal course requirements for each student. What the students wrote in their journals was subject to assessment and so the overall trustworthiness of the contents may have been skewed to some extent as they may have felt that there were certain things which were acceptable or otherwise to express.

Finally, the study only focused on first year students. It must be recognised that this was only the start of their journey which would be likely to take many more significant turns as they continued to move through the programme.

For those wanting to teach, developing a sense of professional identity is of central importance as it is the foundation which enables the individual to untangle the complex social world they inhabit. Developing a teacher identity can never be a solitary enterprise. However, it is dependent upon the range of experiences, contexts and others involved in the process. This research has attempted to explore these influences to ensure that teacher education programmes focus on the primacy of relationships at all levels and provide appropriate support for students, tutors and host teachers to ensure optimal engagement and the most positive outcomes for student teachers and the pupils they teach.

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## Strengthening Identity and Social Responsibility among Roma University Students\*\*

### Summary

The aim of our research is to present how the identity and social responsibility was strengthened by a Roma Student College in Higher Education. We rely on the literature of equality and equity, which is examined in the context of empowerment, resilience and intersectionality (Varga, 2017). Our research sample consists of the community members of the diverse (Roma, non-Roma, disadvantaged students) Roma Student College of Pécs, Hungary. The sample university students are considered resilient (Masten, 2008), as they have overcome the hardships of their family background and study now in Higher Education. Our study gives an analysis and highlights of 27 biographical interviews from the perspective of their pre-university years and the years spent as Student College members. The summary of the grant period between 2016 and 2018 will reveal the diverse programs, which were available for students in the Student College and can be divided into three main groups. The positive role of some of these and the Student College community appeared in the narratives as a strikingly relevant factor.

**Keywords:** Roma, higher education, intersectionality, empowerment, resilience, inclusion

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## Introduction

According to the 2010 census, 317,000 people declared themselves to be of Roma origin composing 3.17% of the total population of Hungary. Various research studies and Roma organisations estimate this number to be between 650,000 and 1 million (Cserti Csapó & Orsós, 2013). The Roma population is concentrated in the northeastern and southwestern regions of Hungary, and they are overrepresented in the villages of less developed regions and segregated environments. Nevertheless, the Hungarian Roma community belongs to the lower segments of society during state socialism based on their social realities and external perceptions of them (Kemény et al., 2004).

After 2011, the horizontal axis of the EU education strategy became the reduction of early school leaving and defining the expected indicators, which in turn influenced the focus points in the education system (Fehérvári, 2015). In this context, a smaller part of the EU funding sources was labelled for education development (EFOP) as compensation for disadvantages students. Such funds helped the establishment of student colleges for advanced studies to mentor university students and the after-school tutoring cooperatives. In these two programs, Roma students appear as the directly targeted minority group in the grant applications. Both types of programs (“after-school tutoring co-ops” and “Roma Student College mentoring programs”) have been included in the state support system, and their operation has been funded from this system. There are currently more than 300 after-school tutoring co-operatives functioning in the country, mainly supporting disadvantaged Roma primary school students.

The establishment of the Roma Residential College network is a key education policy decision for the betterment and empowerment of the Hungarian Roma (Forray, 2015a). The network of 11 Student Colleges – funded by either Higher Education institutions or Church – spreads across the country, supporting almost 300 disadvantaged, mainly Roma higher education students (Biczó & Szabó, 2020). In domestic and international academic life, we are increasingly confronted with research on the Roma intellectuals (Bereményi & Carrasco, 2017; Bhabha et al., 2017; Durst & Bereményi, 2021; Forray, 2015b; Kende, 2005; Lukács, 2018; Messing-Molnár, 2011; Szabóné, 2012). It is worth examining, beyond individual life paths, whether a type of institution that fundamentally affects the Roma intellectuals of the rising generation, works along which principles and goals, and whether it already has results.

Our study is scientifically located on the personal side of Roma students in the concepts of intersectionality and resilience, while on the community/organisational side it can be discussed in the context of empowerment and inclusion. Relying on these four scientific approaches, we focus on a specific Roma Student College<sup>1</sup> community. Based on the life-path interviews of the Roma Student College students, we sought the answer to how their intersectional situation and identity had changed, and what influenced the change, especially in relation to the Roma Student College years.

## Literature Review

### Roma intellectuals and university students in Hungary

The formation, characteristics and condition of the intellectual layer of the Roma population in Hungary have already been studied by several researchers. The studies so far are mostly based on in-depth and life-path interview analysis of graduates who claim themselves to be Roma. Research was focused most on finding answers in individual life paths to how they managed to get a degree, what difficulties they face in achieving social status, and how their identity (belonging to the Roma community) was shaped. Judit Szabóné Kármán (2012) summarises this research in her doctoral dissertation and notes at one point that the results in many cases suggest that becoming an intellectual is associated with the damage, weakening and loss of Roma identity (Szabóné, 2012). At the turn of the millennium, Forray (2003) examined what characterises Roma youth entering higher education. In terms of their family background, they have identified three groups: “members of the Roma middle class, Roma from socially marginalized groups, and young people brought up in foster care” (Forray, 2003, p. 262). For the latter two, she pointed out that they are usually older than their university peers because they often get back into higher education by restarting their school career. The way to higher education is too long and rocky for these students. Their

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<sup>1</sup> Student College is kind of a unique establishment in the Hungarian Higher Education. It is group of students, who not necessarily live together, but work together on their own professional life paths. For example, support each other's scientific research or do common research and publications. So, it is not an individual organisation, but operates within a university or a college.

educational decisions are influenced by school failures, lack of information, lack of self-confidence, and are often limited by the guidelines of their teachers. The analysis also discusses the lack of material conditions and the importance of scholarship support. She mentions that at the time of the study, a large number of Roma students chose correspondence trainings in order to be able to fend for themselves and their families, as in many cases they already had their own families to take care of. She also takes note of the fact that it is necessary to examine the socialisation processes of young people who did not bring patterns of becoming intellectuals from their homes, and to get a clear picture of how they relate to their peers, their own community, and to see their relationship with the entirety of Hungarian society (Forray, 2003). Moving towards our narrower target group and research question, it is worth mentioning further research. Bigazzi and Bokrétás (2015) studied the identity problems of Roma university students in Pécs in the 2000s. They conclude that in order to avoid an identity crisis, these young people can benefit from building a strong, realistic self-image and the widest possible network of contacts (Bigazzi & Bokrétás, 2015).

### **Roma Student College Network**

The establishment of the Roma Student College Network is a key education policy decision for the betterment and empowerment of the Hungarian Roma (Forray & Boros, 2009). The network of 11 Roma Student Colleges – funded by either higher education or churches – spreads across the country, supporting almost 300 underprivileged, primarily Roma higher education students. It is important to see that the support they receive from the college provide relevant answers to personal life situations and community needs. It is also necessary to think about the pedagogical principles and goals of the institution that provide a home-like educational center for the Roma intellectuals of the next generation (Varga, 2018a).

There are currently 11 institutions in the network, in 11 different parts of the country. A comprehensive, questionnaire-based survey conducted in 2020 provides an accurate picture of membership in student colleges. 78.5% of student college students are between the ages of 18 and 24, and most of them have entered Higher Education immediately after high school. 69% of them declared themselves to be Roma, 52% of them have official documents

proving their disadvantage. About half of the students (47%) are rural<sup>2</sup>, and only a fraction (14.5%) come from a larger city. Thus, settlement disadvantage can also be assumed for the majority of students. Regarding the family background, it can be seen that only a few of the parents do not have eight general primary school qualifications (father 7.5%, mother 9.5%), primary education characterises 28% of fathers, 31% of mothers, 35% of fathers and 22% of mothers have a trade, 16% of fathers and 21% of mothers have a high school diploma, and 9% of fathers and 15% of mothers are graduated. In terms of the labour market situation of the parents, 17% of fathers and 10% of mothers are unemployed, and the employment relationship (fathers 60%, mothers 68.5%) is overrepresented. In other words, Roma Student Colleges are mainly communities of students who, due to their family background, need fair support for their mobility through Higher Education. Among student college students, teacher and teacher training was over-represented (30.5%), which was followed by economic (12.5%), social (11.5%), humanities (9.5%) and medical and health science (9%). Almost two-thirds (63.5%) of the students are BA students.

### Field of study

When the Henrik Wlislöcki Student College<sup>3</sup> (WHSz) was established at the University of Pécs in 2002, its aim was to provide a scientific community for Roma<sup>4</sup> and non-Roma students interested in Romology/Romani Studies. The Student College was launched with the help of a significant amount of European Union funds (Phare), then, from 2004 to 2013, with 10–12 students per year, it ran on university support. From 2013 onwards, it expanded its range of activities and student base with the support of the European Social Fund (TÁMOP) – and it joined the network of Roma Student Colleges. At the time of the research, it also implemented a European-funded (EFOP) complex program, which was launched from 2016 to 2018 with the participation of 28–35 students.

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<sup>2</sup> This means they come from villages whose population is between 1 and 20,000 people.

<sup>3</sup> The Henrik Wlislöcki Roma Student College is an Academic Student College within the University of Pécs with a mission to mentor Roma students through academic projects and field research, and to support the process of inclusion by organising forums and community-building activities for Roma youth and allies.

<sup>4</sup> In the research presented in our study, we have classified students who consider themselves as Roma.

Table 1. General goals of the Roma Student College

General aim	Principles – activities	Relates to Roma identity and social responsibility
Building on active community (peer-help and empowerment)	<p>The operation of a student college is embedded in a community that is characterised by self-activity. Members of the student college develop their cultural and community programs into which they are incorporated by their interests. Part of this are the programs aimed at strengthening identity – considering the Roma community as a positive value and internalisation of being an intellectual. The mentoring system ensures individuality. Older and more experienced student college members as translators, are the driving force of the community, helping to increase the activity of their younger peers. Mentors also gain self-confidence, personal empowerment (self-help mechanism) through successful community actions.</p> <p>The students do their voluntary work in different organisations where they mostly work with Roma and disadvantaged students and their families. Their main task is usually to help them in different school subjects and organise extracurricular activities outside the classroom. These activities can strengthen their positive identity development. They can become role models for the pupils and important helpers for the host organisations. During these activities – which enhance their social responsibility – their social capital is broadening, and their self-confidence is increasing. Many of them may find themselves in a pedagogical situation during volunteering that they would not be able to experience during university training, so they can look forward to their teaching practice more confidently than their groupmates. At the same time, getting acquainted with the work of the host organisations, they can see examples of civic, civic self-organisation, which was unknown to many of them so far.</p>	<p>A community of actors and active people, where internal commitment develops, social responsibility is strengthened towards Roma communities. Resilience is maintained through empowerment. (Table 2)</p>

Inclusive/ equitable support and maintaining resilience	One of the pillars of personal care is the tutoring system. Teachers recognised in higher education (university professors) will assist students personally and individually to help their advance. This role has a bearing on commitment of the tutors to make the university environment more inclusive. On the other hand, personal care means that student college members seek/receive services from external experts tailored to the individual needs, including support with academic studies, personal problems and language studies. The efficiency of individual care is enhanced by the fact that student college members develop their career plans with their own tutors, choosing from offered options. The interactivity of their support is enhanced by the fact that students record their progress in their portfolio and reflect on their development.	Personal successes are linked to a positive Roma identity and become credible role models for their community.
Capital accumulation and strengthening Roma identity	In the field of higher education, academic advancement gives student college members a cultural capital that can be used on the labour market later on. They receive coaching, as well as several other options to practice. They can receive support for individual and small-group student research, may participate in joint research with teachers. The research topics take a different approach, but are related to Roma community, so students form an opinion on this issue with an "external eye" beyond their personal history, which helps them become Roma intellectuals responsible for their community.	A scientific, critical, intellectual approach to the subject.

In this grant period from 2016 to 2018, the diverse programs in the Henrik Wlisløcki Student College can be divided into three groups. Above (Table 1) we have summarised the general goals of the organisation, the principles behind it, the activities that build on it, highlighting how it is all related to Roma identity (Pedagogical Program, 2016).



## The group in focus

The majority of Roma students in Hungary are in a situation that is described by the literature as a phenomenon of intersectionality. The results of the study presented above – which covers the entire Roma Student College Network – show that more than two-thirds of the students profess to be Roma and more than half of them are disadvantaged<sup>5</sup>. In addition, approximately 90% of them are the first in their family to graduate, thus they are considered first-generation intellectuals. Their settlement disadvantage and/or parents' lower educational attainment need fair support for their mobility through Higher Education. Unfortunately, the research does not reveal what proportion of Student College members suffer from two or more disadvantages at the same time, but it is likely that their higher proportion is characterised by intersectionality. Intersectionality, as an intertwining of two types of inequality situations (Asumah & Nagel, 2014; Sebestyén, 2016) for students in Roma Student Colleges is the sum of the mutually reinforcing effects of the lack of the various capital gaps (financial assets, cultural, social, and symbolic capital) (Bourdieu, 1978, 1997; Coleman, 1997) and negative social perceptions (latent or discriminatory), which reinforce each other.

The establishment of the Roma College and the definition of its target group were largely influenced by the fact that in Hungary there is a large overlap between social disadvantage and belonging to the Roma community. Several research studies have shown in the past decades that social disadvantages in Hungary are exacerbated by the negative social prejudice associated with the Roma minority group (Cserti-Csapó & Orsós, 2013; Forray & Hegedűs, 2003; Forray & Pálmainé Orsós, 2010; Neményi, 2013). Educational focus studies have provided data that failure at school is a common phenomenon amongst disadvantaged and Roma students, so educational issues related to these characteristics cannot be separated (Fehérvári, 2015; Híves, 2015). When discussing the educational situation of the Roma, the researchers have been reporting gradual improvements, but it was also found that the distance (gap) did not shorten from the non-Roma population (Havas & Liskó, 2002; Kemény

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<sup>5</sup> The present regulation (Law 1997/XXXI, 67/a.) requires the low financial position of the family and plus at least one additional feature of disadvantage to fall into the legal category of disadvantaged position. The law defines three areas where additional disadvantages occur: the low educational levels of the parents, their long-term unemployment, residence in segregated or derelict areas, inadequate residential conditions.

et al. 2004; Zolnay, 2015). This is also reinforced by the fact that Roma students are more likely to be early school leavers or to choose shorter education paths (Liskó, 2003; Mártonfi, 2013, 2015). Today, more research has pointed out that the deterioration of Roma students' school performance is exacerbated most by the coexistence of poverty and ethnic segregation (Fejes & Szűcs, 2017; Kertesi & Kézdi, 2012).

The institutional spaces of Roma Student College help to acquire various – cultural, social, symbolic – capitals and by contributing to capital acquisition they make access to social benefits easier. Another important area of intervention is related to belonging to a minority group and includes actions building on cultural values and fighting against racial prejudices (Arató, 2007; Bigazzi, 2013). The community of Roma Student Colleges aims to strengthen their personal and social identity. Processes aimed at identity development are embedded in services that assist both the competence development of college students and the establishment of resilience and empowerment. At the same time, all these things have an impact on the sensitivity of the social environment and prejudice reduction.

## Methodology and Methods

All members of the Student College (32 people) were interviewed in the autumn of 2017, and 27 interviews were used for the analysis presented in the study. The in-depth interview includes the students' life history, family and school memories. It took note of the circumstances and experiences of going to a college, with particular regard to the services provided by the college, and their views on identity, voluntary work and the community.

The interview questions were aimed at exploring the external and internal effects and factors of the students' lives that can be linked to their successful educational progress. What role did their intersectional position and Roma identity play in all this? What role does the inclusive environment of the Henrik Wislocki Student College currently play in their lives and in the development of their identity? Can the impact of the Student College and the volunteer work in Roma communities and organisations be felt in the development of resilience and empowerment?

The interviews were processed qualitatively, with narrative content analysis – using a pre-defined code system. For the analysis of the interviews,



the data of the interviewed students related to college membership were also used: their age, place of residence, their undertaken identity, their social status, time of their college membership, their higher education degree, and their grades, which were treated as independent and dependent variables in the analysis. In the study from the interviews, we highlighted short details that bring the general findings to life. Because of the small number of interviews, we highlighted just the typical points of the life stories.

## Findings and Discussion

### General characteristics of the examined group

Almost half (11 persons) of college students who were interviewed in the autumn of 2017 are characterised by intersection. So they are both Roma and also in disadvantaged social situation. A further 8 people identified themselves as Roma, but no documents related to the legal criteria for the disadvantaged status were submitted. Overall, 70% of the respondents are Roma.

It is worth noting that social disadvantages for some Student Colleges are so severe that there are students for whom college means, among other things the following: “I have not been hungry for the past half year”. The following quote reflects similar difficulties:

I have just recently taken one of my friends to our place. So far, I've taken five or six people to home all together. Well, they were shocked, that is for sure. The last friend I took home said that ‘this is rock bottom’. But I think rock bottom is having absolutely nothing in this world. (WHSz member, Life Interview Excerpt, 2017)

### Pre-university years

Every fifth student spoke of an exclusionary event related to poverty or “Gypsyism” during primary school. The stories are not just “joking” events, but there are some blatant accusations rooted in prejudices, all of which have left a profound negative effect on student college members self-confidence and dignity.

One of the turning points in elementary school was when one of the PE teachers called me ‘little black’. That is when I realised something being different with me and the rest.



And then I finally asked, but they did not make a big problem about it. (WHSz member, life interview excerpt, 2017)

We couldn't play with toys in pre-school because we were Roma. That's why we changed our last name over time because we were Lakatos originally. And many times, the police mixed us up. They came to see about a fight looking for the wrong Lakatos family. And I was just a little kid around the age of 10 back then, and the police realised they are looking at the wrong place. Primary school was even worst. There teachers told me that nothing would become of me, I will become a con, yes. (WHSz member, life interview excerpt, 2017)

Many have also mentioned support programs or organisations that have helped their school careers and prevented them from dropping out. The János Arany Program and study room like civil society organisations were mentioned in the interviews.

My mother and my father were both serious alcoholics, but luckily we went to school and did not drop out and lucky there was the study room. I was in seventh grade when I started to go there. It gave me and my brother a safety net so we didn't drop out but other young people in our neighbourhood, the same age, their life did not go towards learning, but shady business, illegal stuff. Fortunately, since we did not go home after school, but stayed in study rooms, we didn't really meet these people. Yes, and then, after all, my years went by parents being heavy alcoholics, but still me doing very well at school. (WHSz member, life interview excerpt 2017)

In our high school there was the János Arany Program. And more Roma students choose that instead of other high schools, I think, because those who want to study further are the ones coming here (János Arany Program), but without the supporting background, money, or financing. And this what the János Arany program is about, teachers there helped me a lot. (WHSz member, life interview excerpt, 2017)

In several interviews, we could see how the narrator had chosen a strategy against initial difficulties, most of which were exclusion or failure at school. A common point in them is the conscious will to change, the intention of proving themselves to the social environment, as can be seen in the following interview section.

I don't care about it anymore, I rather listen to some good music and try to prove them wrong. Now, I have not gone back to primary school yet to tell them that I have graduated since then, and that I'm going to college now. Somehow I dare not to go there yet. I am not sure why. Although it would feel good to get back at them, look at me now, who became what. Because there is a classmate from that time who is not a Roma, and they all

had high hopes for him and now he is in prison. And now I would just get back at them, who ended up in jail and who has gone how far. (WHSz member, life interview excerpt, 2017)

Barely half of the students experience a strong sense of identity in their family (e.g., parents). Also, they rarely mentioned preserving traditional Roma habits or using Roma language at home. In most cases, the question of identity has not yet appeared in children who attend elementary school. Public education was considered generally neutral by them in relation to their identity. The reason behind it is the phenomenon of ethnocentrism. The individuals do not feel discrimination based on their identity, since the hegemony of the majority culture is considered natural by them, for example in educational content. As a consequence of implicit impacts on the individuals, such as colour-blindness, the sense of assimilation grows stronger in them. Later this sense gets broken down every time the individuals are discriminated against because of their outer racial features. And since they have formed an ethnocentric identity in the school system, they typically do not have the means to respond constructively, either based on positive identity or self-defence mechanism (Arató, 2012).

I was teased a lot in elementary school. They weren't that rude to me, but I was hurt pretty bad still. So I had friends but they made fun of me anyway. Because of my skin, because I'm a Roma. (WHSz member, life path interview excerpt, 2017)

This mechanism is supported by the life path interviews, as we encountered one or two similar examples to the ones mentioned above. However, in the narratives, the student college members say the issue of identity mainly appears during high school and it is associated with implicit or explicit racist attitudes. Also, nearly all of them could list occasions of discrimination based on their race but some of these stories were affecting their environment rather than them. This mechanism typically appears in research dealing with the strategies of the minority shifting towards assimilation, which ultimately contribute to the maintenance of racism (Arató, 2012).

### **Student College membership period**

The interrelations of inclusivity and resilience have shown through the stories of the Student College members. In the following, we try to present the activities through which the Student College contributes to strengthening the minority identity and the commitment to social responsibility, and how



the students experienced this, and in which form they plan to carry it on in their lives. However, the mutually reinforcing effect of these two processes is multiplied as the individual becomes more and more active, and in addition to his or her own interests, the interests of his or her community are considered. Empowerment, identified in the field of social policy and social psychology, is the process of gaining power, during which the individual and later the community becomes capable of self-determination and formulation of their common objectives. The individuals recognise their position of power and have the courage to use this power for the sake of the community. They also have the power to change their own and their community's social inequality situation and turn their life around for the better (Adams, 2003; Lakatos, 2010). During the development of empowerment, the individuals gradually recognise the factors of power structure affecting their circumstances in a negative way and they use support tools to bring about change, acquire elements of competence and organise community activities. The resulting minority influence rewrites the mechanisms of the reproduction of social inequality and gives a chance to share social goods, despite structural vulnerability.

The environment of the Student College that builds upon self-creation and cooperation, presupposes the goal of achieving the resilience of people within it. The positive experiences of cooperation (gaining motivation and competence), contribute to the inner integration and maintenance of empowerment on a personal level.

Consequently, empowerment is a process (Table 2), the first stage of which takes place on the individual level and extends from self-respect to the formation and maintenance of resilience. This leads to the evolvment of the sense of responsibility for the community, the actual action, and the resulting changes (Travis-Bowman, 2015). Community empowerment also has an impact on resilience, as bearing responsibility for others encourages self-help mechanisms (Varga, 2015a).

Table 2. The framework of personal and community empowerment (Travis-Bowman, 2015)

Personal empowerment			Community empowerment	
SELF-RESPECT	RESILIENCE	DEVELOPMENT	COMMUNITY	CHANGE
<i>Feeling better</i>	<i>Doing better</i>	<i>Being better</i>	<i>Better sense of belonging</i>	<i>Better community conditions</i>

In the case of the examined Student College the commitment to the Roma community and the related social responsibility (as a component and the highest degree of empowerment) starting point is the attitude towards one's own identity. Diverse attitudes were found related to this question among the students who considered themselves to be Roma (19 persons) (Table 3).

It is also important to see that two thirds of the respondents highlighted as one of the virtues of the Student College that there is an opportunity to experience a positive Roma identity in this community.

I dared to take it (that I'm a Roma) before (the Student College) but now it feels better to say it out, because I see that we're in this together. And I was brave enough to say it out even when I was judged because of it, but now it feels so much better to do so in the Student College because it is ordinary and accepted here. (WHSz member, life path interview excerpt, 2017)

Social psychological studies of empowerment have demonstrated that the positive experience of group identity reinforces the sense of belonging to a group, which is the first level in the development of empowerment (Travis and Deepak, 2011).

Table 3. The life path details of the studied group – identity (N = 19)

Topics mentioned			Number of people	%
Relation to Roma identity	Family	strong	8	42
		weak	8	42
	Public education	positive	2	11
		neutral	13	68
		negative	1	5
	Individual	positive	14	74
		neutral	5	26
Discrimination of Roma group		school	10	53
		labour market	2	11
The positive identity forming role of WHSz			13	68

The years of membership at the college is evenly distributed among the examined persons: nearly one third are new entrants and one third are old

members. The “core” (more than a third) has been in the community for 2–4 years. By examining the duration of the membership, it is apparent that the newer members are more “identity-neutral”, who do not neglect their minority identity but consider it a barely determinant factor. In their case it is more noticeable that they are performing excellently in other areas (e.g., learning) as a form of compensation. The “avoidant” attitude can also be observed, which is more negative than identity-neutrality, often appears in the form of denial. In this case, the compensation mechanism is prominent as well.

Actually, it wasn't specifically stressed for us that as Roma, so we should do this or so that. There was one thing they I was told to pay special attention to. It has always been emphasised I should be aware of the fact that compared to others I always have to go the extra mile for the exact same thing. I've always been a little angry about this. I think it is unfair that because I'm a Roma, or perhaps someone else, I have to do more to prove myself. Now I can understand why, one can see the reasons, of course. And now I think it was completely alright, they were right and everything. So I accept that this is public opinion but I also see my mother, what she does, how hard she works for everything. I know that it was the same for her as well. She has to work twice as much to get what she wants. I've gotten used to it through all those years while I was at home with her. She talked about these things and I saw how things are so it became obvious to me that I need to do the same. The fact that it annoyed me is a different story. (WHSz member, life path interview excerpt, 2017)

However, the importance of belonging to the community of young people of similar background is expressed by almost everyone, which is the sign of the strength of their social identity. Some members, who have been at the student college for two years or longer, are somewhat more conscious of their Roma identity, and they are also involved in shaping the future values of the student college community.

One of the ways to inspire social responsibility in the Student College is to support children by doing voluntary work in Roma communities, institutions, elementary and high schools. The majority of the student college members was first involved in voluntary work through the college. However, there is no difference in the age of membership when assessing the necessity of volunteering – all respondents consider this duty important and useful. Some of the interviewed members mentioned that they were initially frustrated and afraid of volunteering but along with his personal experience, ultimately this feeling has transformed entirely.

And when I got into the student college, the immediately sent me to a study hall, dropped me right into the deep end, when I had to tutor children instantly, especially





unprivileged ones. Actually, I really enjoyed doing it, those children truly have become dear to my heart. And now that I'm out in the ghetto, where we have 20-30 children with especially disadvantaged backgrounds, I would not only like to tutor them, but also mentor them. To talk about things, organize different programs, because I know well that if I had such opportunity, I would have taken advantage of that. I could have used a study hall-like program similar to this one. (WHSz member, life path interview excerpt, 2017)

Three-fourth of the students would like to do voluntary work in some form even after graduation. The answers of the student college members reflect that they are committed to volunteering in Roma communities and most of them explicitly formulate their own role for others to follow.

With my current knowledge and mindset, I think I want do voluntary work in places where my presence is needed the most. To show the majority of Roma children that they can do it... Because I could do it. (WHSz member, life path interview excerpt, 2017)

The newer members can only use volunteer opportunities offered to them by the Student College, whereas the older ones, based on their own decision, are allowed to take on duties in other places as well. This shows that, despite the assimilative resilience of the community, as a positive effect of the Student College, the undertaking, preparation and imprinting of the role of the translator takes place. The role of the translator was discussed in a multicultural approach in the diverse society of the United States. The differences of family and school socialisation, named as bicultural socialisation, have been defined by characters and actions to help overlap the two socialisation spheres. The person who succeeded in school from a minority environment and became a credible mediator for his community in the middle-class culture, was called a translator (Adler, 1975).

## Conclusion

In this paper we have tried to show mostly the positive impact of a programme on students' identity and social engagement. This programme was supporting disadvantaged, mainly Roma students in Higher Education in Hungary. In this paper, we have analysed the interviews in order to find out how students' identities and attitudes towards social engagement changed during the course of the programme. Our findings, supported by quotes, show that



students have become more confident in their identity and more inclined to take an active role in society during their time in the organisation.

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## **Collegiality as a Fundamental Professional Value in an Academic Setting: A Case Study in a Teacher Education Institution in a Small Island Developing State\*\***

### **Summary**

Collegiality is believed to entail “always acting in good faith, [...], in concert with one’s honest judgment as to the best interests of one’s institution” (Siegel, 2004, p. 411). This understanding of collegiality is deemed to be output-oriented and missing out on important underlying concepts and values related to the construct. While research shows that collegiality as a concept and a practice is well anchored in corporate jargon and settings where collaborative efforts among employees are capitalised upon for the optimisation of output, there seems to be a dearth of literature on the importance of collegiality in relation to personal well-being in the professional set-up. Moreover, in academic settings, collegiality as a concept has been extensively researched in relation to teacher collegiality, but there is very little mention of how collegiality influences well-being in work life among academics in higher education institutions. This paper seeks to explore the understanding that academics in a teacher education institution have of the concept of collegiality and its impact on their professional stance and job-related personal well-being. It addresses the question of whether collegiality should be incorporated as a fundamental professional value within a teacher education institution as this is deemed to have implications for human capital development. The study shows that though the corporate logic of the use of collegiality for enhanced

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performance is the most prevalent practice even in an academic set up, academics have also appropriated the concept to include a strong element of social and emotional intelligence.

**Keywords:** collegiality, collaboration, academia, professional value, job-related well-being, social and emotional intelligence

## Introduction

Teacher education is an important area of higher education which embodies considerations for pedagogy. Teacher education has implications at different levels of the education sector: for academics, educators, and students in schools through a cascading effect. Such responsibilities come with their lot of strain and stress that can have a toll on the well-being of academic staff. In an environment of uncertainty and unpredictability characterised as being demanding and stressful, people, their intellectual capital, and the culture they create are valuable assets for organisations (Baporikar, 2015; Palaniandy, 2017). In relation to this, it is generally found that positive and healthy interpersonal relations are closely related to and enhance productivity and output and result in job satisfaction and job-related well-being (Moulin, 2020; Palaniandy, 2017; Shah, 2012). Collegiality is thus perceived as being an important contributor to the enhancement of professional, personal, mental and emotional well-being (Baporikar, 2015; Cipriano, 2011; Moulin, 2020; Palaniandy, 2017; Shah, 2012).

Taking into consideration the importance of collegiality with regards to job-related well-being, this research seeks to probe into the lived experiences of academic staff in a teacher education institution to gain insight into the phenomenon of collegiality as a fundamental professional value in an academic setting in a Small Island Developing State (SIDS). The research was conducted against the backdrop of emotional wellness at the workplace, with explicit focus on collegiality as a means of fostering a sense of personal well-being within the professional sphere among academics in the higher education sector, more particularly in the domain of teacher education.

## Context and Background

The research has been conducted in the Mauritius Institute of Education (MIE), the national teacher education institution in the Republic of Mauritius.



With an area of 2,040 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 1,266,334 people (Statistics Mauritius, 2021), Mauritius is considered as a SIDS (Small Island Developing State) because of its small geographical and population size and economic features related to its colonial history (Crossley, Bray, & Packer, 2011; Martin & Bray, 2011). Notwithstanding its small size and demography, the Mauritian people attribute much importance to education as a means of social and economic development, and Mauritius positions itself as a 'Knowledge Hub and Centre for Higher Learning and Excellence' in the region (Tertiary Education Commission, 2012). The island state tops the list among sub-Saharan countries in the provision of education and has been ranked 72nd in the Human Capital Index out of 124 economies (World Economic Forum, 2015). Mauritius boasts a high rate of adult and youth literacy of around 90 to 98%; 92% of children aged 3–5 years are enrolled in pre-primary schools, 96% between 6–11 years are enrolled in primary schools, 96% of the 12–18 years age group are enrolled in secondary schools and 39% of youth aged 19–24 years are enrolled in tertiary education institutions.

These conditions pose demands that have important implications for the MIE which is the sole teacher education institution in the country, with a mandate of teacher education, curriculum development and research in education to meet the needs of the education sector at a national level. The MIE is thus responsible for the pre-service and continuous professional development of teachers and cadres in Mauritian schools, the development of curriculum materials for primary and lower secondary school levels, and research in education to inform policy and practice. The institution is meant to support and promote the government's vision regarding education and implement its national policy, as well as having the responsibility of conducting its activities in a sustainable and responsible manner, with transparency and fairness, in accordance with the principles of good governance. The MIE, as a higher education institution, contributes significantly to national development through the empowerment of the country's human resource, in line with the statement of Martin & Bray (2011, p. 23) that in a globalised economy, tertiary education is of fundamental importance as it provides the human resources that allow countries to connect to the knowledge society. Such responsibilities demand that academics working for the institution live up to the expectations of the educational sector and the government, and this comes with its lot of job-related stress and strain.

## Literature Review

In the literature, collegiality is most often referred to as companionship and cooperative interaction between colleagues who share power, responsibility and authority (Shah, 2012). It includes being pleasant and supportive and ready to assist. However, there seems to be a lack of a universal definition of the concept (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011) and the definition of collegiality within the literature is still quite hazy. For the purpose of this paper, collegiality will be perceived as friendly and supportive working relationships between colleagues that promote and sustain a feeling of job-related mental and emotional well-being and satisfaction. Within the educational domain, research in collegiality started in the 1990s and has consistently underlined the contribution of strong collegial relationships to school improvement and success (Shah, 2012). Collegiality is perceived as being important and beneficial for the effective functioning of educational institutions. The power of collegiality in school-based professional development (Owen, 2005), professional well-being and growth (Retallick & Butt, 2004), the contribution of collegiality in improving relationships among colleagues in a school setting (Barth, 2006), teacher collaboration in improvement of student achievement (Goddard, Goddard, & Tschannen-Moran, 2007), and the impact of collegiality on teacher attrition (Abdallah, 2009), among other related areas, have been well documented. As far back as in 1997, Hargreaves listed several benefits of collaboration among school staff, including moral support, increased efficiency, improved effectiveness, reduced overload, shared and realistic expectations between teachers and administrators, collective professional wisdom, increased capacity for reflection, better organisational responsiveness and opportunities for continual professional growth and development.

In a comprehensive review of the literature on the importance of collegiality among educators, Shah (2012) has summed up the salient points on collegiality in school settings. He points out that among the major outcomes and benefits of highly collaborative and collegial cultures in educational organisations, a strong and healthy collegial relationship among school teachers is regarded as an essential component of school effectiveness and teacher enhancement. Collegiality plays a vital role in augmenting teacher professional growth and development, job satisfaction, organisational and professional commitment as well as school quality and better student performance and academic achievement. Such benefits are evidence of the



importance of building a strong and effective collegial culture in schools. The research recommends that teachers should get opportunities to collegiate with each other to best serve their students, to make their work more meaningful, and to transform schooling in ways that keep it vibrant and relevant.

At a personal level, the review of Shah (2012) points out that collegiality has been found to stimulate enthusiasm among teachers. It reduces emotional stress and burnout, creates a sense of belonging among organisational members and makes the bonds among colleagues more cohesive, leading to a culture of commitment to their organisation and their profession. This influences the motivation of teachers and the extent to which they are willing to modify classroom practice. Teachers who work together collegially become more flexible in times of change and cope better with new demands. They benefit greatly from enhanced communication and willingness to seek and give help, which results in improved practice, enhanced repertoires of techniques, positive attitudes toward teaching, high morale, and increased trust. As opposed to collegiality, an atmosphere of competition in the workplace and pressures and stressful work conditions can be detrimental to human relations.

A culture of collegiality is also found to ensure more systemic assistance to beginning teachers and helps to reinforce their confidence through support from their more experienced colleagues (Shah, 2012). Schools having a good collaborative culture and strong atmosphere of collegiality have lower teacher attrition rates as collegiality helps novice teachers to cope with uncertainty and complexity, respond effectively to rapid change and create a climate that values risk taking and continuous improvement.

At an organisational level, the conception that professionals perform better when working together collegially is supported by organisational theory models. Such conceptions view authentic teamwork as an essential characteristic of the successful organisation as its members interact regularly to share their ideas and expertise and develop common understanding of organisational goals and the means to their attainment (Johnson et al., 2012). Collegial communities create a cooperative climate that heightens the level of innovation and enthusiasm among employees and provides continuous support for staff professional enhancement.

Nurturing a collegial atmosphere within organisations also has a beneficial effect on organisational identification. Pratt (1998) distinguishes between organisational commitment and organisational identification as follows: "Organizational commitment is often associated with, 'How happy or satisfied am I with my organization?' ... Organizational identification, by contrast, is



concerned with the question, 'How do I perceive myself in relation to my organization?' " (p. 178). From this distinction, it is clearly seen that commitment to the organisation and thereby to the profession is closely related to personal satisfaction and happiness at the workplace.

In relation to paying heed to the importance of the affective domain within the workplace, Johnson et al. (2012) point out a distinction between cognitive and affective identification with organisations. According to Johnson et al. (2012), individuals identify with groups in order to either reduce perceived uncertainty, which is related to the cognitive domain, or to feel better about who they are as individuals, which is related to the affective domain. Johnson et al. (2012) find that affective identification provides incremental predictive validity over and above cognitive identification in the prediction of organisational commitment, organisational involvement, and organisational behaviours. Johnson et al. (2012) furthermore highlight the benefits of social identification in an organisational set up, for when employees identify with organisational groups, they are less likely to leave, are more involved and more satisfied with their jobs and work harder. A sense of inclusion and collaboration in groups also nurtures a sense of pride, increased self-esteem and belongingness. These reflect the strong emotional value attached to group interactions through a culture of collegiality among group members in the professional domain, and relate to the benefits of collegiality among teachers as outlined above, and therefore can be considered as universal characteristics. However, the literature points out that collegiality does not completely occur as a natural part of the process in any organisation. In order for a culture of collegiality to be developed among professionals in any sphere, it needs to be structured, taught, developed and fostered (Kuhar & Cross, 2013). This has strong implications for professionals in leadership positions. Kuhar and Cross (2013) also posit for the advancement of 'collegial ethics', which refers to a set of rules of conduct embraced by a group. According to Kuhar and Cross, supportive behaviour resides in people's psyche. People do support their colleagues, and this support should not only be extended in ordinary times but also and more importantly in troubled times, as giving aid and approval, encouraging, helping sustain others and treating others with compassion is part of collegial ethics. In an academic sphere, Baporikar (2015) points out that ensuring collegiality is fundamental to developing academe and can be nurtured and developed for excellence in academia. According to Baporikar, there are at least three important aspects to collegiality in academe – the ethical imperative, the task of assessing

collegiality affects job effectiveness and the question of boundaries. Departments that invite free expression, exploration and inquiry demand not only the right people but also the right approach, which comprises positive academic leadership and a strategy that emphasises building on strengths and opportunities rather than simply solving problems or correcting flaws. Such skills include supportive communication and conflict resolution. These points underscore the need for collegial skills to be identified, taught, practiced and nurtured in professional spheres, as highlighted by Kuhar and Cross (2013).

On a different note, collegiality and managerialism are often portrayed as opposed to each other. However, according to Tight (2014), the two concepts are not as dichotomous as believed to be. Commenting on the relationship between management and faculty staff within a tertiary academic context, Cipriano (2011) points out that collegiality should be evidenced in the manner in which faculty and administration not only interact socially, but show genuine respect for one another, treat colleagues with dignity and civility, value their potential, benefit from each other's experiences, work collaboratively to achieve a common purpose, and assume equitable responsibilities for the good of the discipline, the faculty, and institution as a whole.

Further research within the tertiary academic sphere points out that engaging in professional development and enhancing professional knowledge can be part of collegiality. It is posited that academic institutions should provide institutional support to empower their academics to enhance collegial practices. High levels of collegiality as well as strong and healthy collegial relationships are regarded as essential components of institutional effectiveness (Arnold & Ukpere, 2014), as the quality of education in higher education institutions very much depends on the quality of its academics. Sharing of knowledge is also a way to ensure collegiality. Higher learning institutions, in their aspirations to achieve long-term institutional success and enhanced standards, are ensuring that faculty members not only continue to generate new knowledge but seek to disseminate and share knowledge with others (Howell & Annansingh, 2013). This is an indication of the importance of and huge potential for professional and institutional advancement created by collegial practices within the academic community. Higher learning institutions are encouraged to promote the desire for knowledge sharing among academics (Breu & Hemingway, 2004). In the knowledge-based era, universities should seek to ensure success and permanence, organisational goals, and performance improvements (Sharma & Sharma, 2010). Unfortunately, knowledge seeking and

sharing practices among academics is a rare phenomenon (Skaik & Othman, 2014) let alone knowledge sharing for professional competencies.

The above review of the literature shows that the positive impact of collegiality in schools, organisations and higher education institutions is quite well explored. However, the angle in the analysis is instrumental in nature, as the use of collegiality to enhance performance at the workplace is the most prevalent focus, following a corporate logic. The relationship between collegiality and the affective domain related to personal well-being at the workplace in academic settings seems to be under-researched.

### **Rationale, Aim and Research Questions**

Collegiality is recognised by most institutions as being an important contributor to the well-being of professionals and for the good functioning of organisations. As was seen above, research done has consistently underlined the contribution of strong collegial relationships to school improvement, organisational output and success. The nature of relationships among the academic community has a substantive influence on the quality of institutional work and on student accomplishment (Baporikar, 2015; Palaniandy, 2017). It is believed that a conducive collegial environment characterised by respect, dignity, trust and genuine care for one another among faculty members can nurture a culture of sharing and growth in academic institutions (Cipriano, 2011). Collegiality is thus considered to be an important phenomenon that deserves attention, especially in higher education (Edwards, 2003). Creating a productive work climate within a faculty or an institution requires shared leadership and responsibility and relates to how members of the academic community engage in their share of the workload and responsibilities in a collaborative manner. Understanding how academic institutions and academic professionals can make use of strengths derived from a collegial culture and climate promises to be an area of fruitful empirical research that has the potential to enlighten the academic community about best thinking in an academic set-up. Hence, the aim of this paper is to get insight into collegiality as a fundamental professional value among academics in a higher education institution. It explores the understanding that academics in a teacher education institution derive of the concept of collegiality, the extent of its application in their professional endeavours and its impact on job-related

well-being. The questions that have guided this research can be summed up as follows:

- How do academics of a teacher education institution define collegiality?
- What, in the opinion of academics, is the impact of collegiality on their job-related well-being?
- Why is collegiality important for academics' job-related well-being?

## Methodology

This study has been conducted through a qualitative approach grounded within the interpretivist paradigm, which translates itself best with an understanding of the individual. This is so as studies situated within the interpretivist paradigm seek to understand the subjective world of human experience (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). The study was also based within the grounded theory approach, which meant that we let the information that emerged from our data guide our analysis, with the belief that theory is emergent and should arise from particular contexts or situations (Cohen et al., 2007). The study was conducted at the Mauritius Institute of Education (MIE) which has the responsibility of teacher education and curriculum development for schools as mandated by the Government of Mauritius, and research in education for informing policy and practice. These responsibilities are deemed to be stressful for academics at the institution and it is posited that a culture of collegiality has the immense potential of alleviating job-related stress and nurture job-related well-being.

For the production of our data, we chose participants who are academics with varied years of experience ranging from twenty-two months to eleven years of experience as teacher educators at the institution. We chose a purposive sample of participants with whom we had already established a rapport. The literature highlights how the researcher-researched relationship is of prime importance to allow for the smooth generation of rich qualitative data (Blackledge & Creese, 2010; Feldman et al., 2003; Heller, 2008; Wanat, 2008). Hence, our choice of participants was guided by considerations within these premises. We also ensured that our selection of participants included a fair distribution of male and female teacher educators, though considerations for gender issues were not our initial focus. Moreover, we chose academics within different areas of specialisation to get a broad view on the matter.

Data was produced in two stages. First, we administered a questionnaire to thirty-five academics. The questionnaire consisted of seven questions that focused on a personal definition of collegiality, the importance and benefits of collegiality at the workplace, ways in which collegiality is prevalent at the institution and how collegiality can be enhanced. An analysis of the preliminary data generated through the questionnaire gave rise to the need to probe further in some emergent areas such as the link between the pragmatic and affective dimensions involved in the practice of collegiality, leading to the need for an individual in-depth interview with a selected number of academics from among the respondents of the questionnaire. We were able to secure the participation of three academics based on convenience sampling as they were available to participate in our hour-long interviews on areas that had emerged in our responses to the questionnaire that needed further insight. This new set of data helped us develop a more in-depth understanding of areas that needed further exploration.

## Findings

Our findings will be structured around our research questions, spanning across how collegiality is understood by the participants and how collegiality or the lack of it impacts on the professional stance of academics.

### Defining Collegiality

Most of the respondents shared a common understanding of what they perceived collegiality to be. For them, collegiality entails the ability to “work together” or “to work with other colleagues on a common task”. Some also stated that collegiality is all about “collaborating with colleagues towards a shared vision” whilst one respondent defined collegiality as “the cooperative relationship of colleagues”. One respondent further added that collegiality entails “not having a hidden agenda and being transparent about what” is expected when working with colleagues on common tasks. From the data that was generated, it can be argued that academics at the MIE view collegiality as being a concept which is intricately linked with the concept of collaboration, sharing as well as caring for each other within the workplace. The idea of collegiality being a positive and healthy ‘relationship’ stands out prominently.



pointing to considerations for the human dimension within the professional sphere. Attention to the role of emotional intelligence in communities of practice is strongly highlighted.

From the above it becomes clear that though the definition of collegiality is hazy in the literature, academics have their own understanding of collegiality. For most, collegiality leads to well-being at the workplace and is thereby closely linked to the affective domain. Moreover, the concept of collegiality is generally associated with positive *humane* values as well as professional ethics and attributes. In the data produced, terms that were frequently used to define collegiality emphasise this dimension, as the respondents bring forth the notion of “fairness”, “trust”, “integrity”, “honesty”, “humour” as well as “respect” with regards to relationships among colleagues. For them, collegiality encompasses these positive deep-seated humane values. Most of the academics also bring forth the affective dimension of friendship inherent in collegiality. It can therefore be understood that collegiality for the participants entails the ability to work together in a positive and conducive environment.

### **The Impact of Collegiality on Academics' Job-Related Well Being**

It was found that all the respondents concurred upon the fact that collegiality, which is “at the root of a healthy relationship” in the workplace, is extremely important to ensure the good “functioning of any organisation”. However, it was seen that whenever the focus of the discussion was on the benefits of collegiality on the organisation, the participants brought back the focus on the benefits of a collegial work environment on the self. Hence, according to most of the respondents, the presence and fostering of a healthy, positive and conducive work environment is not only beneficial for the organisation but also for the human self. It was felt that collegiality enhanced “communication” and ensured the creation of stronger “social links” as well as healthy interpersonal communication which not only leads to “success of any department” but also to the emotional as well as mental well-being of academics.

Furthermore, the very act of reflecting on the construct through the interviews provided the participants with a platform to probe into the contours of their thinking when it came to collegiality, a concept which is deemed to be an integral part of their professional life but which they do not usually talk about and reflect upon. In this sense the interviews proved to have a cathartic

effect, as it empowered them to reflect on and be clear about how collegiality impacts on their personal well-being as well as that of others within the workplace. The probing into the importance of collegiality at the workplace made them realise a number of things about which they themselves had never thought regarding their own well-being as academics and getting acquainted with their own voices, beliefs and thoughts on the phenomenon.

Most academics also felt that an organisational culture in which collegiality is embedded allows colleagues to align their competencies to work towards the common goals they have within the organisation. It was felt that the “amalgamation of the knowledge, know-how and skills brought by each member of the team” allows for the completion of common tasks in a more efficient and productive manner. A participant also added that collegiality “boost(s) team spirit and create(s) a friendly working environment” which motivates academics as “everyone is valued for their contribution”.

The respondents based on purposive sampling procedures included both male and female as well as novice and more experienced academics and it was seen through this mixed population that collegiality neither has a gender nor an age bias. Both male and female academics, whether young or more experienced/senior staff, felt that collegiality is a crucial organisational value and that it is essential for the well-being of the self as well as the organisation. They all underlined the importance that collegiality has in their day-to-day interactions with each other and for organisational sustainability, though they do not usually put the construct at the forefront of their practices. This shows that collegiality is an underlying fundamental value in a conducive and healthy professional set up.

Moreover, the respondents concurred on the fact that the identity of a teacher education institution, which is where the study took place, is associated with the right set of dispositions and attitudes as one of the aims of an institution functioning at this level is to empower teachers with the “right set of dispositions” and “getting teachers to work better”. In line with this, one participant stated that “it is also about us (academics) doing better things, (collegiality) being part of a better thing”. Hence, a teacher education institution performing the role of a higher education institution is purported to embody what it teaches and this allows academics to identify with the organisation better. The integration of collegiality in the day to day functioning of the institution is felt to be a prerequisite. The respondents felt that “all teacher education courses should be serviced by staff who display the desired qualities”, with reference to the dispositions imbued in a collegial stance. The



respondents were of the opinion that these beliefs as well as attitudes should be translated in the work culture and infused in the institutional culture. They believed that a teacher education institution which fosters collegiality as an essential component of its culture and ensures that it is part of the organisational values offers the platform that makes it possible to enhance collaboration between academics through shared experiences and practices. This would then ensure that all academics grow professionally through negotiation and “acceptance of new practices” which would be “good for the department[s] and the institution as a whole” in the long run.

### **The Impact of Lack of Collegiality on Job-Related Well Being**

A lack of collegiality is generally believed to have a detrimental effect on personal well-being at the workplace. The respondents stated that they equate lack of collegiality with “gossiping” about one another with other academics, a lack of fairness, with “people in power positions” keeping “certain types of portfolios for themselves”, “misuse of power”, colleagues having “selfish and egocentric motives”, being competitive at the workplace, “promotion oriented” and wanting to fulfil only “self-prophesised agendas”. It was felt that colleagues who “do not share good practices” and refuse “to collaborate”, for example, in doing research, create an atmosphere that is conflictual. According to the participants, attitudes and dispositions which are devoid of collegiality are neither in the best interest of the institution, nor of those academics who are victims of such situations, nor of the academics having such behaviours and attitudes themselves, as it fosters mistrust and frustration as well as “stress” and has a negative impact on the emotional and mental well-being of all included. One participant indeed pointed out that collegiality at the MIE entailed “being selective” about colleagues with whom she would work because there are certain persons with “whom she would not work well”.

Moreover, the respondents felt that a lack of collegiality in an organisation can affect self-esteem, especially for those who are newly recruited and who are in the process of constructing their identity within the institution, as evidenced by the words of one participant who noted that a lack of collegiality impacts on her own positive professional self-image as she “feel(s) that (she) might lag behind since (she does) not have ideas or the right kind of information about how to grow professionally” within the organisation.

Another participant added that a lack of collegiality is also translated by self-assertiveness which is based on selfish motives and which trespasses on the well-being of others. This creates unhealthy situations in which academics do not thrive, leading to a lack of self-confidence. For the participants, this is not symbolical of what collegiality should entail. However, it was generally believed that collegiality also entails respecting the personal space of others and has ethical implications, pointing out the need to be sensitive to boundaries as well.

In addition to the above, the data strongly emphasises the destructive effect that a culture of competition can have on the well-being of academics. This culture of competition that is found to be prevalent within the organisation, regarding, for example, the nomination for administrative posts, allocation of staff development facilities and promotions, is believed to impact negatively on collegiality and the benefit that this brings within the professional domain and personal well-being in the workplace. For the participants, tension emanates mostly from a lack of transparency and a perceived lack of fairness that do not foster collegiality. Such conditions lead to academics feeling isolated and impact on their mental as well emotional well-being. Most academics speak of demotivation which results from the culture of competition that prevails.

## Discussion

As was seen above, the literature highlights the instrumentalist nature of the concept of collegiality through the application of corporate logics regarding the use of collegiality to enhance productivity, whereas in our study, what comes out really strongly is the *affective dimension embodied* within the concept of collegiality, which encompasses genuine caring and sharing among individuals, without an instrumentalist focus. This is felt to be valuable within the academic work context, hence the humane dimension of collegiality is highlighted. Thus, our study shows that though the corporate logic of the use of collegiality for enhanced performance in common goals is the most prevalent practice, in an academic set up as that of the MIE, academics perceive collegiality as being deeply grounded within the humanistic dimension. At its heart, collegiality is all about how professionals interact with each other on a humane level and consolidate the human relationship between colleagues.

Moreover, what also stands out are two areas related to the positive impacts of healthy collegiality: the *ethical imperative* including respect of boundaries and the *affective imperative* and its *impact on personal well-being, job effectiveness and organisational productivity*. The study shows that organisations that promote and respect free expression, exploration and inquiry demand not only *the right people with the right set of dispositions, attitudes and beliefs, but also the right approach*. This comprises *positive academic leadership* and a strategy that emphasises *building on strengths and opportunities rather than simply solving problems through a problem-based approach* (Baporikar, 2015).

This has implications for setting the proper mission and vision of the institution and of academic staff, and empowerment. Therefore, embedding collegiality as an organisational value is fundamental to developing academe. Collegiality can grow by itself, out of good faith as well as goodwill of some people who have a disposition towards sharing and caring. However, for collegiality to permeate the organisational culture to sustain the desired sense of well-being among staff, it needs to be nurtured and developed. It will then foster excellence in academia (Baporikar, 2015). Thus, it can be argued that a *culture of collegiality* fosters the construction of a positive identity for both the individual and the organisation. A *culture of collegiality* has implications for the dynamics of personal identification, organisational identification, and relational identification (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2017).

It can be argued that the data shows that participants believe that lack of collegiality leads to the disempowerment as an academic and does not motivate them to grow as professionals. Hence, it can be claimed that a teacher education institution having a high dose of competitiveness amongst academics and where collegiality is not nurtured ends up not being a productive institution. If academics find no motivation to give the best of themselves and instead work to undermine the endeavours of each other, this does not augur well for the well-being and growth of any organisation. It can be argued that it is crucial that the institution gages in the well-being of the academics and one way to study that could be through the implementation of Happiness Index surveys such as has been used in Bhutan and other countries (Sithey, Thow, & Li, 2015).

From the study it is also seen that collegiality in an educational set-up relates to the domain of social interaction that promotes the adoption of effective practices and sustainability both in education and educational organisations. Collegiality therefore forms the foundation of successful interactions in academic life (Cipriano, 2011). Collegiality can be considered



to be a virtue as a genuine concern of caring and sharing has the potential of breaking isolation among academics. It contributes to a paradigm shift in the knowledge, skills, judgement and sense of commitment that individuals bring to their work and enhances the collective capacity of academics in tertiary education institutions.

Furthermore, our study confirms the point highlighted in earlier research (Ashforth & Schinoff, 2017; Baporikar, 2015; Kuhar & Cross, 2012; Palaniandy, 2017; Shah, 2012) that collegiality does not happen by chance or automatically once people are working together to achieve common goals in the workplace. It needs to be planned and structured, taught and learned, and internalised by both professionals and organisations for it to become an integral part of organisational culture and professional dispositions and for both the people and organisations to benefit from its positive impacts. Therefore, fostering and nurturing a collegial culture including collegial ethics for promoting a sense of well-being and identification with the institution should be an important objective of both academic and organisational agendas. As such, nurturing and fostering a culture of collegiality is evidence of proper educational leadership.

It can also be affirmed that probing into the impact of collegiality among professionals proved to have a cathartic effect as the study allowed most of the participants to purposefully engage with a concept that is believed to lie at the heart of their professional stance and well-being but which they had not pondered upon in depth. This, then, leads them to reflect on their own selves and the importance to pay attention to their mental as well as emotional well-being within the workplace. What is seen is that academics have appropriated and owned the concept, endowing it with a strong element of emotional intelligence. In doing so, they understand collegiality as being a strong component that impacts on their emotional intelligence that in turn impacts upon their overall well-being at the workplace.

## Conclusion

This study not only confirmed several points related to the benefits of collegiality within an academic set up but also revealed a number of aspects of collegiality that were not prevalent in the literature. At least three elements stand out most importantly. First of all, it was striking to note that collegiality knows no age or gender restrictions and barriers. All people flourish in



a collegial atmosphere, contrary to common beliefs that female staff are more sensitive to their emotional well-being than male staff, and that senior staff have the tendency to be independent and prefer being aloof. It was seen that personal and emotional well-being at the workplace was equally important for male as well as female academics, for new recruits as well as more experienced and senior staff within the academic set-up.

Moreover, caring for the affective domain of professionals is a prerequisite for nurturing an atmosphere where people grow professionally, feel good and strengthen their sense of belongingness and identification with the organisation. These result in enhanced productivity in a cyclical rather than linear process. Furthermore, the act of talking on the topic and reflecting on its practice and applications has a beneficial effect as it helps people probe into their inner selves to identify and understand the importance of wellness at the workplace and the impact of good professional relationships nurtured by collegial dispositions. This highlights the need to probe into the overall well-being of academics by paying attention to the Happiness Index within the institution, in line with the practice adopted by some institutions and countries like Bhutan, through the usage of the Bhutan's Gross National Happiness Index to make the happiness of their people the driving force of their initiatives (Sithey et al., 2015; Ura, Alkire, Zangmo, & Wangdi, 2012).

This research has also highlighted the fact that considerations for the humane dimension where people are involved are of prime importance, as opposed to the corporate logic in favour of harnessing the human dimension for the sole purpose of optimising outputs. Professionals working towards common organisational goals, whether male or female, new recruits or more experienced ones, are sensitive to the humane dimension at their workplace and this has a strong impact on their job-related well-being. A dehumanised and output-oriented emphasis following an industrial logic is detrimental to both the professional and the organisation. The human touch makes a big difference in the professional sphere and is important to nurture, foster and promote.

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## **Development of Transversal Competences: A Current Challenge in Teacher Education\*\***

### **Summary**

This study responds to the growing demand to adapt the content and methods of teacher training programs to reflect the rapid emergence of new, nonpareil 21st century professions in the labour market, predominantly due to the information technology revolution. It is clear that future teachers will increasingly be expected to have a wider range of professional teaching skills, but also transversal skills and competences. For this purpose, a Slovak research team at Matej Bel University prepared an experiment by transforming a traditional foreign language CLIL course into a new course Global Encounters in Local Settings, aimed at developing not only pre-service teachers' multilingual and intercultural competences, but also a variety of other transversal skills and competences (critical thinking, intercultural competence, time management, teamwork, plurilingual and interpersonal communication skills and others). The innovative components in the new course are student-centredness, service learning and the collaboration between domestic and foreign students. GELS pilot teaching was launched in February 2020 and has been repeated during four following semesters (up to December 2021), despite severe pandemic constraints. The author presents some results from the verification of this pedagogical innovation in the teachers' university training curriculum. It has been tested by three quantitative-qualitative research methods: pre-term and post-term questionnaires, content analysis of students' seminar work, reflective individual diaries and group reports. Although the results from all of them are briefly stated, this focused on the results from the last mentioned analysis – diaries and group reports. The results of the data analysis show that this innovation has proved to be feasible and effective in achieving an increase in students' transversal skills, especially project management skills, interpersonal

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skills, communication skills, ICT skills, time and project management, tolerance and flexibility, critical and reflective thinking skills and open-mindedness.

**Keywords:** transferable competences, teaching, students, education, pre-service teachers, service learning

## Introduction

“The combination of teaching a rich body of knowledge and providing engaging opportunities to apply this knowledge is a challenge for teachers.” (Economou, 2016, p. 29)

At the beginning of the third decade of the 21st century, curriculum designers of tertiary pre-service teacher education are under growing pressure from the quantity of societal expectations about the qualities that should be acquired by their graduates during their studies. Various stakeholders, such as governments, students’ parents and employers demand more than just teaching skills and professional knowledge of their main subjects which used to be sufficient in the past. Changes in society, especially due to the boom in information technologies and the unprecedented extent of online workspace, but also due to various threats to the existence of life on Earth and, most recently, to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, have rapidly accelerated changes in the required professions in the labour market and the scope of information and competences that need to be taught to the latest Generation Alfa. Current pre-service teachers have to be able to prepare their students for professions, the majority of which will differ from the existing ones. According to The Future of Jobs report (World Economic Forum, 2016, p. 3), “in many industries and countries, the most in-demand occupations or specialties did not exist 10 or even five years ago, and the pace of change is set to accelerate”. “Students today are likely to have several careers in their lifetime. They must develop strong critical thinking and interpersonal communication skills in order to be successful in an increasingly fluid, interconnected, and complex world” (Terzieva et al., 2015, p. 25–26). Thus, to train future teachers means to transform their preparation by including the development of their global and transversal competences and skills, in order to train their students’ in 21st century skills and competences needed for their future jobs.

Accordingly to European Union documents, competences “comprise skills (as well as attitudes, knowledge, etc.)” (Ananiadou & Claro, 2009, p. 8), where knowledge includes data, facts, ideas, or theoretical concepts (linked to

a practical field or scientific discipline); skills (practical or cognitive) are the abilities to apply knowledge and use it in various contexts in order to achieve results; and attitudes are the disposition and mind-set to act on or react to ideas, persons or situations (European Commission, 2008; Council of the European Union, 2018).

In the European education space, competence-based education has been recommended for more than 20 years – starting with *the Bologna Declaration* (Adam, 2004; Davies, 2017; EHEA, 1999). The question is, to what extent have these recommendations been applied in European countries? The Berlin Conference of Ministers of Education in 2003 and the subsequent Bologna Ministerial Communiqués repeatedly comment on the ongoing need for competence-based education (Council of the European Union, 2004). In 2004, the Council of the EU reported a non-satisfactory state of competence development in Europe, saying that “nearly 20% of young people fail to acquire key competences” (Council of the European Union, 2004, p. 18). The emphasis is placed on the importance of not only specific professional knowledge, skills and competences but also on attaining “generic (sometimes called key transferable skills) relate[d] to any and all disciplines e.g. written, oral, problem-solving, information technology, and team working skills, etc.” (Adam, 2004, p. 5).

In the following years, the EC paid attention to this basic educational requirement in other substantial documents, such as *A New Skills Agenda for Europe* (Soldi et al., 2016) and the ESCO Strategic Framework: European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations – a multilingual classification system for European skills, competences, qualifications and occupations (ESCO Board, 2017). The research team involved in the project the Assessment of Transversal Skills 2020 – ATS2020 (Economou, 2016), co-founded by the European Union, provided a diachronic and synchronic overview of some existing transversal skill frameworks, bringing together evidence about a large number of research and theoretical models of skill development (Economou, 2016). Also, individual countries have been actively promoting and applying competence-based teacher education for several years now. For example, according to the website of Oulu University of Applied Sciences, their School of Professional Teacher Education has been preparing educational professionals who are able to use competency based work methods and digital technology and various learning and guiding environments (2021).

On the other hand, as Finnish authors commented in 2019 (Kepanen et al., 2019), “although there is plenty of research nationally and internationally



about the idea of competence-based education, the student perspective has remained in the shadows” (p. 1). In some countries, there is still a quite long way to go to achieve real reform of traditional knowledge-focused education and to incorporate ideas of lifelong learning into reality for education students and their teachers. This is the case in Slovakia, where the reform of teacher education towards the nourishment of the key competences did not take place until the end of the second decade of the 21st century (Porubský et al., 2014).

### **Transversal skills and competences – definitions, frameworks and assessment**

Probably the earliest term used for ‘general’ human – working and life – skills and competences is the term *soft skills*, which means “the required interpersonal and intra-personal skills necessary to be effective in the workplace” or “a set of intangible personal characteristics, traits, attributes, habits and attitudes that can be used in many different types of occupations” (UNESCO, 2013). As the term “soft” has several underestimating connotations that underestimate the significance of these skills it is no longer in line with the current situation and is therefore no longer appropriate (Kosová et al., 2019).

Similarly, the term *generic skills* was used to describe skills important for work, education and life in general, applicable in various occupations. They do not describe skills specific for one job, but cross-sectional skills important for work, education and life in general (Kosová et al., 2019). A synonym for generic skills and competences is the term *key competences*, needed for everyone’s personal fulfilment and development, employability, social inclusion, sustainable lifestyle, a successful life in peaceful societies, health-conscious life management and active citizenship. In 2006, the European Commission published a list of eight key competences for lifelong learning: communication in the mother tongue; communication in foreign languages; competences in maths, science and technology; digital competence; learning to learn; interpersonal, intercultural and social competences and civic competence; entrepreneurship; and cultural expression (European Parliament and the Council, 2006). In 2018, the Council of the EU gave a further description of the recommended *key competences*, underlining the “awareness of all learners and educational staff of the importance of the acquisition of key competences and their relation to society” – to learning to learn competence, life

management, STEM competences (in sciences, technology, engineering and mathematics), entrepreneurship, digital, linguistic, and citizenship competences (Council of the European Union, 2018). According to the Council, these key competences consist of various skills, such as problem solving and decision making, teamwork, critical thinking, risk assessment, constructive management of emotions, communication and negotiation skills, analytical skills, creativity and intercultural skills (Council of the European Union, 2018; Economou, 2016; ETSC, 2018). Both of these older terms (generic or key competences) relate to the application of the acquired education at work or in the professions, and therefore have strong political-economic contexts, such as employment development and economic growth.

Different experts prefer different variations of the names for skills and competences considered common to the whole human race, e.g. transferable skills, 21st century skills, global or transversal competences. Most of them are considered to be overlapping synonyms (Economou, 2016; Terzieva et al., 2015). The differences result from their emphasis on various typical features as we can see from their brief descriptions below.

Skills and competences that are acquired “through training or through work experience” in one context, e.g. in education, and that can be effectively used and further developed in another context e.g. in employment, or in business, are sometimes called *transferable skills* (Scholz et al., 2009). The emphasis is on their transferability in terms of the process of individual careers.

More current concepts, as used for example by the OECD, are *21st century skills and competences* and *global competences*. The former emphasises the needs of the emerging economic and social development in the 21st century (Ananiadou & Claro, 2009), and the latter emphasises competences required in various intercultural situations and in dealing with global issues, potentially affecting people anywhere in the world and influencing not only the current, but also the next generations (OECD, 2018). They include creativity or innovation, critical thinking, problem solving, decision making, communication, collaboration, information literacy, research and inquiry, media literacy, digital citizenship, ICT operations and concepts, flexibility and adaptability, initiative and self-direction, productivity, leadership and responsibility.

*Transversal skills and competences* emphasise cross-sectionality in terms of the content, not a specific task/role/discipline, but usability in various contexts. They may include an emphasis on humanity and the holistic development of the personality of learners (UNESCO, 2013), based on collaboration, self-discipline, resourcefulness, and respect for the environment. These are skills

that all types of education, work and careers have in common and can serve as a bridge between education and work, and between different careers and personal lives (Kosová et al., 2019; Scholz et al., 2009). It was the education component that led the author to the decision to use the term *transversal competences* in this article.

So far several overlapping categorisations and frameworks of various sets of transversal competences and skills have been produced. Economou (2016, pp. 31–32) characterises the following ones: enGauge 21st Century Skills (Lemke, 2002), The Definition and Selection of Competences: Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations (DeSeCo) (Rychen & Salganik, 2003), The Key Competences for Lifelong Learning – A European Framework (Council of the European Union 2006 & 2018), The Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21) (2007), The ISTE Standards for Students (ISTE, 2007, 2016), Assessment and Teaching of 21st Century Skills (Binkley et al., 2012), the KSAVE Framework (Putro, 2017), The Technology and Engineering Literacy Framework (National Assessment Governing Board, 2014), and The Key Skills of Junior Cycle Framework (Department of Education and Skills, 2015). Most of them emphasise a similar set of competences as OECD/CERI (Fadel, 2008), which is the starting point for our analysis below.

In 2020, after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the European Union reacted to the newly increased need for transversal work and life competences. In the document European Skills Agenda (July 2020), the EU proposed twelve actions in order for Europe to be able to recover from the losses due to the pandemic, among them the development of skills for life (“media literacy, civic competences, and financial, environmental and health literacy”) and transversal skills (“cooperation and critical thinking”) (European Commission, 2020).

In the context of education, it is necessary to pay attention to the assessment of the development of transversal skills (Terzieva et al., 2015). According to the VISKA project funded by the EU (ETSC, 2018, p. 9), the assessment should be holistic, consisting of (a) precisely defined learning outcomes and levels of their achievement; (b) validation of the learning outcomes of prior learning compared in context of specific jobs; (c) assessment of the achievement of learning outcomes using various assessment procedures and techniques “competence portfolio, self-assessment, dialogue with guidance professionals, peers (through group work) and assessment interviews (based on dialogue, examples and cases)”.

So far we described one of the current challenges in teacher education – the expansion of the expectations that teacher training will include the development of transversal competences of future teachers. As current developments in society and life on Earth show, acquiring these competences is the only responsible way to prepare the future citizens of our planet. The question is: How should teachers be prepared for these new requirements in the middle of an already crowded teacher training curriculum?

Teacher education is a specific field of education in which “new teaching and learning approaches are needed in order to address transversal competences, which demand a change of teachers’ role, from transmitters of knowledge to facilitators of learning” (Economou, 2016, p. 29). An internationally widespread model, built on previous models and experience in the development of transversal skills via teacher education, is the model of the Assessment of Transversal Skills – ATS2020 (Economou, 2016). It is a complex learning model which includes both the teacher’s role in the process of development of transversal skills (coaching, assessment) and the student’s involvement in their own learning. It consists of several procedural constituents, such as prior knowledge, setting of the goals, choosing appropriate tools and strategies, evidence and self-evaluation.

### Research context

Inspired by the challenge to develop global skills and competences of future teachers of the youngest Generation as mentioned in the above-mentioned framework and models, the team of teachers and researchers from Matej Bel University (MBU) in Slovakia decided to create and implement an innovation into an existing teacher education programme that would develop the transversal skills of their students – future teachers – without the need to increase the number of hours in the curriculum. The team transformed the existing, traditionally designed CLIL (content and language integrated learning) course for pre-service primary school teachers – into a newly-designed student-centred course called *Global Encounters in Local Settings* (GELS) – GELS because it places the development of future teachers’ professional as well as transversal skills into the natural context of cooperation with foreign students studying in various programs. GELS enables the development of future teachers’ professional skills as well as their transversal skills by changing the basic approach to teaching university students.

The GELS course design allows all individual students to develop autonomously in the above-mentioned areas by implementing a service-learning strategy which was established at the MBU almost 10 years ago (Brozmanová Gregorová et al., 2014). Its main idea is to create space for students to learn through serving a community as well as working with that community. At the beginning of each semester, the student groups have to analyse the needs of any community, which they agree on, and then create a meaningful project for – and with this community. They have to elaborate it – when possible – in consultation with the community. The project should at least partially meet the selected need. The condition of this project is that there should be community service parallel to the learning of students through this service. At the end of the project, significant emphasis is placed on individual and group reflection and self-reflection, dissemination of the project and its evaluation by external evaluators. Our thesis is that through these GELS joint projects domestic and foreign students might develop, not only their linguistic and intercultural skills, but quite naturally their transversal skills and competences also, e.g., critical thinking skills, active citizenship, intercultural and plurilingual competence, time management, leadership skills, interpersonal competences, and teamwork.

GELS pilot teaching launched in February 2020 and since then the course has been provided repeatedly during the four following semesters (up to December 2021), despite severe pandemic constraints. It was attended by domestic and foreign students (Erasmus exchanges, students studying in English-medium study programs, and also students registered through the eMERGE program). The research was accomplished thanks to funding by the Cultural and Educational Grant Agency at the Slovak Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport.

## Methodology and methods

The implementation of GELS as a pedagogic innovation, compared with a traditional teacher training curriculum, has been accompanied by quantitative and qualitative research since February 2020.

**The overall aim of our research** was to find out whether the newly designed GELS course in primary school teachers university curriculum would prove to be feasible and effective in achieving the key aims of CLIL





(professional and foreign language integrated learning) – such as increasing level of professional communication in foreign languages as well as of intercultural competence, but also the growth of students' transversal skills, e.g. project management skills, tolerance and flexibility, critical and reflective thinking skills, ability to negotiate, create and carry out projects, open-mindedness etc. To confirm this complex research thesis, it was necessary to confirm all three strands, and hence to use three research methods.

For reasons of objectivity, validity and reliability, the research used the following three methods: (1) analysis of students' work, (2) pre- and post-term questionnaires with open questions, and (3) reflective diaries were used with each GELS course in the four semesters (2020–2021). The first two methods were used to test the growth of language and intercultural skills and the third one, predominantly qualitative, the growth of transversal skills.

The predominant purpose of the **content analysis** of students' work was to verify if GELS as a pedagogic innovation results not only in newly formulated transversal competences, but if, at the same time, it fulfils the original purpose of this foreign language course – the development of students' plurilingual and intercultural competences. The basic requirement for continuing this GELS experiment was to maintain at least the same standard of improvement in the level of foreign language competence as used to be achieved in the previous CLIL courses. The researchers focused on foreign language communicative skills (reading professional texts with comprehension, writing notes and summaries from those texts, listening comprehension of videos and speaking skills via presentations and the ability to contribute and even lead discussion and whole seminars) of the students in the experimental groups and compared them with the other groups studying in typical English for Specific Purposes (ESP) / English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses.

The **questionnaires** were created on the basis of intercultural dilemmas with the aim of diagnosing a possible increase in intercultural competence through GELS. Control groups were created to compare the added value of GELS against traditional language courses.

**Diaries by individuals**, as well as **group reports** from GELS groups, were used in order to document the growth of transversal competences from a different metacognitive, reflective and even emotional perspective. Both documents were a mandatory part of the GELS course. Students should have recorded in their diaries any reflections on their own learning in response to the question: What did I learn today? What else do I want to learn? In their group reports, students had to answer similar questions in pre-prepared group



worksheets. In their group reports and reflections, the students freely, without any influence from the researchers, were to describe in their own words what they considered as a benefit of the GELS course.

At the end of each GELS semester and after data collection via all three pre-planned methodological procedures, the data obtained were analysed, coded, categorised and evaluated. Most of the results of the quantitative analyses have already been published, others are currently being processed. In this article we present results from a qualitative analysis based on individual students' reflective diaries and group reports.

### Research sample

The overall research sample consisted of 120 MBU students enrolled in GELS, coming from various study programs and study fields. For the purpose of this study, we only chose the students in primary education teaching programmes. In the Slovak context, primary teachers are prepared to teach all subjects to 6–10 year old pupils (if they also choose the foreign language minor, they can get a licence to teach foreign languages). In the experiment with GELS – which has taken place in 4 semesters so far (winter and summer terms in 2020 and 2021), both experimental ( $N = 42$ ) and control ( $N = 42$ ) groups were included. That means that the overall number of students involved in the research was 84 (12 in the first term, 24 in the second term, 28 in the third term and 20 in the fourth term).

### Research findings

Although the results from the reflective diaries and group reports are going to be presented, to confirm our overall thesis it is necessary to present, at least briefly, the findings from the first two methods.

As regards the **questionnaires**, their data were transferred into descriptive tables showing the difference between pre-test and post-test level of transversal skills and competences of both the experimental and control groups. Due to the rather small groups of respondents and their selections, the results were processed only via descriptive statistics. If in the future there are bigger groups of applicants for this course, the inferential statistics will

be used. The results in each semester have shown a positive increase in the level of intercultural competence of the experimental group of GELS students. In comparison, the students in the controlled groups showed only a minimal increase in their intercultural competence.

Data from **analysing students' work** testing the fulfilment of the original aims of the foreign language course, were processed also only via descriptive statistics due to the specifics of each group included in the project (different entry level, small numbers of students and minimum possibility of objectively ensuring the selection of linguistically comparable groups). The results confirmed the fulfilment of the foreign language skills growth requirement of university foreign language courses. Compared to previous CLIL courses, the GELS students on average have shown a significant increase in their speaking skills, presentation skills and the ability to discuss in a foreign language. This success inspired several domestic students to apply for international mobility next semester. Comparable to control groups, GELS students have also developed their writing skills. In terms of reading and listening skills, it depended on the focus of the GELS project. However, due to the pandemic, GELS students in the field did not have as many project options as control students. A certain feeling of discomfort by the students with lower entry level of foreign language command has also emerged, especially in case of introverts. For them (approximately 5% of GELS students), the language skill requirements for GELS were so demanding that they would rather have opted for a traditional CLIL course.

The last of the methods, which focused predominantly on obtaining qualitative data, were **group reports and reflective student diaries**. The researchers compiled all the statements of the students into one document, then filtered the statements that either explicitly or implicitly mentioned transversal competences. Then, based on the students' statements, the researchers created categories of individual transversal skills. They analysed all the collected statements and coded them. Without any pre-set exact scales or pre-formulated instructions about assessment and evaluation conclusions, students in all GELS groups identified the improvement of several of their transversal skills and competences as the main added value of this teacher training innovation. Table 1 summarises the number of occurrences of a given transversal competence or skill (both explicit and implicit) showing the GELS students' feedback and evaluation from all four terms: summer term 2019/20, winter term 2020/21, summer term 2020/21, and winter term 2021/22. It

turned out that the GELS students valued the acquisition of transversal skills. They have seen improvements especially in their interpersonal skills (1/4 of statements), then organisational and managerial competences (1/5 of statements), but also personal qualities and skills, communication skills, ICT skills. They emphasised abilities to work in teams, collaborate, give/receive feedback or flexibility and adaptability.

Table 1. Explicit students' evaluation of GELS impact on their competence/skills/personality growth (own research by the author)

Number of GELS student using the following statements (out of total N): "GELS developed/enriched my..."	summer term 2019/20 (N = 6)	winter term 2020/21 (N = 12)	summer term 2020/21 (N = 14)	winter term 2021/22 (N = 10)
"overall global competences"	1	–	–	–
communication and plurilingual competences:	11.7%	12.7%	18%	17%
– participating in discussions	2	5	4	4
– negotiation	1	7	9	7
– focusing on a topic	–	1	–	–
– <b>better use of English</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>
– guessing meaning of words in other languages	–	5	4	3
<b>organisational and managerial competences:</b>	<b>21.5%</b>	<b>26.2%</b>	<b>19.4%</b>	<b>19.5%</b>
– setting the goals	–	8	5	5
– group management	3	7	4	4
– project management	3	9	8	5
– time management	3	10	8	7
– organising activities, events	2	2	2	2
<b>interpersonal competences:</b>	<b>27.4%</b>	<b>28.4%</b>	<b>26.6%</b>	<b>28%</b>
– identifying people's needs	1	4	5	4
– <b>teamwork</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>
– <b>collaboration/cooperation</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>
– ability to agree with others	2	2	4	3
– <b>giving &amp; receiving feedback</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>
– mediation skills	–	1	–	–
– serving others with one's skills	–	–	1	–
– group decision-making	–	4	3	4
– empathy, compassion, mindfulness	2	4	2	3
– overcoming each other's setbacks	–	–	1	–
– offering help /receiving help	–	1	2	2

research competences:	9.8%	0.7%	0.7%	
– creation of polling forms	3	–	–	–
– analytical thinking	–	1	1	–
– statistics	2	–	–	–
IT skills:	5.8%	3.5%	5.8%	9.3%
– graphs, charts, statistic pies	3	–	3	1
– creating/maintaining webs	–	5	5	–
– using smartphone apps	–	–	–	5
– creating smartphone apps	–	–	–	5
intercultural competence:	3.9%	6.4%	7.2%	6.8%
– understanding other culture	2	7	8	5
– tolerance	–	2	2	3
personality qualities:	15.6%	14.2%	15.1%	13.6%
– <b>flexibility, adaptability</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>4</b>
– creativity	3	–	2	2
– patience	1	–	–	–
– professional responsibility	–	2	1	1
– adaptability (to changes, limits)	–	3	2	4
– opinion-making, open mind, assertive	1	7	6	5
– maximalising personal skills	–	1	2	–
cognitive skills:	1.9%	7.8%	7.2%	5.9%
– content knowledge (culture, biology, sports, informatics)	–	3	3	2
– critical and reflective thinking	1	8	7	5
Total number of statements in each semester group (percentage):	51 (100%)	141 (100%)	139 (100%)	118 (100%)

The added value of GELS is evident also from the comparison of GELS diaries with the optional diaries of non-GELS students in the control groups. The evaluation statements of the students from the control groups were much less extensive. In addition to the developed communicative competence in English, they only mentioned the development of content knowledge, technological, teamwork and giving feedback competences.

At the end of this section, we present the actual statements by students. We do so with a dual methodological purpose: (1) for research documentation purposes – to allow the reader to imagine the original form of the students' statements as a source for subsequent content analysis, but also (2) conveying an authentic experience of enthusiasm from GELS and the possibility of self-motivation for this pedagogical innovation.

The individual evaluation statements by the GELS student groups also testify to the positive results of this innovation:

GELS students during the 1st semester – spring 2020 (1st wave of the pandemic in Slovakia):

Ultimately, the service-learning concept was a success since, instead of merely providing theoretical knowledge on a subject, we were afforded an opportunity to conceptualise and implement a project which not only enriched our professional competences but, hopefully, could also add value to the student community. (GELS 1, 1)

Our team showed definitive improvement in all of the key competences, they grew naturally in proportion to growth in communicative skill and multicultural skill. As shyness and confusion began to dissipate, and we became more open to collaboration, our results gradually began to improve, as did our work speed and overall productivity. It also promoted the less sociable or open of us to become more opinionated and to become decision-makers, which will be rather valuable for our individual futures. (GELS 1, 2)

We learned how to maximise our personal skills and pass them unto others, so that they might be useful to our common goal. We spoke freely and made more concise decisions as time went on, and more effectively figured out how to tackle the problem at hand. Our own previously owned skills received ample ground for improvement, and we made the best of them, from powerful mediation to a subtle knowledge of something as hidden as colour theory and how it might make our project more appealing. (GELS 1, 3)

We also grew more mindful of each other's personal setbacks and difficulties, and how to overcome them, making us more compassionate and mindful towards people overall. We did not let the palpable language barrier hinder our goals, though it did take moulding and accommodating to reach a level comfortable overall, but we believed it was reached fairly and kindly. (GELS 1, 4)

We were taught patience, resilience, mindfulness and experienced the wonders of multiculturalism in a new light, and skills like those could not be more valuable in the globalised world of today. (GELS 1, 5)

We have learnt how to set goals, how to speak our mind, feelings, and ideas freely. We have learnt how to offer and receive offered help, which is not easy sometimes. In the beginning, just a few members of the group were involved in the discussion but at the end of the activity, almost every member was involved and participated during discussions and decision making. In the beginning, it was very hard to arrange a meeting for all members of the team. We were too busy with classes or various duties. Our flexibility improved as the semester ended. We were able to adapt and meet at any time. As the previous table shows, we have learnt a lot. We have gained a lot of experiences, knowledge, and improved lots of skills. For example, we developed some multicultural skills and improved our



communication skills, especially communication in the English language. We have learnt how to express our ideas assertively. (GELS 1, 6)

GELS students during the 2nd semester – autumn 2020 (2nd wave of the pandemic in Slovakia):

What have we learned from project? The concept of 'perspective'. That is the word that defines what we learned when creating this academic project. The place you are born in the world, makes you look at it from a different angle, with different eyes, and that it why connecting with other cultures can be so important and fulfilling. This idea came to our minds even more when we analysed the news that we were working on from each country, and that is something that we can take with us as a positive point. We cannot forget the translation itself; it was a skill that we developed a lot during this project, and it can be an amazing tool for the future. And, in the end, working with a motivated team was an amazing experience and we could all learn and help each other while making our LocalNewsGlobally project possible. We were surprised we were able to manage the whole project on our own. (GELS 2, 6)

But more than just informatics skills, we also developed our capacity to lead a project totally by our own and forced us to make decisions. It also shows us that the organisation in a team is building up naturally, without speaking of it, one or two people will take the lead of the group and will take more decision or more initiatives in order to help the others. Moreover, the way of communication was totally new as only distance communication was possible without any real meeting. It forced us to adapt to this situation and change all the way of working we were used to. To summarise, this project gave us knowledge in informatics, in communication and team building but also improved our capacity of adaptation to unknown situations and also improved our maturity. (GELS 2, 9)

Apart from discussing a lot, we learned multiple unexpected things about our group members. The subtle nuances of different cultural heritages and the alignment for this shared work brought us further as humans, not just students. Sure, our idea of cultural integration might sound idealistic at times, but just by sharing this idea with others we might already bring slight change, hopefully for the better. (GELS 2, 11)

GELS students during the 3rd semester – spring 2021 (2nd wave of the pandemic in Slovakia):

For us personally, this multicultural group work was a pleasing experience to widen our knowledge about similarities and difference for our countries. We implemented every skill each of our group members have and had lots of fun creating such a project with each other. (GELS 3, 8)

## Discussion

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions and lockdowns, GELS courses could not be implemented in the planned face-to-face regime. Its students had to respond flexibly to the limitations of online planning and elaboration of their GELS projects, as well as their presentation and evaluation. They focused their projects on the communities they were in contact with during the pandemic: the needs of the community of foreign citizens in their town or village, the community of foreign students at the university, the community of foreign migrants, the needs of children and families from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, as well as on typical pandemics and the post-pandemic needs of the mentally unstable, and on families without continuous access to the internet and thus to online education during the lockdowns.

In spite of this very limiting factor – as we are talking about working with a certain community and not just about students learning in their typical classroom – the results of this innovation are encouraging.

At the beginning of our study, we presented several definitions and models for the development of key/global/transversal competences. Organisations such as the EU, UNESCO and OECD have been dealing with this issue for a long time and have published a number of studies. National education systems have declared the acceptance of those competences into their curricula.

The question is, however, what really happens in schools and teacher training institutions? This is also illustrated by OECD research in 17 countries (Ananiadou & Claro, 2009). Most responding countries agreed on the need to develop 21st century skills in teacher training. But the extent to which they carry out this kind of teacher training varies considerably. “It is, however, not clear to what extent these training programmes place particular emphasis on the teaching and assessment of 21st century skills” (Ananiadou & Claro, 2009, p. 8). Some focus on developing only some of the skills. Others offer optional courses or even specific new programmes teaching these skills (especially in countries where a thorough educational reform took place).

UNESCO in 2015 found out that while, on the one hand, teachers are gradually adapting to new expectations and increasingly trying to invest effort into the development of their students’ transversal skills and competences, their “confidence and motivation is influenced by an over-emphasis in the school

culture on good examination results in traditional academic subjects, and by teachers being overwhelmed by work demands” (Economou, 2016, p. 29).

We compared the results of students’ statements about the developed competences and skills with the frameworks mentioned in the introduction of this article. Compared to the framework of competences recommended by OECD (Fadel, 2008) and eight key competences and related skills recommended by the EU (2018), the students mentioned all except the entrepreneurship competence and the risk assessment skills (which was confirmed by the observing GELS teacher trainer). Amongst the OECD’s 21st century skills and competences framework (2018), all but productivity were explicitly mentioned by GELS graduates. However, throughout the whole semester, students were producing projects to meet the needs of the community, so it can be said that from the point of view of the course observer, this competence was also developed.

The results of our qualitative analysis show the real impact of the implemented service-learning innovation on the process of acquiring transversal competences. The added value of the implementation of a service-learning project in education has already been proven through multiple research projects in various educational institutions around the world, e.g. as pointed out by Eyler et al. (2001). In their overview of studies about the positive impact of service-learning on personal, social and educational outcomes, as well as on career development and relationships with domestic institutions, they also mention the development of transversal skills and competences: (a) personal development (awareness of self-efficacy, personal identity, moral development) and development of interpersonal skills (to cooperate, lead, communicate despite differences and a belief in the importance of diversity); (b) development of the social dimension (social skills, elimination of stereotypes, facilitation of cultural understanding, development of social responsibility and civic skills, willingness to decide to help the community and involvement in the community); and cognitive but also affective growth (ability to apply the acquired knowledge in practice, critical thinking, ability to solve problems, and others (positive impact on preparation for the profession after graduation). The positive impact of service-learning in university courses on developing critical thinking skills was also mentioned by other research teams (Burbach, Matkin, & Fritz, 2004).



## Conclusions

The aim of this paper was to show one of the possible ways how to convincingly incorporate the development of not only professional and foreign language skills and competences but also transversal competences into teacher education without increasing demand for human or financial resources.

The analysis of the differences between pre-term and post-term questionnaires, the analysis of students' foreign language outputs, and of students' diaries and group reports brought evidence that a service learning course focused on both the individual student's need and the community need, taught in a foreign language thanks to collaboration between domestic and foreign students, is a feasible and effective pedagogical innovation in the pre-service teachers curriculum.

In spite of the pandemic and other limitations – that this was a qualitative examination of rather small, deliberately selected samples and thus this research does not claim to be generalised – we believe that GELS as the pedagogical innovation was verified, to the extent that qualitative research allows, via students' reflections. Although it needs continuing development and further research, the results so far demonstrate that it is possible to move forward the efforts for real development in pre-service teachers' transversal skills and competences.

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## **Health and Health Literacy in Teacher Education: Comparative Analyses of Student Teachers and Teacher Trainees\*\*\***

### **Summary**

Health literacy (HL) represents an important determinant of health and is considered a necessary prerequisite for health-promoting behaviour as well as the maintenance and promotion of health. Strengthening HL is an important aspect of prevention and health promotion in the context of (teacher) education and it is partially integrated into the German Professional Standards for Teachers. Previous study results of (prospective) teachers point to deficient training regarding health-related competencies in the context of their qualification. Overall, there are too few studies on prospective teachers' HL and only few that focus on the key health-related competencies of HL in the context of prospective teachers' health. Linking this study examined the HL and health status of student teachers (ST) and teacher trainees (TT) and their differences. In addition, the association between the two constructs will be elaborated. In this study, 195 ST and 242 TT participated in an online survey, which used questionnaires to assess HL and health status. The statistical analysis took into consideration t-tests, product-moment correlations, and multivariate regression analyses.

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With the exception of key HL competence *communication and cooperation*, the other key HL competencies were significantly stronger among ST. In contrast, TT assessed their health status significantly better. In terms of correlations, ST and TT abilities to self-regulate played a leading role. In ST, *self-regulation* represented the statistically strongest predictor for health status, but in TT, *proactive approach to health* represented the strongest predictor.

**Keywords:** health literacy, health status, student teachers, teacher trainees, teachers' health promotion

## Introduction

Since the turn of the century, health and health promotion have become increasingly important in the context of professional research on the teaching profession (Sandmeier, Mustafić, & Krause, 2020). The teaching profession is associated with a variety of occupational stresses (Abel & Sewell, 1999; Bradley, 2007) that, depending on an individual's assessment, may negatively impact a teacher's health or increase the likelihood of illness. In the context of salutogenesis, the availability of resistance resources is important for coping with occupational demands (Antonovsky, 1997). Health literacy represents such a resource and is understood as a key competence to strengthen physical and mental health as well as well-being. Promoting health literacy is also an important task related to prevention and health promotion in an educational context (Schaeffer, Hurrelmann, Bauer, & Kolpatzik, 2018). So far, health literacy has rarely been considered in the context of teacher education, although it seems to be relevant in light of teachers' increasing psychological stress and stress-induced health risks (Schaarschmidt & Kieschke, 2013). Initial study results on the health literacy of teachers indicated that more than half have limited health literacy (Hartmann, Rückmann, & Tannen, 2020). Further findings on student teachers replicated this in terms of insufficient health literacy (Ahmadi & Montazeri, 2019). Lamanauskas (2018) points out a lack of training in health-related competencies as part of teacher qualifications.

Overall, there are too few studies on the health literacy of prospective teachers and none that focus on the development of health-related competencies and their association with health in order to be able to derive recommendations for teachers' health promotion within the context of teacher education. Soellner, Huber, Lenartz, and Rudinger, (2010) and Lenartz (2012) developed a structural model of health literacy in which – in addition to the basic skills – advanced skills (key health literacy competencies) form the core

of the model (Soellner & Rudinger, 2018). The development of these key health literacy competencies could lead to an improvement in health literacy and an improvement in health.

The aim of this study is first to elaborate how the key competencies of health literacy of prospective teachers (student teachers and teacher trainees) are developed and how they assess their health status. Related to this, it will be investigated whether they differ in these two constructs. Second, the association between the key competencies of health literacy and the health status will be determined. Recommendations for teacher education in the context of teachers' health promotion will be derived from the study results.

Accordingly, the research questions are as follows:

1. How developed are the key health literacy competencies of student teachers and teacher trainees and do they differ?
2. How is the health status of student teachers and teacher trainees and do they differ?
3. How are the key health literacy competencies associated with student teachers' and teacher trainees' health status?

## Theoretical and empirical background

The World Health Organization defines health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity (Franzkowiak & Hurrelmann, 2018). Teachers' health is seen as a central resource for schools and their development (Paulus & Schumacher, 2007). Recent findings identified that teachers' health is related to school quality in many ways (Klusmann, Kunter, Voss, & Baumert, 2008; Klusmann, Richter, & Lüdtke, 2016). According to these findings, teachers' health and well-being have an influence on students' well-being, motivation to perform and educational success. Healthy teachers are better at building positive social relationships with their students than unhealthy teachers. They have a demonstrably positive impact on students' performance (Herzog, Sandmeier & Affolter, 2021). The definition of health describes a positive understanding of health, which is integrated in the concept of salutogenesis by Antonovsky (1997), and the development of resistance resources is essential for the long-term healthy coping with (professional) demands. In this context, the teaching profession is associated with a variety of occupational stressors and requires

sufficient resistance resources. An explanatory framework for this can be found in the context of teacher health in theoretical models such as the transactional stress model (Lazarus, 1966; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) or the job demands-resources model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

### Teachers' Health in the Context of Teacher Education

In Germany, teacher education is structured into two consecutive phases – the first phase is carried out within a university and the second phase is more practical oriented *trainee phase* (called '*Referendariat*' or '*Vorbereitungsdienst*') usually lasting between 18 and 24 months. This phase is independent of the universities and organised by special 'teacher training seminars' as well as 'training schools'. During this phase, teacher trainees are prepared for their professional duties and their work at school. Their performance and their professional development are evaluated and supervised by mentors from their 'training schools' and teachers from their 'training seminars' (a more detailed overview of German teacher education and international comparison can be found in Howe, 2006).

#### *Student Teachers*

Study results on the health of student teachers indicated that they predominantly assess their health status as satisfactory to good (Jantonowski, 2008). However, they already showed more frequent unfavourable coping patterns compared to other students (Römer, Appel, Drews, & Rauin, 2012). Schaarschmidt and Fischer (2008) designed a multidimensional personality diagnostic inventory that can be used to identify work-related behaviour and experience patterns (*AVEM-Inventar*). The procedure identifies health-promoting or health-threatening behaviours and experience patterns when coping with work and occupational demands, integrating these into four patterns. The *health-ambitious type* (H) is characterised by a high level of occupational commitment and at the same time, pronounced resistance to stress. The *unambitious type* (U) is characterised by low occupational engagement but high resilience. People assigned to the following two risk patterns are thought to be at a high risk for burnout and stress. "The excessively *ambitious type* (A), scoring high on engagement and low on resilience, is characterized by excessive engagement, striving for perfection, and an inability to recover emotionally from work" (Klusmann et al., 2008, p. 704). A low level of commitment to work



and a low level of professional ambition are found in people who are assigned to the *resigned type* (R), which goes hand in hand with a reduced ability to cope with stress (Schaarschmidt, 2005). Twenty-five percent of student teachers classified themselves as the *resigned type* (R) (i.e. at risk of burnout). However, the results regarding the health situation of student teachers are inconsistent (Reichl, Wach, Spinath, Brünken, & Karbach, 2014; Roloff Henoch, Klusmann, Lüdtke, & Trautwein, 2015). Rothland (2011), for example, indicated a more favourable assessment, as only 15.5% of student teachers are assigned to the *resigned type* and the *health-ambitious type* is found most frequently (35%). The results of the survey by Lenz, Cesca and Pelz (2018) showed that the requirements in the teacher training programme represent a somewhat greater burden compared to other degree programmes at the university. Student teachers also associate the practical semester as part of their university education with a variety of new demands that can potentially represent stress (Kücholl, Westphal, Lazarides, & Gronostaj, 2019). They already feel exposed to high levels of stress during the practical phase due to parallel work at school and university (Jantonowski, Bartsch, Limmer, & Gumz, 2010). Initial surveys also showed that student teachers feel stressed, especially at the end of the practical semester, although negative stress consequences do not necessarily arise for all students (Holtz, 2014). In his longitudinal study, Rauins (2007) pointed out that a deficient fit between study-related and professional demands and individual coping resources can lead to health impairments from a medium- and long-term perspective. Moreover, greater physical complaints and poorer psychological well-being could be expected in the trainee phase (Christ, 2004).

### *Teacher Trainees*

Looking at international studies, and therefore seemingly independent of the type of teacher education, it appears that the career entry phase is perceived by beginning teachers<sup>1</sup> as stressful and, above all, as insufficient in terms of coping with the actual tasks in the profession (Friedman, 2000; Klusmann, Kunter, Voss, & Baumert, 2012; Stokking, Leenders, de Jong, & van Tartwijk, 2003). Regarding the work-related behaviour and experience patterns mentioned previously, it is evident for the target group of teacher trainees in Germany that slightly less than half of them assign themselves to a pattern

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<sup>1</sup> According to Veenman (1984), all teachers in their first three years of teaching are called beginning teachers, irrespective of whether they have only a partial qualification (as in Germany in the "Referendariat") or have a full degree (see Klusmann et al., 2012).

that is harmful to their health (*ambitious type* and *resigned type*) (Darius, Bunzel, Ehms-Ciechanowicz, & Böckelmann, 2020; Lohse-Bossenz & Rutsch, 2021). Lohse-Bossenz and Rutsch (2021) investigated whether these patterns change during the trainee phase and identified a change in approximately 44% of the teacher trainees, while at the same time clarifying the dynamics of professional experience and behaviour. Concerning mental health, Darius et al. (2020) showed that almost one-third trainee teachers complain of poor mental health and increased burnout symptoms. The results of this survey were in line with the findings of Klusmann et al. (2012), who showed that emotional exhaustion is a core component of burnout syndrome and increases during the trainee phase. For the trainee phase, there is an increase in emotional exhaustion during the first year (Dicke, Elling, Schmeck, & Leutner, 2015; Dicke, Parker, Holzberger, Kunina-Habenicht, Kunter, & Leutner, 2015), followed by a decrease towards the end of the trainee phase (Klusmann et al., 2012; Kunter, Linninger, Schulze-Stocker, Kunina-Habenicht, & Lohse-Bossenz, 2013; Richter et al., 2013). Referring to work-related behaviour and experience patterns, Klusmann et al. (2012) found that teacher trainees with the *health-ambitious* and *unambitious types* reported less emotional exhaustion than teacher trainees with the *ambitious* and *resigned types*.

### Health Literacy as a Health Resource – Relevance in the Context of Teacher Education?!

Health literacy consists of cognitive and social skills that determine motivation and the ability to access, understand and use information in ways that promote and maintain health (Nutbeam, 1998). The fact that health literacy is a resistance resource for health maintenance and promotion (Kickbusch, Maag, & Saan, 2005) has become increasingly internationally accepted in recent years. This is evidenced by various initiatives of the World Health Organization, such as the *Shanghai Declaration* (WHO, 2016), the *Roadmap for the Promotion of Health Literacy over the Life Course* (WHO, 2019) and the *Manifesto on Health Literacy* (WHO, 2013). Strengthening health literacy is also an important task for prevention and health promotion in education. Institutions of the educational system have great importance for the promotion of health literacy and teachers can support people in the development of cognitive, social and emotional knowledge, skills and abilities that influence on health literacy (Schaeffer, Vogt, Berens, & Hurrelmann, 2016). In Germany, for example,

Strategy Paper #1 of the Alliance for Health Literacy recommends that the aim should be

to support teachers in all institutions of the education system to integrate health issues into their professional understanding and to improve the well-being, motivation and ability to concentrate as well as the time and stress management of their respective clientele. Steps to safeguard their health (for example, to protect against burnout syndromes) should also be more strongly addressed (Hurrelmann, Bauer, Schaeffer, 2018, p. 7; the German quote was translated into English by the authors).

Currently, various models and measurement instruments exist for health literacy (Okan, Bauer, Pinheiro, Levin-Zamir, & Sørensen, 2019). Hartmann et al. (2020) used the HLS-EU-Q16 questionnaire to examine teachers' health literacy based on the conceptual model by Sørensen et al. (2012). The results showed that more than half of the respondents have limited health literacy. In the area of health promotion, teachers find it particularly difficult to deal with mental health issues and have great difficulty finding information to improve their mental well-being (Hartmann et al., 2020). Study results based on the same conceptualisation indicated that people with higher health literacy generally assess their subjective health status better and are more likely to engage in health-promoting behaviours than people with lower health literacy (Jordan & Hoebel, 2015; Schaeffer et al., 2016). In addition to the conceptualisation by Sørensen et al. (2012), there is also the structural model of health literacy by Soellner et al. (2010) and Lenartz (2012) to be mentioned, which is consecutive and describes content components of health literacy at the level of key competencies (the English version can be found in Soellner, Lenartz, & Rudinger (2017)). In addition to the basic skills of health-related knowledge and basic health-related skills, the core of the model consists of advanced skills (*key health literacy competencies*) that describe the competencies necessary to act in a way that promote one's health (Soellner & Rudinger, 2018). These include perceptive-motivational conditions (*self-perception and proactive approach to health*) and behavioural components (*dealing with health information, self-control, self-regulation, communication and cooperation*) of health literacy. These health-related competencies offer approaches to promoting health literacy. Soellner, Huber, Lenartz, and Rudinger (2009) illustrated that individuals with low health literacy are considered to be more at risk for developing diseases in terms of their perception and processing of stressful situations. Health literacy represents a competence that, like other competencies, can be

acquired through learning (Bitzer & Sørensen, 2018; Levin-Zamir, Leung, Dodson, & Rowlands, 2017).

Promoting health literacy is an important aspect of prevention and health promotion in the context of (teacher) education (Vamos, Okan, Sentell, & Rootman, 2020), and it may allow (prospective) teachers to gain more control over their health and the factors that directly influence one's health (Abel, Sommerhalder, & Bruhin, 2018; WHO, 2017). Health literacy's early promotion has been widely discussed in school settings (Paakkari, Inchley, Schulz, Weber, & Okan, 2019; Peralta & Rowling, 2018), and teachers as health promoters should have well-developed health literacy themselves (Byrne et al., 2016; Lamanauskas & Augienė, 2019). The development of teachers' health literacy, in conjunction with their various roles in the school, represent a major component in the realisation of health education and concomitant health literacy (Byrne et al., 2016; Peterson et al., 2001) in schools (Lamanauskas, 2018). Hartmann et al. (2020) summarised that teachers' health literacy is crucial for the success of school health promotion and influences adolescents' health literacy (Lamanauskas, 2018; Okan, Pinheiro, Zamora, & Bauer, 2015; Paakkari et al., 2017).

Overall, it remains unclear how student teachers' and teacher trainees' key health literacy competencies are developed and how their health status is and whether student teachers and teacher trainees differ from each other. In the context of health promotion for prospective teachers (student teachers and teacher trainees), studies are needed to investigate how health literacy is developed among prospective teachers and how it is related to their health, in order to derive recommendations for teacher education. The following study makes a first contribution to this.

## Methods

### Sample

A total of 195 student teachers and 242 teacher trainees from Germany participated in the online survey. The teacher trainees complete an 18-month trainee phase – divided into three semesters – in Lower Saxony (Germany), and are assigned to different study seminar locations where subject-specific and pedagogical seminars take place. The participants were at different points

in their second phase of teacher education, with the majority being in the first and second semesters. They came from different school types (e.g. primary school and secondary school). On average, student teachers were  $25.0 \pm 4.1$  years old and teacher trainees were  $28.8 \pm 4.8$  years old. The composition of the sample is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution by Student Teachers and Teacher Trainees by Gender

Gender	Student Teachers		Teacher Trainees	
	n	%	n	%
female	167	86.1	193	79.8
male	25	12.9	48	19.8
diverse	2	1.0	1	.4

### Measures

For data collection, a quantitative cross-sectional survey<sup>2</sup> was conducted in the form of an anonymous online questionnaire. Health literacy was measured based on Lenartz (2011) German questionnaire. The questionnaire includes 29 items which measure key health literacy competencies in the areas of *self-regulation* (five items), *self-control* (five items), *self-perception* (five items), *proactive approach to health* (five items), *communication and cooperation* (four items), and *dealing with health information* (five items). In this study, the items were rated on a four-point Likert scale with the response alternatives 1 = ‘not correct at all’ to 4 = ‘correct’. A higher value refers to a stronger expression of the respective abilities. In the case of negatively formulated statements, the polarity of the statements made was reversed. The questionnaire proved to be a valid measuring instrument (Soellner et al., 2017) and has already been used in other studies (Kuhlmann et al., 2015; Stassen et al., 2020). In this survey, all scales had acceptable to very good internal consistency (alpha between  $\alpha = .70$  and  $\alpha = .87$ ; see Table 2).

To assess health status, we asked ‘How is your health status in general?’ in accordance with the recommendation of the World Health Organization

<sup>2</sup> The data from the student teachers were collected as part of a survey by Dr Timo Beckmann during the practical phase of student teachers at Leuphana University Lüneburg at the beginning of 2020. The data for the teacher trainees were collected as part of our cross-sectional study from November 2020 to February 2021.

(WHO) (de Bruin et al., 1996). This item has already been used in other German-language surveys (DEGS: Robert Koch-Institut, 2018, GEDA: Jordan & Hoebel, 2015). The response format includes five levels (1 = 'very poor' to 5 = 'very good'). For the analysis, the categories were dichotomised according to the GEDA study (Jordan & Hoebel, 2015) and classified into 'self-assessed good health' (values 1 and 2) or 'self-assessed poor health' (values 3–5).

### Statistical Analysis

Data analysis was performed using SPSS statistical software (version 26.0). To answer research question 1, descriptive characteristics of health literacy and health status differentiated according to the two groups were used and group differences were calculated using t-test. In the case of significant differences, effect sizes according to Cohen (1988) were determined, which can be interpreted as follows:  $d$  between 0.2 and 0.5 = small effect,  $d$  between 0.5 and 0.8 = medium effect, and  $d > 0.8$  = strong effect.

To answer research question 2, Pearson's product-moment correlations were calculated for both groups to identify the correlations between the key health literacy competencies and health status. To determine how large the correlation was, Cohen (1988) provides the following classification for interpretation:  $r = .10$  corresponds to a weak effect,  $r = .30$  corresponds to a medium effect, and  $r = .50$  corresponds to a strong effect. To test the associations between the key health literacy competencies and health status, multivariate regression analyses were performed for both groups. According to Cohen (1988), the following interpretations apply:  $|R^2| = .02$  = weak variance explanation;  $|R^2| = .13$  = moderate variance explanation;  $|R^2| = .26$  = strong variance explanation. A probability of error smaller than 5% was assumed to be significant for the results.

## Results

### Health Literacy

Student teachers had higher values than teacher trainees in all key health literacy competencies. The groups have in common that in each case, the highest mean values could be found for the scales *dealing with health*



*information* and *self-perception* and the lowest values in the scales of *communication and cooperation* and *self-regulation*. With the exception of *communication and cooperation* ( $t(428) = 1.951$ ,  $p = .052$ , 95% CI = .000 – .230), group-specific significant differences could be determined for the remaining skills (see Table 2). The effect sizes were medium (Cohen, 1988).

Table 2. Descriptive Results and Group Differences in Health Literacy

	Groups	Mean	Standard deviation	Cronbachs Alpha ( $\alpha$ )	Group Differences p – value, 95% – CI and Effect sizes
<i>self-regulation</i>	ST	2.78	.55	.77	$p < .000^{***}$ [.295 – .518] $d = .69$
	TT	2.38	.60	.80	
<i>self-control</i>	ST	3.06	.49	.81	$p < .000^{***}$ [.091 – .281] $d = .60$
	TT	2.88	.50	.78	
<i>self-perception</i>	ST	3.25	.43	.74	$p = .01^*$ [.027 – .197] $d = .57$
	TT	3.14	.45	.70	
<i>proactive approach to health</i>	ST	3.18	.52	.87	$p < .000^{***}$ [.219 – .417] $d = .67$
	TT	2.86	.51	.80	
<i>communication and cooperation</i>	ST	2.88	.60	.79	$p = .05$ [.000 – .230] $d = .55$
	TT	2.77	.61	.77	
<i>dealing with health information</i>	ST	3.34	.47	.84	$p = .024^*$ [.014 – .200] $d = .56$
	TT	3.23	.49	.83	

Notes: Range = 1–4, CI confidence interval,  $d$  effect size,  $*p < .05$ ,  $**p < .01$ ,  $***p < .001$ , ST student teachers, TT teacher trainees.

### Health Status

Of the student teachers, 63.1% rate their health status as good (49.2% = good, 13.9% = very good) and 36.8% as poor (34.2% = moderate, 2.1% = poor, 0.5% = very poor). Of the teacher trainees, 78.9% rate their health status as good (56.2% = good, 22.7% = very good) and 21.0% as poor (20.2% = moderate, 0.8% = poor). Student teachers ( $M = 3.74$ ,  $SD = .74$ ) and teacher trainees ( $M = 4.01$ ,  $SD = .68$ ) differed significantly from each other ( $t(382.511) = -3.920$ ;  $p = .000$ ; 95% CI =  $-.407 - -.133$ ;  $d = .61$ ) and the effect size is medium (Cohen, 1988).

### Associations Between Health Literacy and Health Status

An examination of the correlation coefficients for student teachers showed how differently the individual components correspond to the health status (see Table 3). The ability to *self-regulate* was primarily related to the health status ( $r = .43$ ;  $p < .01$ ). Further, *proactive approach to health* ( $r = .27$ ;  $p < .01$ ), *self-control* ( $r = .27$ ,  $p > .01$ ), and *self-perception* ( $r = .23$ ,  $p < .01$ ) also showed significant positive, but weak to moderate, associations with health status (Cohen, 1988).

Table 3. Intercorrelations (by Pearson) of the Key Health Literacy Competencies and Correlation (by Pearson) of the Key Health Literacy Competencies With Outside Criteria for Student Teachers

	SR	SC	SP	PATH	CUC	DWHI	HS
SR	1						
SC	.17*	1					
SP	.39**	.38**	1				
PATH	.27**	.17**	.39**	1			
CUC	.17*	.11 <sup>ns</sup>	.28**	.26**	1		
DWHI	.17*	.24**	.45**	.41**	.15*	1	
HS	<b>.43**</b>	<b>.27**</b>	<b>.23**</b>	<b>.27**</b>	.3 <sup>ns</sup>	.11 <sup>ns</sup>	1

Notes: The external criteria health status was surveyed by a single item, significant correlations with the external criteria are highlighted in bold, \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ , <sup>ns</sup> = not significant, SR self-regulation, SC self-control, SP self-perception, PATH proactive approach to health, CUC communication and cooperation, DWHI dealing with health information, HS health status.

The results of the correlation analysis for teacher trainees consistently showed positive correlation coefficients for the person-related components of health literacy with health status (see Table 4). The ability to *self-regulate* was primarily related to health status ( $r = .42$ ;  $p < .01$ ). *Proactive approach to health* ( $r = .27$ ;  $p < .01$ ), *self-control* ( $r = .27$ ;  $p < .01$ ), and *self-perception* ( $r = .21$ ;  $p < .01$ ) also showed positive correlations with health status. These were small to medium effects (Cohen, 1988). The remaining abilities showed no significant correlations with health status (see Table 4).



Table 4. Intercorrelations (by Pearson) of the Key Health Literacy Competencies and Correlation (by Pearson) of the Key Health Literacy Competencies With Outside Criteria for Teacher Trainees

	SR	SC	SP	PATH	CUC	DWHI	HS
SR	1						
SC	.12 <sup>ns</sup>	1					
SP	.34**	.36**	1				
PATH	.26**	.19**	.41**	1			
CUC	.19*	.12 <sup>ns</sup>	.28**	.25**	1		
DWHI	.18*	.26**	.47**	.44**	.13 <sup>ns</sup>	1	
HS	.42**	.27**	.21**	.27**	.08 <sup>ns</sup>	.12 <sup>ns</sup>	1

Notes: The external criteria health status was surveyed by a single item, significant correlations with the external criteria are highlighted in bold, \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ , <sup>ns</sup> = not significant, SR self-regulation, SC self-control, SP self-perception, PATH proactive approach to health, CUC communication and cooperation, DWHI dealing with health information, HS health status.

Comparing the results of the multiple regression analyses of both groups, they had in common that *self-regulation* and *proactive approach to health* had a positive, significant association with health status (see Table 5).

Table 5. Health Status and Health Literacy: Results of Multiple Regression Analysis

Predictors	Student Teachers (ST)			Teacher Trainees (TT)		
	B	SE	$\beta$	B	SE	$\beta$
SR	.50	.09	.37***	.27	.07	.24***
SC	.30	.11	.20**	.11	.09	.08 <sup>ns</sup>
SP	-.01	.14	-.01 <sup>ns</sup>	-.06	.12	-.04 <sup>ns</sup>
PATH	.27	.11	.19*	.33	.09	.25***
CUC	-.11	.08	-.09 <sup>ns</sup>	-.05	.07	-.04 <sup>ns</sup>
DWHI	-.10	.12	-.06 <sup>ns</sup>	-.17	.09	-.12 <sup>ns</sup>
R <sup>2</sup>	.227			.139		

Notes: For each regression, highly significant F value ( $p < .001$ ), \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ , <sup>ns</sup> = not significant, multicollinearity statistic = .59 < tolerance < .89, 1.11 < VIF < 1.69, B regression coefficient, SE standard error,  $\beta$  standardized  $\beta$ -coefficient, R<sup>2</sup> corrected R squared, SR self-regulation, SC self-control, SP self-perception, PATH proactive approach to health, CUC communication and cooperation, DWHI dealing with health information.

Accordingly, for student teachers, the predictor *self-control* ( $\beta = 20$ ,  $p < .01$ ) additionally contributes to an improvement in health status. The variance explanation of the health status was 22.7% for the student teachers and 13.9% for the teacher trainees. This corresponded to moderate to strong variance elucidation in each case (Cohen, 1988; see Table 5).

## Discussion

The present study aimed to provide empirical findings on student teachers' and teacher trainees' health literacy in the context of teacher health. With these data, it is possible to describe the prerequisites for health-promoting behaviour for both groups and the association with health status in more detail, and based on this, to derive initial recommendations for teachers' health promotion in the context of teacher education.

The first research question was related to the comparison of the two groups of prospective teachers. Student teachers have more favourable prerequisites concerning health-promoting behaviour. With the exception of *communication and cooperation*, they had significantly higher values in the other key health literacy competencies. It could be hypothesised that the student teachers have already been able to attend a few courses on health and health promotion since their university offers several seminars on this topic. Trainee teachers came from several different universities with diverse curricula, so it is uncertain whether they had already attended health-related courses in their first and during their second phase of teacher education.

Overall, the professional standards for teacher education in Germany<sup>3</sup> integrate the training of health-related competences in both phases of teacher education. This may also be because study results show that emotional exhaustion increases during the transition from university to the second phase of teacher education (Dicke, Elling, et al., 2015; Dicke, Parker, et al., 2015), only decreases towards the end of the trainee phase (Klusmann et al., 2012; Kunter et al., 2013; Richter et al., 2013) and might exert an influence on health literacy. The majority of the teacher trainees who participated in this study

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<sup>3</sup> Resolution of the Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of 16.12.2004 as amended in German on 16.05.2019: [https://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/veroeffentlichungen\\_beschluesse/2004/2004\\_12\\_16-Standards-Lehrerbildung-Bildungswissenschaften.pdf](https://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/veroeffentlichungen_beschluesse/2004/2004_12_16-Standards-Lehrerbildung-Bildungswissenschaften.pdf)

were in the first and second semesters of their practical oriented phase. Future studies should investigate this hypothetical relation.

It could also be hypothesised that the different measurement times explain the significant differences in health literacy. The survey of student teachers took place before the COVID-19 pandemic and the survey of teacher trainees during the pandemic. Finding regarding teachers' health during the pandemic in Germany (Hansen, Klusman, & Hanewinkel, 2020) indicated that teacher trainees were at higher risk of high emotional exhaustion than, for example, school headmasters. Even when controlling for age, gender and type of school, this association remained constant. Furthermore, teachers with high levels of emotional exhaustion were more likely to report that the pandemic exacerbated their symptoms (Hansen et al., 2020). This is also confirmed by results showing that people with low health literacy are considered to be at greater risk for the development of diseases and their perception and processing of stressful situations (Soellner et al., 2009). Hansen et al. (2020) also showed that more than half of the surveyed teacher trainees felt they had more work to do due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The development of health literacy is a dynamic process that be impacted by experiences with different health circumstances (Zarcadoolas, Pleasant, & Greer, 2006), such as pandemics.

Regarding the second research question, teacher trainees rated their health status better than student teachers did. Conversely, studies have shown that people with higher health literacy generally rate their subjective health status better and are more likely to engage in health-promoting behaviours than people with lower health literacy (Jordan & Hoebel, 2015; Schaeffer et al., 2016). On the other hand, the variance explanation for the health status of teacher trainees had a lower percentage than student teachers, so other predictors exert a greater influence but this should also be a focus in further studies.

The results of the correlation and regression analyses showed correlations between the key health literacy competencies and health status. The correlation coefficients for both groups were relatively stable and positive. Despite the diversity of health-related determinants, up to 22.7% of the variance in health status could be explained by the results of the regression analyses for student teachers and up to 13.9% for teacher trainees. For student teachers, self-regulation was the most significant predictor for health status and for the teacher trainees, self-regulation and proactive approach to

health were the most significant predictors. In terms of predictors, proactive approach to health ranked higher among teacher trainees. It could be hypothesised that this may be due to age and the associated personal development that teacher trainees pay more attention to oneself and one's health. Teacher trainees also take responsibility for students through their work in school. However, this should also be investigated in further studies.

Both groups had the lowest means in the competences of self-regulation and communication and cooperation, which complements the results of the studies mentioned previously, and points to the less favourable work-related behaviour and experience patterns in dealing with stress (Lohse-Bossenz & Rutsch, 2021; Römer et al., 2012). In this context, these competencies can also be seen as important health resources that enable a person to deal constructively with (occupational) stresses and personal problems. Lenartz's (2012) findings on scenarios of various health-related behaviours showed a positive association of the behaviour 'taking a break' on the ability to self-regulate ( $r = .46$ ,  $\beta = .43$ ;  $p < .01$ ), the perception of need in a pressure situation ( $r = .25$ ,  $\beta = .18$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and for the perception of tension and stress at work ( $r = .33$ ,  $\beta = .17$ ,  $p < .01$ ). In a professional context, the study results indicated that learning opportunities that include the acquisition of professional self-regulation skills have rarely been integrated into the context of teacher education (Roloff Henoch et al., 2015). The usefulness of self-regulation strategies, in general, for the teaching profession and, in particular, for beginning teachers has been highlighted (Mansfield et al., 2012; Roloff Henoch et al., 2015). Overall, further studies are needed to examine the association between occupational self-regulation and the key competence of health literacy.

Concerning the ability to *communicate and cooperate*, it was shown that this has a positive association with the health behaviour 'telling about illness/accepting help' ( $r = .43$ ,  $\beta = .40$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and emphasises the use of help (Lenartz, 2012). Also, in a professional context, related to the assessment of health-relevant conditions in the workplace, and according to findings from research on teacher stress, social support is an extremely health-relevant factor (Lehr, 2004; Rothland, 2013). Social support does not exclusively refer to health issues, but it does not exclude them either. In the trainee phase, fellow candidates support teacher trainees in their second phase of teacher education, especially emotionally, in dealing with stress and in relation to work organisations (Braun, 2017; Richter, Kunter, Lüdtke, Klusmann, & Baumert, 2011). This support is also relevant during the first phase of

teacher education, especially for the practical semester and the supervision by mentors (Kücholl et al., 2019). However, this correlation should also be examined in further studies.

## Conclusions and Implications for Practice

The results underline the need for interventions aimed at the sustainable and systemic promotion of health literacy. We hypothesised that early promotion of health literacy in the context of teacher education could have a positive impact not only on the study period and practice semester during the first phase of teacher education but also on the trainee phase and the later work situation. Early promotion requires curricular adaptations and learning opportunities within the framework of teacher education, which aims to improve health literacy and health. The results indicated especially the need for interventions improving the skills *self-regulation* and *communication and cooperation*.

(Prospective) Teachers need self-regulation skills that enable them to use action- and emotion-related strategies in ways that are functional for coping with job demands and health issues. Mindfulness represents a possible emotion-related form of coping that can help identify and regulate individual stress patterns (Lutz, Slagter, Dunne, & Davidson, 2008), as well as promote self-care and overall well-being (Goyal et al., 2014). The relevance of mindfulness in the educational context has been investigated in numerous studies, and the positive effects of mindfulness-based interventions in relation to teacher trainees and teachers seem promising (Emerson, Leyland, Hudson, Rowse, Hanley, & Hugh-Jones, 2017; Flook, Goldberg, Pinger, Bonus, & Davidson, 2013; Wimmer, von Stockhausen, & Bellingrath, 2019). Besides self-regulation, especially in the second phase of teacher training, which is associated with multiple stresses, social support is an important health resource for communicating one's state of health and accepting help. A first university seminar concept that pursues the promotion of student teachers' health literacy was developed by Hohensee and Schiemann (2022).

Overall, this study showed that teacher education should change and be rethought in terms of a stronger integration of health-related competences to maintain and promote (prospective) teachers' health early and sustainably. This study addresses a topic in (teacher) education that is gaining increasing attention in international discourses (Vamos et al., 2020) and is one of the



main social factors influencing health (Lamanauskas, 2018). The promotion of health literacy is also highlighted as one of three priority action goals in the 2016 WHO Shanghai Declaration (WHO, 2017).

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## **Virtual Observations: A Situational Analysis of a Technological Response to Practicum Assessment During a Pandemic\*\***

### **Summary**

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, virtual observations were introduced to assess student teachers, in a Scottish Initial Teacher Education (ITE) department. This research critically reflects on the usage of these virtual observations as they were deployed on a large scale to meet the emergency requirements of teacher education during a pandemic. Using Grounded Theory as a qualitative frame (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), this research employs Clarke's (2005) situational analysis to provide insights into how effective virtual observations are in the assessment of teaching practicum. The research methods involved the collation of individual,

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written, critical reflections from 17 Practicum Tutors who used video to assess student teacher competency. These pieces of reflective writing were then thematically analysed and the resulting coding used to identify commonalities and trends. The importance of the skilled observer, the value of visual information, and the use of supplementary information were significant themes that emerged through the analysis. Overall, the effectiveness of virtual observations is confirmed, but caveats on its use remain. These caveats sit alongside questions of how virtual observation might be used in the future. Exploring the use of virtual observations as an assessment tool, at scale, gives this paper a unique situation, and its analysis adds to the knowledge base for virtual observations and how they can be used within teacher education.

**Keywords:** video observation/virtual observation, teacher education, school practicum, pandemic

## Introduction

The Coronavirus Pandemic (Covid-19) had a significant impact on Scottish education, including Initial Teacher Education (ITE). Schools closed to in-person teaching in March 2020, and pupils were educated online during the Summer Term. As pupils returned to schools, in-person, in August 2020, restrictions on who could visit schools continued and this meant that, for reasons of safety and practicality, the traditional approach of in-person observation visits of student teachers on placement required adaptation. Consequently, while student teachers were able to undertake their practicum placements in schools, innovation was necessary to ensure that the assessments on their practicum placements could be undertaken in the academic year 2020/21.

In-person observations would usually be undertaken by Practicum Tutors employed by the University, and these observations form part of the assessments needed to ensure that student teachers meet the Standard for Provisional Registration (SPR) with the General Teacher Council of Scotland (GTCS) (GTCS, 2012). Student teachers then move into a year of probation following satisfactory completion of their Initial Teacher Education programme. The assessed observation by the Practicum Tutor forms part of the requirement used to ensure that a student teacher is ready to move into their probationary year. As a result, seeing the student teacher teach is a key assessment opportunity. This meant that any innovative substitute for in-person observations would need to enable university tutors to see student teachers in practice, without infringing on the Covid-19 restrictions in place in schools.



For the University of Aberdeen's Initial Teacher Education department, virtual observations were trialed as a solution, as video recordings would enable university lecturers to observe and assess student teachers in practice without physically attending schools.

## Literature Review

Johnson (2020) identifies that school placements (synonyms include: practicum, internships, school-experience, school-based practice/training) are one of the elements of ITE that is recognisable globally. In Scotland teacher education is led by higher education institutions and school placements are a mandatory part of the any initial teacher education course (Johnson, 2020; Scottish Parliament, 2017). While there is uniformity of student teachers undertaking school placements, the reasons for these placements are varied. Developing reflective practice (Mtika, 2011); preparing to teach pupils with diverse needs and backgrounds (Graham, MacDougall, Robson, & Mtika, 2019) and understanding broader responsibilities of members of the teacher community (Zeichner, 2010) are all examples of how school placements can develop student teachers. While student teachers can develop in different ways and placement experiences can vary (Johnson, 2020) an aspect that is consistent for all student teachers in Scotland is an assessment of their placement, against their teacher standards, by a Practicum Tutor.

Much previous research on the use of virtual observations focuses on video as a formative assessment tool for pre-service or in-service teachers (Hannafin, Shepherd, & Polly, 2010; Liang, 2015). However, little research has been conducted on the effectiveness of video observations as a summative assessment process in ITE. The few recent studies which do consider virtual observation as a summative assessment tool primarily discuss live streaming (Admiraal, Hoeksma, van de Kamp, & van Duin, 2011; Dyke, Harding, & Liddon, 2008; Mac Mahon, O'Grádaigh, & Ní Ghuidhir, 2019; O'Grádaigh, Connolly, Mac Mahon, Agnew, & Poole, 2021) as opposed to recording to a secure online platform, as this paper considers. Moreover, video observations had not been used in Scotland as a summative tool in ITE prior to Covid-19, nor does existing research consider its usage on this scale. The 2020/21 cohort of students from Aberdeen University on practicum and requiring in-practice observation, was over 500 students. As such, there were many unknowns,

from practical applications of virtual observation at scale, to permissions for recording and data-handling. The ITE department worked in collaboration with its partner Local Authorities (LAs), where student teachers were placed for practicums, to establish a Video Observation Protocol (Appendix A) that would enable video observation to be used in schools during the pandemic, in order to support the observation and assessment of student teachers. This protocol was a compromise around what was necessary: observing the student teacher teaching in practice, seeing their relationship with the class, and observing their decisions in practice. This had to be balanced against ensuring compliance with data protection of individuals and ensuring consent had been given for those who were featured in the videos. As a result of this compromise, it was agreed that only the student teachers would be filmed for the video observations with no pupils to be included in the recording. This is a key difference from much of the body of literature relating to video observation, in which pupils or students are often included in the recordings (Baecher, McCormack, & Kung, 2014; Dyke, Harding, & Liddon, 2008; Mitchell, Marsh, Hobson, & Sorensen, 2010), though issues around privacy have also been raised by other studies (Dyke et al., 2008; Liang, 2015; Mac Mahon et al., 2019; O'Grádaigh et al., 2021).

The distinctiveness of this version of video observation, the fact that it was undertaken in a Scottish context as a method of summative assessment, and the scale of the usage of video observation, are original contributions of this research. The analysis that follows will explore considerations of how, and to what extent, virtual observation can be used as an assessment aide in Initial Teacher Education.

## Methodology

To explore the situation within our research, the research team sought the views of any Practicum Tutors who had undertaken video observations during the autumn of 2020. Following ethical approval, the researchers asked for informed consent and a written reflection. These written reflections responded to some prompt questions designed to encourage reflection (Galleta, 2013) about the virtual observation process. Tutors were under no obligation to reply, but 17 tutors provided written reflections that were considered in this research. All reflections offered were anonymised on receipt and only the



corresponding researcher was aware of the initial identities of each reflection. This was a decision taken to support anonymisation of the writers, but also to ensure that the research team were able to analyse the reflections based on the detail contained within them, rather than any wider interactions they had with individual tutors in their daily work within the Initial Teacher Education department. While this anonymisation also supported diminishing researcher bias, the research team were part of the implementation team responsible for the virtual observations and keen to review the results to consider potential future uses, beyond a pandemic response.

As the context, scale and version of video observation are unique, the research team considered it important not to pre-empt any emergent key themes or findings; as such, Grounded Theory was selected as the qualitative frame (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Using a situational analysis approach to grounded theory (Clarke, 2005; Clarke, Friese, & Washburn, 2018), the research team explored our unique situation – the need to respond to a pandemic – with an innovative/distinctive approach to observational assessment. It was important to consider this as a situation which by its very nature of observing student teachers involved complex relational, spatial, and temporal ecologies (Clarke et al., 2018). In this complexity, it was important to consider the data we collated as the ideas and theory evolved (Strübing, 2007). The iterative processes of our approach enabled us to memo and capture the inferences we make from our data and the situational mapping enabled us to consider the relationships between our emerging ideas. Figure 1 indicates the process we undertook to generate our situational analysis.

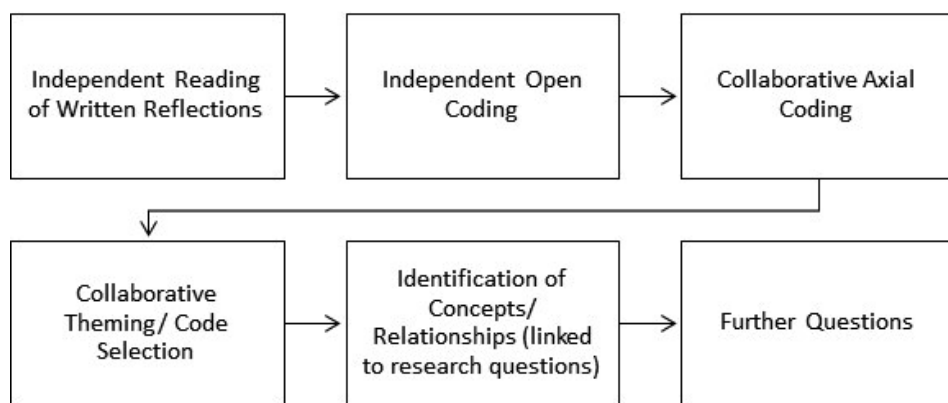


Figure 1. Process of coding analysis

The initial reading and coding of the written reflections was first undertaken individually by each researcher. The four researchers then met to compare and refine the codes collaboratively into axial codes (Kolb, 2012). Once the axial coding was completed, the research team collectively grouped these axial codes into broader themes. Each of the axial codes and therefore the themes had a positive and negative dimension. For example, a Practicum Tutor may have reflected that audio was essential to understanding the whole lesson (positive dimension) or buffering made the audio quality poor and the observation hard to follow (negative dimension). Identifying the dimensions enabled the research team to explore each code and any negative cases (Kolb, 2012) which contrasted with other findings. This in turn helped them validate the emerging findings from their coded analysis.

From these codes the research team collaboratively generated situational messy maps (Clarke, 2005; Clarke et al., 2018). Memoing was used throughout the process to record decision making (Birks, Chapman, & Francis, 2008). From these messy maps and memoing, the team was able to refine and align the axial codes to then explore them further through our ordered maps (Clarke et al., 2018). The initial messy maps were significant in the situational analysis as they enabled the research team to explore the prevalence of each axial code. Understanding the prevalence of each code through the discussion of the messy maps helped to further refine understanding of the participant responses.

Building on this understanding, the research team used Clarke's (2003) ordered maps to further explore the relationships between the codes. The discussion surrounding this helped to reveal, through memoing, the relational links (Clarke, 2003) which deepened the understanding of each code within each theme. Glaser (2004) suggests that memoing is straightforward, yet it is in this capture that significant relationships between the coded data can emerge. The team recorded their memoing and referred to this in their discussions around the data. As this was done, they noted how themes evolved. Each evolution involved further checking back to the original data sources to ensure all points could be supported by the initial Practicum Tutor reflections.

In line with the grounded theory approach taken, the discussions and memoing continued until the links and comparisons had been exhausted. At this point five themes emerged: Visuals; Time; Pedagogy; Effectiveness of Assessment and Future Uses. Each of the themes and their final map will be shared in the results section, with the Effectiveness of Assessment being addressed in the concluding sections of the paper.

## Findings

The maps generated from the discussions, memoing and reflection on the participant data are included in the result section. This is to enable the reader the opportunity to see how diverse and coherent the different themes were. Positive and negative dimensions were identified for each theme and this section will describe the maps to reveal the key points that will be furthered in the discussion and conclusion. Some of these points are clearly identified in more than one map.

### Visuals

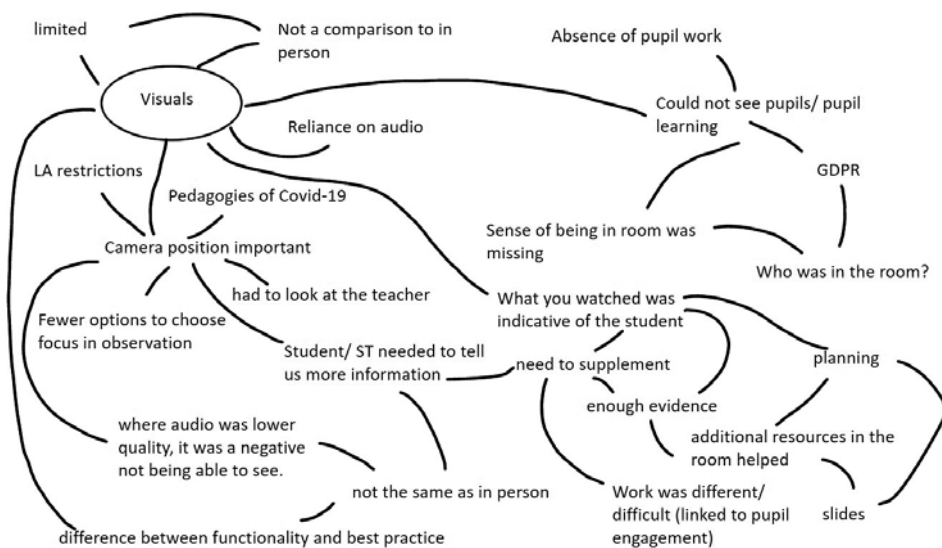


Figure 2. Map of theme: Visuals

The overall theme of this first section is the importance of visuals. Initially in the coding and memoing, the key ideas in this theme seemed to be related to audio. The initial impression and the initial codes gave examples of positive codes for audio being useful or problematic. This suggested that participating tutors were indicating that audio was particularly important to virtual observations and when audio quality was poorer, this impeded their ability to undertake their observation. However, as we explored the negative dimensions of the audio codes it became clear that the reliance on audio was not solely

indicative of the poorer audio quality, but was a response to the limitations of visuals, under the observation protocol used. The participants' articulation of the positive and negative codes for audio showed that there was an absence of information that the tutors would normally get from an in-person observation. Namely, that the tutor's viewpoint was restricted to the teacher and the front of the classroom. The negative dimensions in audio of buffering, poor sound quality or background noise impacting on the observer's ability to hear the lesson, showed that the tutors were reliant on audio to supplement the reduction of visual information, regularly available when observing in-person. Therefore, a transition in this theme took place as the ordered maps were generated, with the original theme of audio being replaced by visuals as the dominant theme linked to this set of codes.

The first of these was the importance of positioning the recording device. In the map this has multiple dimensions within the codes. The visibility of the teacher, the teaching and the whiteboard being used, alongside how much of the classroom audio could be heard, were important aspects for the observing tutors:

*Tutor K: The camera positions used by the students varied. Most helpful were positions which enabled me to see the student and any presentation they had on the whiteboard.*

Where there was poorer recording quality there were more negative codes:

*Tutor H: The camera angle in some made it difficult particularly if a student was moving around the classroom. That then impacted on sound.*

and more discussion of reliance on visuals and playback features:

*Tutor C: The quality of some recordings left a lot to be desired.*

*Tutor L: Being able to pause and rewind the lesson to review certain aspects was particularly useful... at times when I didn't hear or fully digest what was said.*

There was also a need to use supplementary information such as reflective conversations with the student and their in-practice, supporter teacher; documentation in the placement file; and/ or email correspondence, to broaden the information the observing tutor used to make their assessment:

*Tutor L: The virtual observation process was particularly successful because of the other elements that fed into it – for example, reading student lesson plans before watching the video; reading student digital [practicum] files before watching the video...*

Tutor G: *Alongside lesson plan evaluations and weekly review discussions with the student and Class Teacher, I felt I was able to make accurate assessments.*

Tutor J: *The emphasis on the post-lesson discussion is intensified in the [virtual] approach.*

Tutor H: *I feel quite confident that I was able to assess the students using [online platform] alongside the other evidence available.*

The need for supplementary information is echoed in the questions that emerged from the observing tutors' comments around a lack of clarity of who else was in the room, supporting or observing the observation. Were the audible pupil responses reflective of the wider classroom or not? While these queries were not only related to visuals, it was the limitation of visuals available, to the observing tutor, that drew these into question.

## Time

The second theme was time. Time was a theme present from the initial codes, and one that evolved through situational analysis. Initially the themes for time were simplistic: did virtual observation save time? The positive and negative dimensions of this were explored. However, as the mapping of the axial codes took place a more nuanced perspective of time emerged.

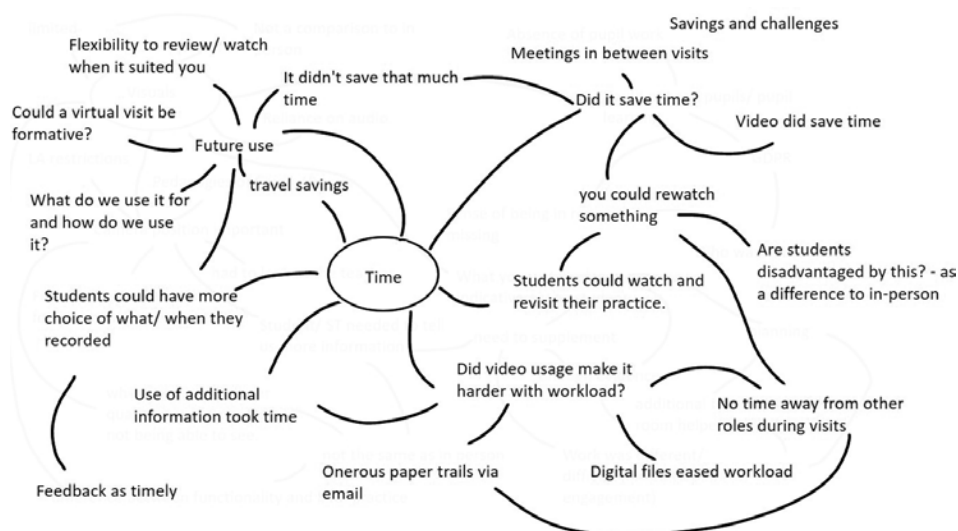


Figure 3. Map of theme: Time

As stated, there was the sense, in the initial codes, that virtual observation might save time. Positive coding around travel (e.g., from Tutors F and J) indicated that travelling time was reduced:

*Tutor F: This system was efficient and time effective...and gave greater flexibility.*

This discussion of reduction of travel correlates with findings of previous research (Bolton, 2010; Liang, 2015; Mac Mahon et al., 2019; O'Grádaigh et al., 2021). Tutors did not need to travel around the North-East of Scotland, and instead could watch their recordings on their computers and visit the student via video link to undertake the feedback conversation. Furthermore, the recordings could be viewed at a time which suited the tutors, which differs from the findings of previous studies in which live-streaming was used (Dyke et al., 2008; Hannafin et al., 2010; Mac Mahon et al., 2019; O'Grádaigh et al., 2021), affording even more flexibility.

On the other hand, negative coding around workload suggested that time saved in travel was consumed as virtual observations took additional time, due to the preparation of supplementary information. Onerous digital paper trails and the need to be in frequent communication with the student on placement were examples of this additional workload.

*Tutor H: A few recordings were too long (well over an hour) and when the student hadn't highlighted which part to watch that meant having to view the whole recording.*

*Tutor C: Some students recorded absolutely everything lasting up to 1 hour and 20 minutes.*

However, this coding was isolated and certainly not universal, appearing in three participating tutor reflections (C, A & H). The relational analysis of the ordered maps suggested that a wider aspect of this might be flexibility or perceived flexibility of time and workload.

The flexibility of time stemmed from some individuals placing value on them being able to decide on what work they did and when, organising this around their responsibilities and other commitments.

*Tutor H: No need to travel and able to view several videos in one day.*

Whereas others indicated that they were being asked to do more work than if they were conducting in-person observations when there would normally have been an easement of other meetings. Using virtual observation,

the dimensions of that fixed time are changed, so that recordings are more flexible.

Tutor F: *This system was efficient and time effective in that recording the lesson gave the students and the observers greater flexibility as there was not the need to match up school timetables with academic timetables.*

The observer can watch the recording at a time that suits them and their wider working patterns, and the student teacher is able to select a lesson that they would like to share with their tutor. However, it is noted in the analysis that this flexibility also could impact on the timeliness of feedback as recordings and observations might be undertaken over a period of days, as opposed to within a morning/afternoon allocated time slot for an in-person visit.

### Pedagogy

The third theme relates to pedagogy and was a theme that emerged through situational analysis. In the initial coding this theme was identified as being tutor preferences towards specific pedagogy or the absence of pupil interactions being observed. Johnston (2020) problematises pedagogy within practicum placements as he discusses how students adapt to suit the school setting they are in.

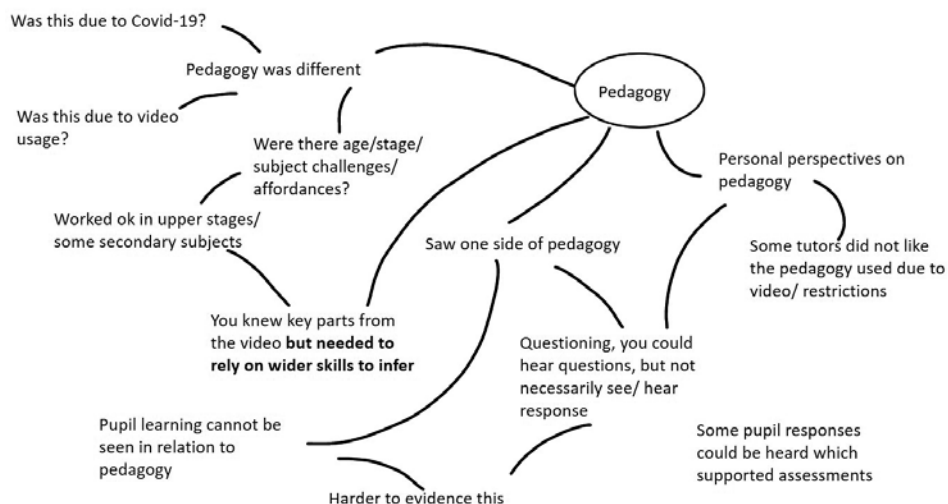


Figure 4. Map of theme: Pedagogy

During the coronavirus pandemic, pedagogical choices were more limited. Teaching was usually done from the front of the class and with little moving amongst the pupils. The changes were made to mitigate infection, but these changes would have been another difference between the Practicum Tutors' previous in-person observation and the virtual observations of 2020–21.

Exploration of this through discussion in the situational analysis indicated that these initial codes were related, and that there was a question about whether Covid-19 and/or the protocol of virtual observations had impacted on pedagogy of the way the student teachers were teaching in their observed sessions. The answer to this was not within the data set, but it was clear from the coding that pedagogy was important to the observing tutors. It is noted in 5 positive and 9 negative codes throughout the responses.

One of the prevalent aspects of these codes was in the negative responses which indicated the absence of the pupils in the recordings, making it harder to ascertain their responses, or involvement in the lesson. This notion of one-sided pedagogy emerged and indicates a limitation in the protocol that was used. Audio was useful in surmounting this absence to a degree, but supplementary information was required to fill in gaps around pupil responses to teaching, and around pupil behaviour, where this was not clear in the audio of the recording.

*Tutor E: I found it very hard to gauge pupil engagement in learning, other than through guessing questions that were answered by the teacher. However, the video was able to capture a 'sense' of the classroom, aspects of the layout of desks, the pace and tone of the teacher.*

Again, the need to see more than just the student teacher was apparent. If the Practicum Tutors had been able to see more, they would have had to infer less.

It was within the relational discussion that it became clearer that there was an element of the need for tutors to infer from the information and use their expertise and experience to bridge the differing information sources. How confident each individual tutor felt with this is explored in the fourth theme.

### Future Uses

Building on the questions of the three themes discussed, the situational analysis presented a fourth theme of future uses. This theme was present in





initial codes, but these codes were isolated to specific participating tutors. Tutors D, E, F, G and M drew on the advantages, benefits, and potential of the virtual observations contextually. Therefore, while this is a pertinent theme, the results for this theme are validated by a smaller group of participating tutors and further exploration would be useful to consider the potential future uses of virtual observations. The three groups of codes within this theme indicate that there is potentially a role for virtual observations as a formative assessment tool, that it can support flexibility in saving time and travel, and that it needs to be considered in relation to student experience.

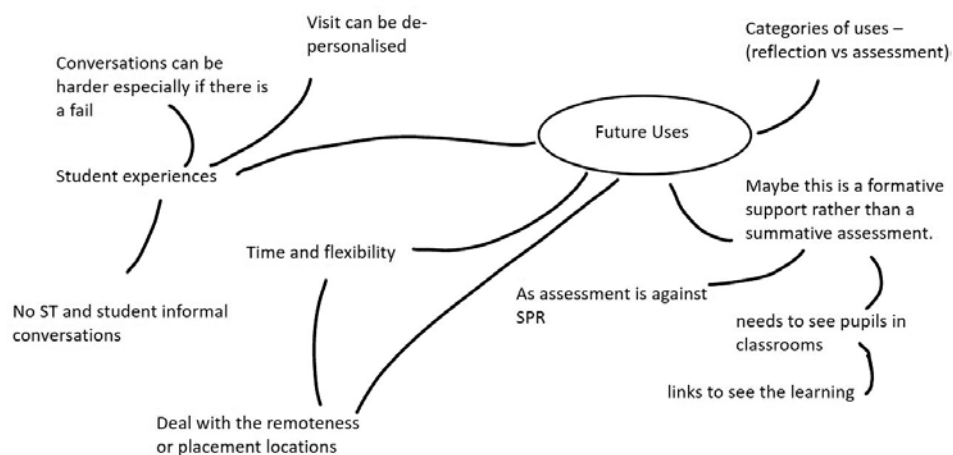


Figure 5. Map of theme: Future Uses

Tutor F: *When students are progressing well, we should consider the first assessment as being virtual to reduce workload.*

Tutor D: *I think there is an ongoing role for video in student teacher placements. Maybe this is more for the student teachers, or for us to work with them in a more formative way, but I think there is potential to help us work with students more when they are in placement through video.*

The potential of virtual observations as a formative tool links relationally to the confidence and preferences of the Practicum Tutors. Ideas exemplified by Tutor D and Tutor Q suggest that with adaptations there is certainly a future use both as an emergency response or as a formative tool that can be used to support student teachers in understanding their own teaching in greater depth:

Tutor Q: *I would suggest this is one useful tool for student assessment, particularly in certain circumstance where students are in remote locations or the prevailing weather is causing disruption to visits.*

This correlates with other research which recognises the value of virtual observations as a formative tool (Liang, 2015; Mac Mahon et al., 2019) and/or which suggests virtual observations might be used to supplement, rather than to replace, in-person visits (Bolton, 2010; Mac Mahon et al., 2019; O'Grádaigh et al., 2021). Therefore, the overall effectiveness of virtual observations is important to consider, and then the application of how virtual observations might offer additional options or advantages to traditional in-person visits needs to be considered.

## Discussion

Building on the findings of each of the themes, the discussion will focus on the links between themes and how these then relate to the pertinent question: Are virtual observations an effective student teacher assessment method?

## Supplementary information

Throughout the analysis the role of supplementary information was reinforced. In the context of these virtual observations, the Practicum Tutors used supplementary information to adjust for absences in the visuals they could usually access when assessing student teachers in-person. Supplementary information was therefore useful in aiding the Practicum Tutors to feel confident in their assessments of the student teachers.

Tutor O: *It was also very difficult to see how work was being differentiated and how individual needs were being met. I was reliant on the lesson plan and the student's reflections to find more information about these areas.*

Indeed, as Tutor O reveals, where gaps existed in the visual information, Practicum tutors were able to use the wider documentation prepared by the student teacher to help determine where each student was in relation to the Standard for Provisional Registration (GTCS, 2012). Different documents

were useful to Practicum Tutors depending on what they needed to explore, and thus the importance of the Practicum Tutor being sufficiently experienced and skilled became evident.

The skill of the Practicum Tutor was also emphasised in the relational aspects of the virtual observation where the Practicum Tutors could use an online conversation with the student teacher and their in-school supporter teacher to find out more about their practice and how they were meeting the relevant standards.

*Tutor N: The video was only one part of the evidence I deployed to assess each student. The most important part of the process involved the learning conversation with the student based on their documentation, conversation with the teacher and the video.*

This element of discussion about the supplementary information mirrors practice when Practicum Tutors would visit schools in-person. It reflects that observation is only part of the complexity of the classroom (Hannafin et al., 2010; O'Leary, 2017) and that it is important to contextualise and use additional information to form a more balanced assessment. This shows that virtual observations, when used as assessments, have similarities to in-person versions. It is not possible to see everything needed to make an assessment against the relevant standards in one observation, so supplementary information is required. Therefore, the need for supplementary information does not diminish the effectiveness of virtual observations, but it does pose some questions that need further exploration.

### **Dimensions of time saving**

Time as a linked theme relates to travel time, workload time for Practicum Tutors, timetabling in schools and processing time. In the findings we found that this was often a polarised dimension with some tutors seeing savings and advantages to the virtual method and others seeing challenges and disadvantages. From a sustainability perspective, time reductions in travel would also see increased time for Practicum Tutors to undertake other work-related tasks. As Tutor F suggests, this is advantageous to employers and potentially to the Practicum Tutors themselves. However, relationally, building relationships and gaining job satisfaction from being in the live teaching space are far more challenging using virtual observations.

*Tutor C: From the tutor's point of view there was very little job satisfaction in this whole process. Live visits to school are the most enjoyable part of the job and interactions with both students and pupils make the whole thing worthwhile.*

Therefore, the advantages of flexibility, reduced travel and associated costs need to be weighed against relationships and experiences. Crucially, understanding more about virtual observations from a student teacher perspective would be important as this could help further clarify the position virtual observations could occupy in any future teacher education programmes.

### **Importance of checking quality and positioning of recording**

The visuals and audio in a recording matter to the Practicum Tutor. Where negative experiences were encountered, it was frequently linked to poor visuals or interrupted audio. If a protocol like the one used in this research was to be enacted in future visits, the visuals and audio of each recording would need to be secure. This is because the absent elements relating to the interplay of pedagogical approaches (e.g., seeing pupils answer questions) need a sufficient level of recording quality in order to enable the experience and skilled Practicum Tutor to analyse and comprehend the information and check this against supplementary documentation. Poorer quality recordings inhibit this process. So, it would be important in future virtual observations to spend time with the student teachers explaining in greater depth the importance of these elements, so that they practise and improve the overall quality of their recordings.

### **The importance of a skilled observer with relevant experience and expertise**

Virtual observations depend on skilled observers. This is reflected in Hannafin et al. (2010), and emphasises that a key element of the virtual observation process is the Practicum Tutor. The virtual observations in this research relied on experienced and expert Practicum Tutors who discerned, inferred, and comprehended the virtual information they were given. This is similar to other research (Admiraal et al., 2011) which shows assessors are able to use their skill and prior experience to effectively bridge elements that were less clear by linking to supplementary information located in the paperwork that the student teachers provided, or through discussion with the student teacher or the teacher supporting them in their practicum.

Tutor O: *I was reliant on the lesson plan and student's reflections to find our more information.*

Tutor Q: *In conjunction with the weekly review form... discussions with students and teachers, allowed for an accurate assessment to be made.*

While the Practicum Tutors themselves did not suggest that they were able to undertake virtual observations because of their experience and skill, it was clear in the situational analysis that this was an important contextual factor. Due to the Practicum Tutors being qualified and experienced teachers, they were able to see and draw effective assessments from the information the virtual observations gave them and then use supplementary information to further justify and evidence their assessments. As such the importance of the skills observer should not be underestimated.

## Summary

Considering the effectiveness of Virtual Observations is key to the situational analysis of this paper. The map below shows the overall considerations. These build on the points made in the discussion about technique, time and supplementary information.

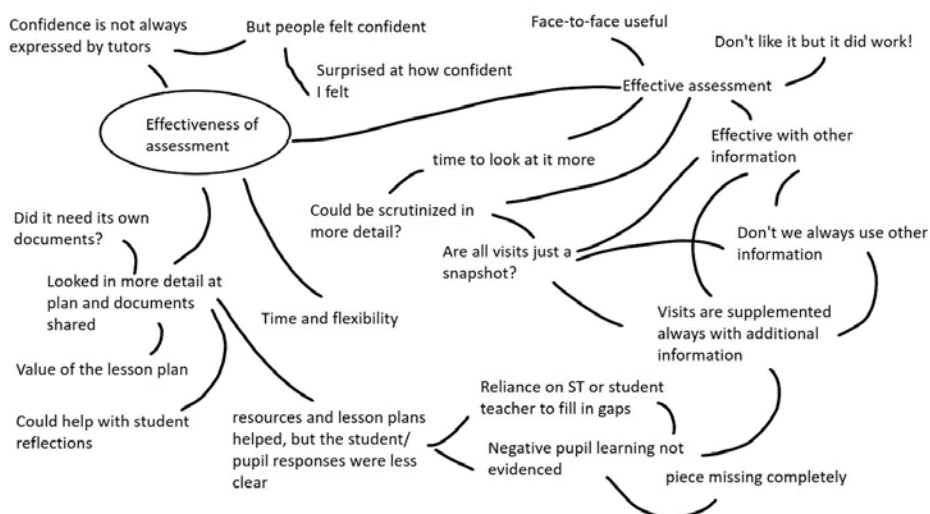


Figure 6. Map of theme: Effectiveness of Assessment

Virtual observations can be used effectively as a method of undertaking student teacher assessments while the student teacher is in placement. However, the effectiveness of these observations depends on specific caveats.

The first of these caveats is that the information the Practicum Tutor has available is different from traditional in-person observations. This means that the Practicum Tutor needs to be a skilled practitioner, familiar with classroom practices, in order to explore the supplementary information available to them; this enables them to ascertain where the student teacher is in relation to the standards against which they are being assessed. Tutor Q summarised this well by saying that the virtual observation should be seen in conjunction with wider documentation to provide an insight into how the student teacher is performing.

The second caveat is that the visuals – what the observer is seeing – are important. The more the tutor can see, the more information they have. Restrictions due to the need to implement a large-scale system of virtual observation during an international pandemic meant that it was more productive to focus on a usable system. Yet, in hindsight, continuing to reach agreement on data protection matters, so that all pupils could be observed, would have improved the visual information for the Practicum Tutor, which could, in turn, have supported them in exercising their professional expertise. This would have reduced the need to rely as heavily on audio, additional supplementary documentation or the teacher support the student teacher in the classroom. However, improvements to the visuals will not detract from the wider supplementary information, which this research has shown to maintain its own importance in the assessment process, but will add to it.

Overall, virtual observations were effective, as a pandemic measure. While improvements can be made to how recordings are generated, the Practicum Tutors were able to exercise their professional expertise and skill to effectively assess the student teachers against the relevant standards. There is also a lot of future potential that should be explored in relation to virtual observations in Scotland. Reductions in travel, time saving, and flexibility are some key areas this research has identified. Further to this, Practicum Tutors identify that virtual observations could become a formative process where student teachers are encouraged to engage actively with their own development: this underlines the potential that needs to be explored and the relative confidence some of the Practicum Tutors had in using virtual observations.

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## Appendix A: Extract from Protocol for Virtual Observations

### How a visit will take place

The diagram below sets out the process that the virtual tutor visit will go through. This process ensures that the same amount of support, time and care goes into each student assessment. Timings are flexible so the process can





be done in one day or over a couple of days depending on the different time constraints the tutor and school-based staff have.

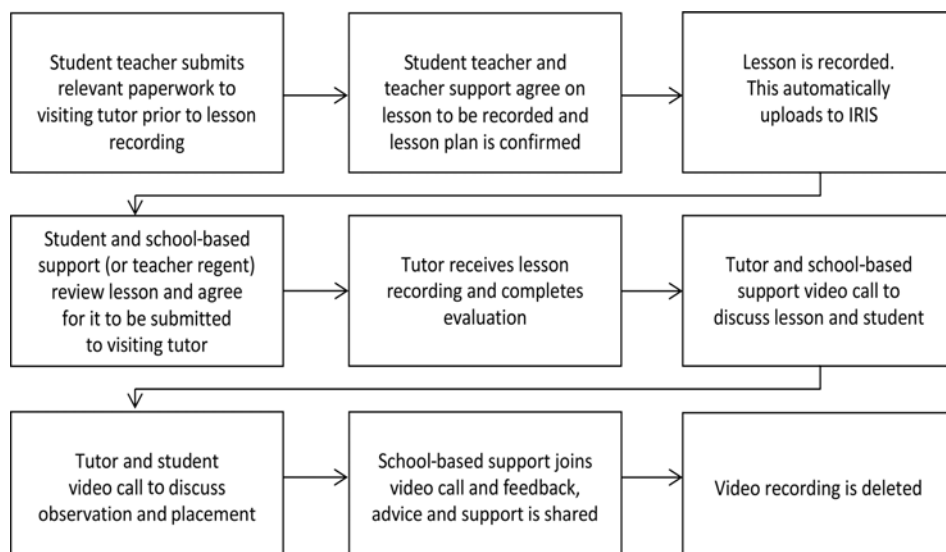


Figure 7. Flowchart of virtual observations

### Who will receive a virtual tutor visit?

Initially virtual tutor visits will take place for students studying on the PGDE Primary/ DLite Primary/ PGDE Secondary and MA Primary Education programmes. If the Covid-19 advice changes, it is possible for all programmes to have a virtual tutor visit, but priority for in-person visits remains as outlined in the rationale.

### Safeguarding

The [online platform] system is a secure system and the protocol set out will enable a school leader to review and check any recordings made in school prior to them being shared with the university tutor. With all videos being deleted after assessment is completed.

As with an in-person visit, if a visiting tutor has any welfare or safeguarding concerns, they will raise these with the relevant member of the school's leadership team.

### **Connectivity**

Where there are connectivity challenges, [online platform] will upload as the connectivity returns. If there are connectivity challenges will endeavour to undertake an in-person visit/alternative approach.

### **Permission**

Before a virtual observation approach can be undertaken, we need to gain the appropriate permissions for each of the partnership local authorities. We hope that this protocol helps explain the reasoning behind adopting a virtual approach for some of our tutor visits this year, as they will reduce the number of people visiting schools in the autumn and winter of 2020.

The university will be the data holder and so local authorities and privacy notices will be issued by the university.

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## **Take a Chance on CPD! How One School Put its Faith in the EntreCompEdu CPD Programme and Developed Whole-School Collective Entrepreneurial Education\*\*\*\***

### **Summary**

The case study in Dafen school represents a successful whole school experience of adult education through the EntreCompEdu continuing professional development programme (CPD). It represents how teacher collaboration enhances collective engagement to develop creative, innovative, and risk-taking abilities through teaching practices. It portrays how teachers' collective engagement has an amplifying impact upon implementation, energy, and confidence; especially influencing the entrepreneurial practice on student learning and the culture of a whole school. It validates how the headteacher and teachers collaborative action enhanced the adult learning in adoption of the new Welsh curricula. In this study we

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propose that the success of the teachers' professional development in learning to apply entrepreneurship education stems from a double loop of collaborative adult online learning and collective engagement under a pressure from the new entrants; a new curricula reform set by the Welsh government and the Covid-19 lockdown.

**Keywords:** professional development programme, CPD, entrepreneurship education, teacher collaboration, teachers collective engagement, collaborative adult learning

## Introduction

Our 21st-century society demands new competencies and innovative approaches to learning with curricula designs that prepare students to think for themselves and work collaboratively with others (Vincent-Lancrin et al., 2019). This creates both the demand and opportunity for teachers to adapt (Ben-Peretz, 2011) through the development of Entrepreneurial Education (EE) pedagogies and teaching practices (Ruskovaara, Hämäläinen, & Pihkala, 2016; Ruskovaara & Pihkala, 2014).

This article reviews how a collaborative learning approach to EE through an online Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programme supported whole-school change. In line with the previous research, this case study confirms that teachers' working in collaborative manner is also supportive to student learning (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Easton, & Luppescu, 2010; Lomos, Hofman, & Bosker, 2011; Nordgren, Kristiansson, Liljekvist, & Bergh, 2021; Ronfeldt, Farmer, McQueen, & Grissom, 2015; Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2009).

The European Commission (2018) emphasises nurturing entrepreneurship competence, creativity, and a sense of initiative especially among young people. All young learners should have an opportunity to undertake at least one practical entrepreneurial experience during their school education. Entrepreneurship competence according to the European Commission (2018), will support the development of learners' capacity to act upon opportunities and ideas, and to transform them into values for others (Lackeus, 2013, 2015, 2020). This highlights the importance of creativity, critical thinking and problem solving, taking initiative and perseverance and the ability to work collaboratively in order to plan and manage projects that are of cultural, social or financial value (Bacigalupo, Kamylyis, Punie, & Van den Brande, 2016; Vincent-Lancrin et al., 2019).

Alongside EE competence (Bacigalupo et al., 2016) there is a focus upon improving the digital competence across all stages of education and training. The OECD (2021) calls for an upgrade in digital curriculum. This builds on the earlier call by the OECD (2018) for collective engagement and ownership, by teachers, students and other relevant stakeholders, in the progress of curriculum. Yet, all such new knowledge and application into daily practices elevates the need for systematic support for teachers which enhances collaborative work (Lefstein, Louie, Segal, & Becher, 2020; Nordgren et al., 2021).

The recent global pandemic has added further challenge to societal, economic and environmental issues around the world, forcing change to learning environments. This research provides an example of a collective of teachers who succeeded in developing their entrepreneurial competence, to help with the implementation of a new national curriculum during the pandemic, with the support of online continuous professional development programme.

## Literature Review

The literature on CPD emphasises that any empowering professional development programmes (Avalos, 2011; Ben-Peretz, 2001; Fischer et al., 2018) share the same cumulative aim to enhance the teachers' change (Ben-Peretz, 2001) in their teaching practices, and thereof, improving the students' learning (Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002; Hattie, 2008). Furthermore, previous evidence states that there is direct relationship between supporting teachers' adult learning and increasing student achievement (Drago-Severson, 2016; Guskey, 1999; Wagner, 2007).

Drago-Severson and Blum-DeStefano (2014) state that up-to-date, effective professional development is a combination of building individual skills and supporting new ways of thinking about those skills (Weiner & Lamb, 2020; see also Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2014). Further, it is said that the effectiveness of the professional learning activities is clearly dependent on teachers' perceptions of the activities (Opfer & Pedder, 2011). However, it has been noticed that upon attending such programmes, the headteachers and teachers frequently report difficulty in applying the new knowledge and skills to their practices (Snoek & Volman, 2014).

Moreover, teacher professional development emphasises training programmes that equip teachers with knowledge and methods that are necessary to enhance their aptitude in a given theme (OECD, 2019; see also Hoban & Ericksen, 2004). Lai et al. (2016) refer to this as teachers' agency and draw attention to the activities themselves that modify professional interactions and activities in new and creative ways. Yet, literature critically points out that sometimes the professional development is disconnected from teachers' everyday practices (Avalos, 2011; Borko, 2007; Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002).

It is well known that success in the implementation of entrepreneurship education in schools is dependent on the school, head teachers' commitments (Ruskovaara et al., 2016) and the teacher's practices (Ruskovaara et al., 2014, 2016, 2019). The teacher is the central actor in entrepreneurship education and the teachers' role in defining the time, frequency, contents and methods of entrepreneurship education is decisive (Ruskovaara, 2014). The key facilitation of learning regardless of the type of setting is in hands of teachers (Ruskovaara, 2014).

Yet, the school culture also plays a pivotal role in teacher leaders' success (Wenner & Campbell, 2017). Each school is an organisation with its own culture (Schein, 2003). Headteachers, teachers and students make up the school as an organisation that has, by its artefacts, symbols and espoused values (Schein, 2003), responsibility to teach and learn.

To support the teachers to sustain their professional learning of new norms, the schools need to offer clear development goals, deliberate balance and structure for the learning as well as safe, collaborative opportunities as a team to look beyond what could be seen differently of doing things and allowing to consider multiple perspectives (Drago-Severson, 2016). Earlier research evidence states that the head teacher's role is essential in leading the collective action in entrepreneurship education (Ruskovaara et al., 2016).

Since the new norms of the curricula need to be established and revisited over time, the collaboration is seen by evidence as another promising way to differentiate the adult learning, teaching and leadership and, thus, the headteachers, in guiding the new norms, play an important role for supporting working collectively together (Drago-Severson, 2016). This kind of collective engagement (Drago-Severson, 2016) similarly supports teachers in their quests to apply the new knowledge into practice, to fulfil the new curricular demands. Thus, the teacher collaboration at its best is characterised by a professional orientation towards meeting the goals of the organisation

(Nordgren et al., 2021) and reinforcing the teachers role as change makers (Penaluna, Penaluna, & Polenakovikj, 2020).

In response to the need for professional training programmes that are embedded in teachers' instant context of daily teaching practices (Eurydice, 2019; Kraft, Blazar, & Hogan, 2018; OECD, 2019; Opfer, 2016), the online EntreCompEdu continuous professional development programme was created using Erasmus+ funding to support teachers to introduce the EntreComp framework competences (Bacigalupo et al., 2016) into their teaching. The programme facilitates teachers by introducing what entrepreneurial education is and how to plan it within teaching practices, providing practical methods and practice-sharing for designing, facilitating and assessing through entrepreneurial learning (Grigg, 2020). The course is based on the EntreCompEdu teacher professional competence framework. The digital online EntreCompEdu entrepreneurship education programme collectively engaging the entire school seems to 'hit the nail on the head' with successfully embedding the new EE driven Welsh curricula across an entire organisation during the Covid-19 lockdown period. The programme itself serves as a new digital EE opportunity (Ratten & Jones, 2020) for collaborative adult learning (Drago-Severson, 2016).

In this study we find out that the online professional learning is not only cost efficient (Department for Education, 2018; Li & Dervin, 2018) but responds to the need of being available and connected to the teachers' everyday teaching (Avalos, 2011; Borko, 2007; Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002), and allows one to rehearse the learning immediately in daily practices (Opfer, 2016; Kraft et al., 2018; OECD, 2019). Furthermore, by being available and accessible online 24/7, the professional training programmes reality engages teachers collaboratively and collectively to exchange ideas at all levels (Drago-Severson, 2009, 2016). When it is appropriately designed, this provides a new EE opportunity (Ratten & Jones, 2020) to enhance teachers' EE learning.

This article is divided in the subsections starting with the introduction. It is followed by the literature review and the descriptions of the contexts: Dafen School and the Welsh curriculum. It proceeds to describe the ethnographic methodology of the case study that seeks to answer the research question on how teachers succeed in developing their entrepreneurial education competence with the support of an online continuous professional development programme and their collective action when facing the new entrants of a new national curriculum in Wales and the Covid-19 lockdown. It presents case study findings of the different stages; including challenges

and results of different levels of experiences from nursery to all school levels with examples and involved stakeholders. In the end discussions reveal the results and conclusions summarise the outcome with suggestions for the further study. Limitations are listed at the end.

### **Dafen School – context of the case study**

Dafen Primary School based in Llanelli, in South Wales, is an English/Welsh bilingual rural school with approximately 153 children, and 11 teaching staff, which includes teaching assistants. The school embraced the opportunity to make use of EntreCompEdu to assist with the implementation of the new 'Curriculum for Wales 2022'.

Following their engagement in EntreCompEdu phase 1, Dafen Primary School in Llanelli became the first whole-school approach to EntreCompEdu Pioneers. Initially approximately 70% of the teachers had signed up, but the enthusiasm and conversation generated outside of the platform meant that the remaining complement of teaching staff wanted to join in. Early collaboration was reinforced through a shared goal and led to early cross-class communications and support. A whole-school approach has a powerful impact in shifting the entire school into entrepreneurial learning as a guiding principle. They continue to contribute their best practice ideas for cross sharing across the EntreCompEdu platform. "Entrepreneurship education as introduced to us through EntreCompEdu released pupil creativity and innovation, and facilitated the development of the ability and willingness to create different types of value in society" said the Head Teacher "which is of timely benefit to us, as we work to implement a new Curriculum that places emphasis on the development of ethical, informed, enterprising, creative contributors."

### **The Welsh curricula context**

The new Welsh curriculum has four core purposes which form the ethos of the entire education system to promote individual and national wellbeing. Wellbeing is very much at the heart of the whole curriculum. The goal is to create critical and creative thinkers, so that children are able to think creatively and critically, and think for themselves and if they see a problem,





take action and endeavour to leave the world better than they found it. The conceptual language of the EntreComp flower marries up almost perfectly to support the new curriculum goals.

The new Curriculum for Wales guidance is a clear statement of what is important in delivering a broad and balanced education (Figure 1). The *four purposes* are the shared vision and aspiration for every child and young person in WLE. The expectation is that these will promote individual and national well-being, tackle ignorance and misinformation, and encourage critical and civic engagement.

### EntreComp competencies link to new Curriculum for Wales 2022

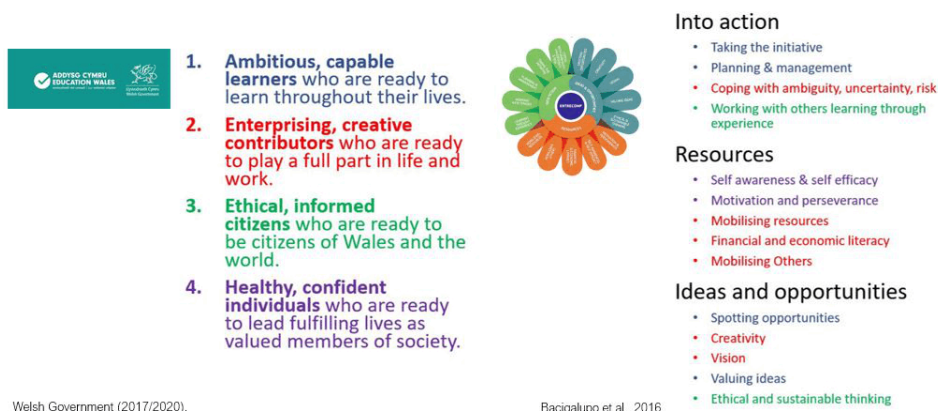


Figure 1. Colour-coded mapping of the EntreComp competences onto the competence areas included within the four purposes of the New Wales Curriculum.

Source: Bacigalupo et al., 2016, p. 11–13, and Welsh Government, Jan, 2020, p. 17.

Making use of the EntreComp Framework as an entrepreneurial learning approach to curriculum design is an appropriate fit to help educators target and unlock the ‘*creativity and innovation*’, ‘*critical thinking and problem-solving*’, ‘*personal effectiveness*’, and ‘*planning and organising*’ potential of learners, as expressed in the new Curriculum.

The schools felt that EntreCompEdu was a perfect fit to target and unlock things like creativity, innovation, critical thinking, problem solving, personal effectiveness planning, organising the potential of our learners, as it is envisioned in the new curriculum. And so, the journey learning began.

## Online CPD

The online modules staff access house a breadth of articles, blogs and websites on entrepreneurial learning, to support the development and experimentation of new practical learning activities for their own contexts. There are also opportunities for staff to engage in critical reflection on their teaching practice, curating examples of their own teaching and activities to date. Staff can also contribute to an open forum feed to share ideas or best practices with other educators.

Research into barriers to CPD often highlights costs, the training itself, and the need for teaching cover (Department for Education, 2018). Yet many teachers will tell you that they need and want more CPD (Li & Dervin, 2018). Whilst the crises have not freed time for teachers, they have created the conditions for an increased appetite for entrepreneurial competence development, unleashing a form of entrepreneurial persistence (Millán, Congregado, & Román, 2014).

A teacher from Foundation Phase explains:

I benefited greatly from familiarising with the 15 competences before the schools closed. Progression achieved on the modules, I believe, set me up to be more accepting of the change I would soon face in my working environment. I've never been comfortable or accepting of ambiguity and uncertainty. Yet as I work through the modules, at a pace I can manage, I have become more aware of, and open to adapt in different ways. I sense a mindset shift in how I now manage uncertainty, and now even make it 'work' for me. I consider how I can also help my pupils through the activities set. I find the LoopMe feedback comments help me with processing the elements of the entrepreneurial competences. I am so inspired from reading about other teacher experiences and reflections in the open forum.

Many staff commented that it had been a useful means to decode and gain confidence with entrepreneurial language.

Another teacher highlighted:

The advantages of a reflective and experiential pedagogy, and that entrepreneurial learning, tapping into creative experimentation had widened perspectives, inspired new thinking and use of resources to more beyond a financial or enterprise focus, opening up more opportunities for the integration of broader value creation that includes the cultural and the social.

## Methodology

An ethnography research method was employed since the authors were either involved in the design and/or delivery of programme, and observed and/or interacted with the study's participants in their real-life environment.

The study focused on the activities of the 11 staff (teachers and teaching assistants) of Dafen Primary school who engaged in the first phase of the EntreCompEdu CPD. The school leadership which included its governing body, supported staff involvement with EntreCompEdu as means to foster the development of curiosity-based entrepreneurial learning approaches and adaptation to a new national curriculum 'Curriculum for Wales 2022'.

## Findings of the different stages

Felicity, a parent of three children in the school (4, 6 and 8 years), and Parent Governor of Dafen School originally pitched the project to her Governing Body in January 2020. The school, recognising the opportunity to support the implementation of the new Curriculum for Wales, gave full support.

Felicity made two visits to the school in 2020, in a pre-COVID period, and through a series of practical activities, introduced the staff to the 15 EntreComp competences. The staff were able to quickly identify different values and activities that could be embedded into their classrooms. They also self-assessed their own confidence across all of the 15 competences, making use of happy and sad emoji face stickers; identifying which they felt most confident in delivering or achieving our skills, and where they felt a little uncertain. It was interesting to see how the majority of the staff identify with similar clusters of competences. Straightaway this offered the view as to where they needed to develop as a team at the school, shifting the whole school to a new mindset making use of entrepreneurial learning as a guiding principle. This was a useful preparation to familiarise with the EntreComp flower in order to start the five EntreCompEdu online CPD modules. The staff gathered a sense that they would be able to capture and build upon their pedagogy, celebrating what they already do well whilst, working on new skills challenges.

After initial meetings with Felicity Healey-Benson, the EntreCompEdu trainer, a 'perfect storm' developed – COVID. All schools in the UK were shut,



and educators were told to take their computers home and figure out next steps. Ambiguity and uncertainty in a nutshell.

Early on there was a recognition, given that the training was easily accessible online with online tutor support, that the EntreCompEdu framework would be lifeline of support to help wrap heads around the challenge. During the period of school closure, the staff were able to progress through the modules. Some staff even reported the CPD helped them become more accepting of risk and ambiguity as they faced unprecedented change to their normal working lives.

The comments, responses, sharing of ideas and signposting links prove invaluable in developing clarity on all the competences and how they could actually be related to everyday teaching practice.

With the unprecedented shift to home-working and home-schooling, whilst staff were also timetabled for manning keyworker childcare hubs, the personalising of pace and timing of the CPD was paramount. Initially the staff gained confidence with the entrepreneurial language, becoming more familiar with each of the competences, and translating them into not only what that might mean for our pupils when we return to school, but what we could achieve during the period of formal school closure.

A crucial factor in the appetite for the CPD was that it made the language of the new curriculum feel far less daunting. Until this point, the new documents felt more theoretical. Staff had read and subscribed to the vision laid out in the 2015 Donaldson report, 'Successful Futures,' and the new Welsh Government (2020) 'Curriculum for Wales guidance' but it was still very open to interpretation for how it would be practically delivered by individual schools at the time. Through the lens of EntreComp framework as supported by the EntreCompEdu training, staff were now able to tangibly relate to how the new curriculum could be put into practice, adapting and progressing their skills. The EntreCompEdu CPD provide the content stimuli, reflection space and support to encourage staff to think more creatively, adjust and adapt, and become inspired by and experiment with new thinking, new methods and new strategies.

## Challenges

The new curriculum and pivoting education online due to the COVID crises, at a time when the world felt chaotic, was indeed a challenge. Yet,



the experience of working on CPD on a new platform, LoopMe, managing learning and reflection fully online, with some tutor support gave us firsthand experience of what the experience of our pupils would be like. For home learners, everybody's ICT skills have to up-level, educators and learners alike. It was easier for some and more difficult for others. By time the school was allowed to reopen after the first lock down eased, the staff faced new challenges such as working within the constraints of class bubbles. The staff had gained new pedagogic insight and were keen to put into practice in a physical setting. Constraints appeared, such as not being allowed to have two classrooms working together on the same project as would have been an obvious entrepreneurial learning endeavour, but the context further encouraged the staff to become even more creative, and to keep the group work going through Teams.

### Nursery (three- to four-year-olds)

In the nursery, Mrs Faith Muldoon (Early Years) promotes resilience with help from the nursery rhyme 'Incy Wincy Spider' (origin unknown). Mrs Muldoon shared "For the children, to never give up, always get back up again, and to try, try, try, again has become a mantra to face ambiguity and challenge with perseverance and resilience". Quoting Rita Pierson, she explained, "if you say it long enough, it starts to be a part of you". She explained:

This little spider is really curious. He works hard, he takes risks, you know, but disasters sometimes happen sometimes. Sometimes Mother Nature wipes you out and you lay on the ground, you've had hurt, you've had a fright. You know, you have yourself a big cry, and that's perfectly okay. But you pick yourself up, you dust yourself off, and you try again. And that's what concepts like resilience and perseverance. This is what it looks like here at the first rung of the school.

Link: <https://twitter.com/amanwy/status/1403392529228304385>

In 10 days, Marshmallow was built from recycled materials and paper mâché and decorated. They give him a heart, a reason for being, a name, a job, a diet and special powers. The children also contributed to a people voice reflective scrapbook. The amount of language development that came out of this process was just phenomenal. It is about 40 plus pages long.

This is what the sort of foundations of collaboration look like. These are children that are still learning to play alongside each other. With a project like this, they're all in there. They're all in it together at various levels, pooling skills and working with different types of tools. When you map this into EntreComp petal terms, it's quite powerful to think how many skills and competences that these three- and four-year-olds have worked on during that project.

### **Foundation (aged five, and six)**

Miss Tracey Singleton, Foundation Phase, embraced the entrepreneurial skills framework to also embed sustainable practices. During a walk following a lesson on plastics pollution the school children spotted a full bin of empty plastic milk containers. They set about repurposing their use to create value for both themselves and their local bird community. The class decided on recycling milk cartons to create bird feeders. This was a messy but fun process which they enjoyed fully and the birds loved them:

After discussion about developing our garden area the pupils spotted the opportunity to raise funds for this project – we would make and sell the bird feeders. We were using an app called Book Creator to make posters to advertise the product and took advantage of our social media platforms and school noticeboard to get the message across to others – the money raised was used to purchase plants and seeds.

Following EntreCompEdu training, the teachers decided to put the principles in to practice through a Curiosity Cube. This would offer several opportunities – vision, thinking skills, imagination, problem solving, generating discussions, reflection... The aim was to add an item to the cube and allow the children to look for clues about what it might be or what message it could be giving them. This was a highly successful addition to the classroom, with enthusiasm from the children when a new item was added, offering motivation for teachers to think of more challenging and obscure additions.

The competences and whole message behind the EntreComp programme fit seamlessly into the pedagogy and ethos of Foundation Phase teaching and learning. They endeavour to enthuse learners and engage them with opportunities and surroundings in a thoroughly cross-curricular approach. Working with others, taking the initiative, motivation and perseverance, learning from experiences – these competences are daily practices for their learners.

As a whole school, I feel that the EntreComp training has supported us in not only gaining more knowledge and understanding of the competences but also in acknowledging the successful and proactive teaching and learning opportunities we are already providing for our learners. Exploring the competences and delving in to what they actually mean for us as educators has enabled us to spot opportunities within our current practices and also highlight areas where we can incorporate the ethos of entrepreneurial learning across the school.

### **Rest of school examples**

Even with their EntreCompEdu online graduation a pleasant summer memory, the staff at Dafen Primary School, not resting on their laurels, leapt into action to embed their enhanced entrepreneurial principles and practices as soon as the new Autumn term brought them back to school, taking school – wide entrepreneurship vision and learner competence development to new heights. An entrepreneurship cross-curricula extravaganza delivered to celebrate Global Entrepreneurship Week 2021 (GEW2021) at Dafen School put a light on the concrete transferability of the EntreComp framework in supporting the new Curriculum for Wales – developing enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work.

For GEW2020, Dafen Primary embraced a breadth of exciting activities and projects that amplified the fact entrepreneurial concepts, competences and language can be confidently articulated throughout all learning environments and age-groups in school. Sustainability was their selected theme for a further conjoined affair.

Boxes of old CDs destined for the bin were the recyclable material of choice for the youngest learners. A series of tests carried out by the nursery children, to work through the properties of the CD and what could be successfully used to decorate them, fueled curiosity and experimentation. Collaborative building with loose parts gathered from boxes of junk led to further creative exploration and inquiry. An additional opportunity for perseverance and grit as the children problems-solved their way through the construction of the new decoration. A young team that now delight in being able to watch and reflect on their beautiful decorative light-catchers, as they twinkle in the sunlight.

The Foundation Phase set up a business to raise money for classroom resources. Inspired by the story, “The Squink”, and a concern for the welfare

of birdlife in their school swale, they voted upon the design and creation of bird feeders. Having spotted a full bin of empty plastic milk containers, they set about repurposing their use to create value for both themselves and their local bird community. Experimenting with bird mix recipes and production approaches, they worked through many entrepreneurial competences, including costing and pricing their bird feeders. They also worked on advertising strategies making use of digital books and social media.

Pupils of the Foundation Phase also committed to a sustainable production project – *recycled paper production*. As well as experimentation with process efficiency and paper quality, the group explored the wider value and benefits of recycling. Pupils had noticed how there was a lot of paper waste and although they were recycling the paper it was an area they wanted to investigate further. They researched ways to reuse old papers and came up with the plan to make paper of their own. Pupils worked together to plan their method and organise their resources and then they got started. Perseverance and Motivation – the paper might not have been as successful as anticipated but the pupils learnt to keep going, to look at the project from a different perspective, to cope with the perceived ‘failure’ and take something from that when moving forward with future tasks and projects.

Following a jam-board session to ideate and work together, the younger juniors also sprang into action with their very timely face mask project. 100% bespoke designs using recycled materials A clear package of spotting opportunities, developing ideas, planning skills, an awareness of limited resources and lots of collaborative learning.

An evaluation of collaborative ideas-sharing, the higher juniors contributed to entrepreneurial fever with their bespoke sustainable bunting. A joyful environmentally-friendly product to send to the local nursing home to brighten up their days. Pupils developed skills in planning and mobilising resources, they worked as a team to support each other in measuring and marking out the coverings before cutting the fabric to fit. They explored the real-world contexts and chose a project which was not only fostering sustainable goals but also relevant to their current daily life. This class also went to develop sustainable clay tile products to create and sell.

There was also a project to upcycle old t-shirts into an incredible creative range of bags, which drew on all manner of “Ideas and opportunities” – “Resources” and “Into action” competences. Pupils in year 4/5 shared ideas about how to engage with our local community. They wanted to create a product which would not only add value but foster a sense of sustainable



thinking too. They decided to upcycle old fabric in order to create bunting to brighten up the local care home – Ty Mair. This opened up lines of communication between the pupils, residents and staff which has since resulted in the school participating in ‘Grandparents Day’ where we made cards and sent gift packages to the residents. Both the residents and care home staff were greatly appreciative of the gestures. This encouraged a sense of pride and achievement in the pupils also. Further opportunities for engaging with local stakeholders came from Year 4/5 development of a green space in the school area – they worked together to create an allotment where they developed skills in planning and organising their resources and the area, working as a team to plant and take care of the allotment and a lot of perseverance and resilience was developed through taking care of the plants and helping them to grow despite the intermittent weather we have been seeing! The class received donations of plants and seeds from our local ‘Morrisons’ and also a small business ‘Stevie Bees’ – this supported pupils in developing thinking about product selection, profit and loss, money management. The intention is to sell produce when the crops and plants are harvested.

Year 5/6 collaborated to plan their challenge and share ideas about possible uses for the ‘old’ T-shirts. From this they chose to upcycle the T-shirts in order to create shopping bags – their goal was to develop a product which supported sustainable goals as well as being purposeful and a valued creation – no more plastic waste from throwaway shopping bags. Many skills were developed across the project – vision, planning and management, mobilising resources, creating value, spotting opportunities.

Beeswax Wraps – as part of our Lightbringers Project the pupils reached out to a local company – Dunelm to request the possibility of receiving offcuts or old fabrics at a reduced price. The result – the company was inspired by the pupils’ creativity and initiative and they donated reams of fabric to the school for free! Definitely a successful lesson in engaging with stakeholders and fostering relationships with the local community. From this, the pupils worked to plan an develop beeswax wraps – the idea was to create a product which would be reusable and reduce plastic or foil waste from packed lunches. With some adult support the pupils worked to melt the beeswax and use it to embed in the fabrics – the finished product looked great and works superbly!

## Discussions

What is very clear from the hive of activity this GEW2020 is that entrepreneurial skills are not just fun to develop, but help pupils develop creative ideas that can solve local problems in better ways, and support with the skills development to turn those ideas into action. Analysis of data observation reveals an inspirational view of collaborative CPD. Further some of the data also reveal a pragmatic, occupational approach to entrepreneurship education (Kennedy, 2011) where the structure of the CPD framework (Decimone, 2002; Fischer et al., 2018) seems to have summed up the situation perfect that the new curricula, new entrant demands. It seems that the practical process is to be heading from conducive to collaborative endeavour (Kennedy, 2011).

It was magnificent that with all that sort of chaos going on, that the school was able to sort of pull together a sustainability themed a Global Entrepreneurship Week, within a very short space of time, testament to how embedded these skills are, because they did not really have to think about it was natural to them. The school was in a flow of being able pull on those competences with a whole-school focus. And come away with a whole suite of projects. This was not done in a piecemeal way: this is something that is actually demonstrating an in-depth and integrated build to their new curriculum development.

Macro lessons that were accomplished was Adopting Creative Learning, that aligns closely to the four purposes of the curriculum for Wales. It makes more active use of nature to bring learning from and out in the outdoors. It enhances the collaboration across classes and on whole-school projects. It improves a sense of well-being or working from the environment and getting personal and shared value from resolving problems through creativity. In addition it enhances more teaching staff collaboration. It applies more ambitious with use of new technology platforms to develop the competences.

Overall an entrepreneurial mindset for staff and pupils and an appetite to take an idea through to implementation, embracing failure and challenge was seen. More awareness of environment – local and global, what's going on in the world around them was recognised. The engagement with stakeholders and the local community was increased. In summary the foundation for the staircase to adopt entrepreneurial competences (Bacigalupo et al., 2016) is well laid down.

EntreCompEdu taught the staff how to make use of EntreComp to ‘receive’ relayed sustainability and creative projects like the Cymbrogi Lightbringers Project in a holistic way – now the entire school community continually builds on entrepreneurship, and entrepreneurial learning, further strengthening, as seen, month by month, week by week, the new curriculum build.

### Stakeholder recognition

Dafen Primary School showcase how the collective engagement of developing creative, innovative, and risk-taking abilities into teaching practices has an amplifying impact upon implementation, energy, and confidence; fast tracking impregnation into the culture of a whole school. This contrasts with a more typical cascade approach to individual CPD opportunities, which can get diluted over time when faced with the obstacles of passing firsthand experience and learning and passion on to others in the workplace/educational setting.

- Gareth Morgans, Director of Education and Children’s Services Department at Carmarthenshire Council said he was impressed on the school’s wholehearted commitment to the new Welsh curriculum (UWTSD, 2021),
- Nia Griffith, Shadow Secretary of State for Wales, complimented the staff and pupils on their vision and resilience, recognising the power of the EntreComp skills framework, celebrating the breadth of value creation work pulling through all the year group presentations adding: “respecting the planet, and integrating the ethical and social, all phenomenally important, not to mention a clear focus on getting things done.” (UWTSD, 2021),
- Lee Walters, Deputy Minister for Climate Change noted the skills the pupils have developed like curiosity and goal setting aren’t just fun but will help them to become confident problem-solvers for the rest of their lives. An exceptional achievement for the school after such a difficult year (UWTSD, 2021).

## Whole-School CPD

Whole-school CPD with online facilitated support is not only efficient, but powerful and impactful. Staff had a high level of interaction with a global population of learners and facilitators on the online learning platform. It became a safe and welcome, yet inspiring space that helped educators through COVID and long-term curriculum implementation. The opportunity for staff to share their stories and to have some personal reflection time, which is done in the personal space, then that opportunity to think wait and see the community as a global entity, when they were thin, confidential web to share their stories ease with people at the other side of the world was key. And not just only within their context as a primary educator. On the forum, primary teachers engaged and exchanged with secondary and HE educators, and the voluntary sector, drawing from all sorts of disciplines from AI and technology to poetry and geography. A cross cutting interactive, professional exchange which inspired and supported a growth entrepreneurship growth mindset.

It was also important that they were able to build upon rather than brush aside all their experience and skills to date. EntreCompEdu encouraged participants to recognise and embrace their good pedagogy and practice, and then build on it through targeted competence growth collectively engaged. It's important that people can draw on their experiences and reflections to support that ongoing journey collaboratively. Mrs Michelle Davies, Key Stage 2, added:

We were introduced to EntreComp and Entrepreneurial Learning in a primary school context. Key takeaways for me was the advantages of a reflective and experiential pedagogy, and that entrepreneurial learning, tapping into creative experimentation, is not purely focused on financial or enterprise activity, but opens up much broader value creation that includes the cultural and the social.

## Summary

The case study in Dafen school represents a successful whole-school experience of EntreCompEdu continuing professional development programme (CPD). It represents how collaborative adult learning (Drago-Seversson, 2009, 2016) and collective engagement of developing creative, innovative, and risk-

taking abilities into teaching practices (Grigg, 2020) has an amplifying impact upon implementation, energy, and confidence; especially influencing the entrepreneurial practice and culture of the whole school. The EntreCompEdu continuing professional development project was introduced to Dafen School in Wales at almost the same moment as the Covid-19 lockdown began in Wales, with the purpose to introduce teachers the entrepreneurial competences that they need in order to follow the new curricula. Firstly, it responded to the call for the professional development that connects the teachers' everyday practices (Avalos, 2011; Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002; Borko, 2007). Secondly, it served its purpose for teachers in processing the new Welsh curricula in the most effective (Drago-Seversson, 2009; 2016) and cost-efficient way (Li & Dervin, 2018).

Analysis of case study results reveals EntreCompEdu as an inspirational channel of collaborative CPD, yet it was pragmatic, taking an occupational approach to EE (Kennedy, 2011) where the structure of the CPD framework (Decimone, 2002, 2009; Fischer et al., 2018) seems to have summed up the different demands placed on the school and its teachers through the twin challenges of the new curriculum for Wales and the onset of Covid-19. It seems teacher development (Ben-Peretz, 2001) in entrepreneurial competences was conducive to building collaborative endeavour (Kennedy, 2011).

This study reinforces previous evidence that teachers' professional development in entrepreneurship education creates a double loop of teachers' collaborative adult online learning and collective engagement under prevailing pressures from new entrants; curriculum reform by Wales government and the school Covid-19 lockdown (Drago-Seversson, 2009, 2016). The appropriately designed online EntreCompEdu professional development programme (Decimone, 2002, 2009; Fischer et al., 2018) further enhanced an appetite for 'facilitated' entrepreneurial learning of individual EE skills (Ruskovaara et al., 2014, 2016) and supported collaborative work on new ways of thinking about those skills (Weiner & Lamb, 2020). The online support facilitated CPD even during a time of crisis i.e. the long term COVID lockdown. It celebrated the gains to be made from whole-school CPD online opportunities. In addition, it initiated a creation of long-term professional network between schools and the 'university'. It enforced the collective engagement, and collaborative learning among teachers (Drago-Seversson & Blum-DeStefano, 2014; Lamb & Weiner, 2020) with full headteacher support (Ruskovaara et al., 2016). Last but not least, it underlined the limitless potential for entrepreneurial practice capture and dissemination, that warrants further research studies.

EntreCompEdu continuous professional development stands as a powerful tool to bring together new curriculum, sustainability and entrepreneurial agendas. It enhances the strengthening of entrepreneurial culture, laying good foundation for learners. Teacher Ms S. said:

Making use of the EntreComp Framework, an entrepreneurial learning approach to curriculum design supported by the EntreCompEdu CPD framework was a perfect solution to help us target and unlock the 'creativity and innovation', 'critical thinking and problem-solving', 'personal effectiveness', and 'planning and organising' potential of learners, as expressed in the new curriculum.

At the start, school leadership saw the EntreCompEdu training as an opportunity to strengthen creativity and innovation, and adaptation to new demands of Welsh curricula, functioning as a positive internal driver for volunteers to commit and complete. For the 8 staff who elected to join EntreCompEdu first, it was possibly an act of blind faith, but early collaboration reinforced the engagement through a shared goal led to early cross-class communications and support.

One-third of the way into the CPD, the groundswell of activity, conversation, and energy surrounding the journey led to the remaining staff joining despite the pressures of Covid-19. A whole-school approach had a powerful impact in shifting the entire school into entrepreneurial learning as a guiding principle. At Dafen, each pupil now knows what the word entrepreneurship means, through taking a chance via creative, innovative, and risk-taking learning concepts.

In the end the Global Entrepreneurship Week at Dafen School shone a light on the concrete transferability of the EntreComp competence framework. Dafen School is the first school that has collectively 'Taken a Chance' on CPD and been awarded 'EntreCompEdu Pioneer School' status to celebrate its entrepreneurship cross-curricula extravaganza.

## Limitations

As Dafen school represents only one organisation under the umbrella of the new Welsh curricula, it depicts only one single successful case of impact of the teachers' professional learning programme of EntreCompEdu on entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial competences. Second the school is rather small in size, and this should be taken into consideration.



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## **A Living Educational Theory Research Approach to Continuing Educational, Professional Development\*\***

### **Summary**

An argument for adopting a Living Educational Theory Research approach to the process of continuing educational, professional development is presented. A living-educational-theory (a term coined by Whitehead by 1989) is the valid, values-laden and evidence-based explanation of the practitioner for their educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of social formations. An educational-practitioner develops their living-educational-theory research methodology as they research into their practice to understand and improve it and to generate valid accounts of their living-educational-theory. A Living Educational Theory Research approach to professional development has been used to enhance professionalism in diverse fields of practice and cultural contexts over many years. Examples are given of the difference adopting a Living Educational Theory Research approach has made to improve educational and professional practice. The difference is focused on realising professional educational responsibilities to contribute to the knowledgebase of education and a global educational knowledgebase for the flourishing of Humanity. The difference is also grounded in practitioners accepting their educational responsibilities for living their values as fully as possible and for sharing the knowledge they are creating. Examples drawn from India, England, South Africa, Pakistan

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and Bangladesh serve to emphasise the global influence of a Living Educational Theory Research approach to continuing, educational professional development.

**Keywords:** professional practitioner development, educational-research, living-educational-theory, Living Educational Theory Research, continuing professional development

Education is a human right and a force for sustainable development and peace. Every goal in the 2030 Agenda requires education to empower people with the knowledge, skills and values to live in dignity, build their lives and contribute to their societies. (UNESCO, 2016)

## Introduction

Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) of the 2030 Agenda aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030. The contributors to organisations such as the Association for Teacher Education in Europe (ATEE) and the International Professional Development Association (IPDA) bear witness to the global efforts by educators to making their contribution to creating a world in which humanity can flourish. This paper is focused on an approach to the continuing professional development of teachers in which teachers, as professionals realise their responsibility to research their practice to improve it, generate their evidence-based explanations of their educational influences in learning with values of human flourishing, and contribute the validated knowledge they create to the growth of a global educational knowledgebase for the benefit of all.

In this paper we aim to present a Living Educational Theory Research Approach to continuing professional development in a way that can be helpful for teachers to:

- Recognise where they are already using action-reflection cycles and other research methods to improve what they are doing.
- Recognise the importance of focussing on values in working to improve their own practice as a professional.
- See the importance of researching into their own practice to understand, improve and explain it and creating and making public valid, values-based explanations of their educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of social formations they are working in and are part of.

- Formulate and act on a plan to extend their living-educational-theory approach to improving their continuing professional development programme for their own benefit and the benefit of us all.

## Living Educational Theory Research

Living Educational Theory Research is a form of professional practitioner, self-study educational research. This is not to be confused with a form of psychological, psychotherapeutic study of self. The 'self' being studied in Living Educational Theory Research is that of a professional taking responsibility for their practice and for improving it, and for contributing to local, national and international academic, intellectual and scholarly discourses, which bring into being a world in which all Humanity flourishes.

An educational-practitioner develops their living-educational-theory research methodology as they research into their practice to understand and improve it and generate valid accounts of their living-educational-theory (Whitehead, 1989a, 1989b, 2019a).

A living-educational-theory is the valid, values-laden explanation of the practitioner for their educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of social formations. The meanings of a practitioner's professional and educational values are clarified in the course of their research into questions such as, 'How do I improve what I am doing in my professional practice?' These humanitarian values form the explanatory principles in explanations of the practitioner's educational influence in learning, the standards by which they evaluate the effectiveness of their practice and the validity of their contributions to the growth of knowledge of their profession *and* to a global educational knowledgebase for the benefit of all.

In the first issue of the *Educational Journal of Living Theories* (EJOLTs) Whitehead (2008) wrote:

The approach outlined below is focused on a living theory<sup>1</sup> methodology for improving practice and generating knowledge from questions of the kind 'How do I improve what I am doing?' It also includes a new epistemology for educational knowledge. The new epistemology rests on a living logic of educational enquiry and living standards of judgment (Laidlaw,

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<sup>1</sup> A 'living-educational-theory' is often abbreviated to 'living theory' and 'Living Educational Theory Research' to 'Living Theory' in the literature.

1996) that include flows of life affirming energy with values that carry hope for the future of Humanity.

The presentation emphasizes the importance of the uniqueness of each individual's living-educational-theory (Whitehead, 1989) in improving practice and generating knowledge. It emphasizes the importance of individual creativity in contributing to improving practice and knowledge from within historical and cultural opportunities and constraints in the social contexts of the individual's life and work.

The web-based version of this presentation demonstrates the importance of local, national and international communicative collaborations for improving practice and generating knowledge in the context of globalizing communications. Through its multi-media representations of educational relationships and explanations of educational influence in learning it seeks to communicate new living standards of judgment. These standards are relationally-dynamic and grounded in both improving practice and generating knowledge. They express the life-affirming energy of individuals, cultures and the cosmos, with values and understandings that it is claimed carry hope for the future of humanity. (p. 103)

Some of the vocabulary associated with Living Educational Theory Research has been clarified in the editorial foreword of the June 2021 issue of EJOLTs:

1. Living Educational Theory (with upper case) refers to a lexical definition of meaning, which distinguishes it as a unique field of educational research activity.

1.1. Living Educational Theory research can be conceptualised as the process that a practitioner researcher engages in to create their own living-educational-theory (with lower case, hyphenated).

2.1. A Living Educational Theory researcher produces an account of their inquiry comprising descriptions and explanations, which together constitute an account of their living-educational-theory.

2.1.1. A living-educational-theory is an educational practitioner's descriptions and explanations of their educational influence in their own learning, the learning of others and the learning of social formations – as they explore questions of the sort 'How do I improve what I'm doing in my educational practice?' (Laidlaw & Mellett, 2021, Appendix, pp. xv-xvi)

## Continuing professional development

In this paper the contribution to enhancing professionalism in education is focused on the clarification and use of humanitarian values that distinguish the educational responsibilities and educational influences of professional educators in improving their professional praxis and contributing to the knowledgebase of their profession. We understand the purpose of education



to be as Reiss and White (2013) put the purpose of school to be, to equip children, "...to lead a life that is personally flourishing, and to help others to do so, too" (p. 1). We contend that is the purpose not only of school but also the purpose of education for all ages. This dual focus of responsibilities on the flourishing of the individual and 'other' is also expressed by Kaukko et al. (2020) in their chapter, 'Education for a World Worth Living In', where they "take a view of education as being for the good for each person and for the good for humankind." These sentiments are echoed in the hallmarks that are commonly referred to as distinguishing characteristics of a professional practitioner. There can be confusion between the expectations of a practitioner as a member of a profession and their responsibilities as a *professional* practitioner, which has implications for what a practitioner includes (or is expected to include by their employer and the professional body to which they belong) in their programme of continuing professional development.

We contend that *professional* practitioners have responsibilities as a *professional*, to meet standards which includes holding them self to account with respect to their humane values. At the same time they have a responsibility to meet the standards of the professional body they belong to and those of their employer. Perhaps a key to understanding those responsibilities is to understand the purposes of the various 'standards' and to whom the practitioner is accountable. Members of a profession, such as teaching, are expected to act ethically and in the best interest of those they work with and for, *and* to develop practice that meets in targets set by their employer and by the government of the day. For example the Department of Education of England (DoE) stipulate:

Teachers make the education of their pupils their first concern, and are accountable for achieving the highest possible standards in work and conduct. Teachers act with honesty and integrity; have strong subject knowledge, keep their knowledge and skills as teachers up-to-date and are self-critical; forge positive professional relationships; and work with parents in the best interests of their pupils. (DoE Teachers' Standards, 2016, Preamble)

The standards by which 'education' is judged and the influence they have on the development of teachers as professionals are not dissimilar from those Zhang and Lui (2021) refer to in their paper, 'Re-professionalisation or de-professionalisation: how do Chinese high school teachers respond to the new professionalism?' In their abstract they indicated that "managerial professionalism strongly influence teachers: examination-oriented professionalism and quality-





oriented professionalism. Meanwhile, three patterns of teachers' reactions to externally imposed professionalism are identified: 'Why bother?', 'Struggling', and 'Meaningless'. The findings provoke further discussion of the potential influence of teachers' responses to the new professionalism and professional development." In their paper they stressed that:

Three key factors have been identified as being central to one's status as a professional: knowledge, autonomy, and responsibility (Hoyle and John 1995). Despite many challenges in relation to teachers' professionalism, these three factors remain important in examining the traditional conception of professionalism, as teachers have a specialised body of knowledge that is beyond the reach of laypeople and the autonomy to make their own judgements on behalf of clients' interests and public goods; moreover, it is vital that responsibility should be maintained during this process. However, traditional professionalism in teaching has come under challenge from the continued ascendancy of neo-liberal reforms in public fields (Anderson and Cohen 2015). Neo-liberal reforms essentially transfer managerial logic from the private to the public sector and create a new form of professionalism which is a markedly changed version of the former well-established professionalism. As a result, the new professionalism is a significant transfer of private-sector logic into the public sector and a replacement of the ethos of public service with the discipline of the market and performance-based external accountability (Evetts 2009a). (Zhang & Lui, 2021, p. 2)

What these approaches to professionalism seem to miss is the responsibility we each have as human beings for what we do. That includes responsibility for contributing to the educational development of the organisations and other social formations we are part of, as well as our responsibility as human beings for contributing to the flourishing of Humanity as a global social formation that transcends time and place. What in effect they do is to foreground the purpose of education as training and knowledge transfer to prepare people for the job market. This defines the roles and responsibilities of Education institutions, such as schools, colleges and universities, and the nature of the 'education' to be 'delivered'.

There are many well-developed learning theories created by psychologists and neuroscientists, which educators can draw on, (such as 'cognitive load theory' the inspection arm of the English Department of Education base their work on). Theories created in other disciplines such as sociology, are also drawn on to improve craft and technical skills (Winch, 2013). For example, 'capacity for critical reflection' is added to extend a notion of what constitutes a professional educator:

As Winch et al (Ibid.) argue, what is missing from both the simplified craft view and the narrow technical view is the capacity for critical reflection: that is, the type of deeper insight that comes from interrogating one's practice and making explicit the assumptions and values that underpin it. In contrast to either view, the idea of the teacher as professional combines all three aspects of knowledge – practical, technical and theoretical – including knowledge derived through personal experience as well as research, analysis and critical reflection. (BERA-RSA Inquiry into Research and Teacher Education, 2014, p. 20)

However, this is still not much of a development from the definition of professionalism Zhang and Liu (2021) base their work on. Sachs (1999) working in a different culture and era, went a bit further with a notion of democratic professionalism. Such writers seem to be more concerned with teacher autonomy and collaboration with 'stakeholders' than about realising the principles of education as a life-long values-laden process of someone learning to live a satisfying, productive and worthwhile life for themselves and others.

The challenges teachers, as professional educators, have to face, whether in Australia, England, China, or other global contexts are those concerned with realising their professional responsibility as an educator to contribute to improving the quality of education for their pupils/students and for all. The key is to shift from teachers focussing on improving performance to enhancing educational influence in learning, which brings us to Living Educational Theory Research and professional educational practice.

In a Living Educational Theory Research approach to enhancing professionalism, professionals engage in inquiry and research to improve their own practice and that of others by contributing to the growth of their profession's knowledgebase and a global educational knowledgebase for the flourishing of Humanity. A Living Educational Theory Research approach to continuing educational, professional development is grounded in:

- The assumption that creating and making public accounts of living-educational-theories contributes to the flourishing of the humanity of individuals, collectives and Humanity as a global social formation that transcends time and place.
- We each have the capacity to generate valid values-laden explanations of our educational influences in learning as we explore the implications of asking, researching and answering questions of the kind, 'How do I improve what I am doing?'

A professional educator's Living Educational Theory Research CPD programme includes, for example:



- Continuing study to extend their cognitive range and concern;
- Keeping up-to-date with practice knowledge;
- Generating and testing the validity of their claims to be contributing to improving the quality of the educational experiences, opportunities and relationships they and their employer are providing for learners;
- Seeking to make a contribution to the growth of global educational knowledge by making public valid accounts of the knowledge they generate through their values-laden professional practitioner self-study educational research;
- Not only drawing on the knowledgebase of their profession to improve their own praxis but to also contributing to the growth of a knowledgebase and academic, intellectual and scholarly discourses for the benefit of all;
- Not only acting in accord with the ethics and code of conduct of their professional body but to also contribute to improving them;
- Challenging and evolving their standards of professionalism and holding themselves to account by researching into their values-laden practice to understand, improve and explain it and generate valid accounts of their living-educational-theories;
- Contributing the educational knowledge generated in the process to a global educational knowledge-base for the flourishing of Humanity.

We believe teachers have a passion, as we do, for improving educational opportunities, experiences and relationship that contribute to the flourishing of an individual's humanity and the flourishing of Humanity as a global social formation, which transcends time and place. We deliberately use the word 'flourishing' not 'surviving'. 'Flourishing' communicates a sense of well being of each and all human beings, who are living lives imbued with energy flowing, life-enhancing humanitarian values and living in harmony with a world they inhabit and are part of. That passion has been core to the questions that have driven the development of Huxtable's professional practices, for example, when working as an educational psychologist and now as a visiting research fellow with the University of Cumbria, and Whitehead's professional practices, for example, when working first as a secondary school science teacher, then as a university lecturer and researcher, and now as a visiting Professor with the University of Cumbria. It is continuously seeking to ask and answer questions such as, 'how can I improve what I am doing?' and 'how do I improve the process of education here?' that led Whitehead to develop Living Educational Theory Research.

A Living Educational Theory Research approach to continuing professional development (CPD) has been used to enhance professionalism in education and other fields of practice in diverse cultural contexts for over 30 years (Whitehead, 1989a, 2019a). This work is drawn on in this paper to:

- Present an argument for professionals adopting a Living Educational Theory Research approach to evolving their continuing educational, professional development programme.
- Provide illustrative examples of how a Living Educational Theory Research approach to professional development has been used to enhance professionalism in diverse fields of practice and cultural contexts over many years.
- Extend an invitation to teachers to:
  - Test our claim that adopting a Living Educational Theory Research approach can make a significant difference to your ability as an educator and professional to improving your educational and professional practice and realising your professional educational responsibilities.
  - Contribute to the growth of local and global researching communities to bringing into being a world in which Humanity flourishes.

We outline some of the research methods developed and then go on to provide illustrative examples of how a Living Educational Theory Research approach to professional development has been used by practitioners to enhance their professionalism in diverse fields of practice and cultural contexts. We provide details to support our claim that Living Educational Theory Research is a well established, internationally recognised, academic research paradigm and form of professional development. We conclude the paper with an invitation to teachers to test our claim that adopting a Living Educational Theory research approach to your continuing professional development as a professional educator can make a significant difference to your ability realising your responsibilities as a professional educator and to join a global community of researchers engaged in values-led research for systemic change, which contributes to the flourishing of Humanity.

### **The significance of a Living Educational Theory Research approach to continuing professional development**

Adopting a Living Educational Theory Research approach to enhancing professionalism emphasises a view of professionalism that includes both



improving educational and professional practice and realising professional educational responsibilities (Harper et al., 2020) to contribute to the knowledgebase of education and to contribute to the educational learning of social formations; local, national and global which comprise the complex ecology within which we live and work.

At the heart of this approach to continuing professional development is an educators responsibility to ask, research and answer questions of the kind, 'How do I improve my professional educational practice with values of human flourishing?' The central significance of this question is the inclusion of the 'I' of the professional educator. It is important to recognise that 'I' is not a concept in the sense of understanding a principle, such as the concept of a person. A Living Educational Theory Research approach includes the lived experience of an individual 'I' in a values-based explanation of an individual's educational influences in learning.

These are the explanations produced by the individual educator of their educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations that influence practice and understandings. Knowledge of education and educational knowledge are often confused. Knowledge of education comprises knowledge generated by researchers who are working within the conceptual frameworks and methods of validation of disciplines such as the philosophy, sociology, psychology and history of education. The importance of recognising this distinction can be appreciated by understanding a mistake that was made in the Disciplines Approach to Educational Theory in which it was held that this theory was constituted by the disciplines of the philosophy, psychology, sociology and history of education. Applying this approach, to continuing professional development, led to the mistake of replacing the practical principles, used by educators to explain their educational influence, by the principles of the disciplines of education (Hirst, 1983, p. 18). Hence the importance of including the 'I' of the educator in explanations of their educational influences in learning.

Educational knowledge comprises knowledge generated by those who accept their responsibility to research their practice to improve it and offer valid, values-based, explanations of their educational influences in learning, in order to contribute to the flourishing of their own humanity, the flourishing of the humanity of others and the flourishing of Humanity. We are taking 'Humanity' to refer to a global social formation which transcends time and place. We repeat, we deliberately use the word 'flourishing' not 'surviving'. 'Flourishing' communicates a sense of well being of each and all human beings,



who are living lives imbued with energy flowing, life-enhancing humanitarian values, in harmony with a world they inhabit and are part of.

A Living Educational Theory Research approach to professional development has been used to enhance professionalism in diverse fields of practice and cultural contexts over many years. Whitehead's writings from 1967–2021, which can be accessed from <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/writing.shtml>, and in the Living Educational Theory dissertations and doctorates, which can be accessed from <https://www.actionresearch.net/living/living.shtml>, provide evidence to support this claim.

Improving educational practices at all levels of education necessitates employing well-qualified professional educators who can contribute to the growth of an educated citizenship of 2030 and beyond to realise a “humanistic vision of education and development” (Education 2030, Incheon Declaration, p. iii).

## The theoretical framework

We have already clarified the meaning of what constitutes a ‘living-educational-theory’, the term coined by Whitehead (1985) as a valid, values-laden explanation a researcher creates in the course of researching into their practice to improve it, of their educational influences in their own learning, the learning of others and the learning of the social formations of which they are a member. Those social formations are often only seen as those a person has an immediate and personal connection with such as the class, school, university they work in. What is not so often recognised is the contribution we each make, whether we intend to or not, to the functioning of other social formations such as political parties, governments and the cultures within which we live. What is also not often recognised is the contribution we each make to the flourishing or otherwise of us all, and those yet to be, by our very presence in the world. These contributions are explicated in the argument we make for adopting a Living Educational Theory Research approach to the process of continuing educational, professional development.

The Framework of a Living Educational Theory Research approach to continuing professional development includes:

- A professional commitment to realise personal and professional life-enhancing values in practice and in generating valid contributions to an educational knowledgebase to bring into being a world in which Humanity



flourishes. (We are taking 'Humanity' to refer to a global social formation which transcends time and place.)

- The question, 'How do I improve what I am doing in my professional educational practice with values of human flourishing?' can include the experience of oneself as a living contradiction in the sense of holding together the desire to live values of human flourishing with the experience of their negation.
- Methods for enhancing the validity of an individual's living-educational-theory as their explanation of their educational influence in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of the social formations that influence practice and understanding.
- Creating an individual's living-educational-theory, as an explanation of educational influence in learning, can include the integration of insights from theories developed in disciplines associated with education such as the philosophy, psychology, sociology, history, politics, economics, leadership and management of education.

The theoretical framework in this paper provides an evidence-based argument to justify the claim that the contributions to the special section of *British Educational Research Journal* 14(6), (Biesta et al., 2021; Dominic et al., 2021; Hordern, 2021; Kelchtermans, 2021; Parsons, 2021; Takayama et al., 2021; Wyse et al., 2021) are not close enough to researching educational practice, that is, their own, to generate the valid explanations of educational influences in learning that are needed to constitute Educational Theory. The paper explains how the mistake in the Disciplines Approach to Education, recognised by Hirst (1983) in replacing the practical principles used by educators to explain their educational practices, by principles from the disciplines approach, can be rectified. This mistake was compounded by Whitty (2005) in his Presidential Address to BERA where he advocated a change in BERA's name to the British Education Research Association.

### The research questions

The research questions focus on professional educators exploring the implications of asking, researching and answering questions of the form, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' and enhancing the rigour and validity of their explanations. The questions addressed in this paper include:



- What are the consequences of professional educators exploring the implications of asking, researching and answering questions of the form, ‘How do I improve what I am doing?’ and enhancing the rigour and validity of their explanations?
- Does adopting a Living Educational Theory Research approach to their professional development enable professional educators to realize their responsibilities?

## Methods

These are some of the research that have emerged from Living Educational Theory Research:

### **Empathetic resonance as a research method developed by Whitehead**

One of the distinguishing characteristics of a living-educational-theory is in the use of the meanings of embodied expressions of values as explanatory principles in explanations of educational influences in learning. The meanings of values-laden explanatory principles, in much educational research are clarified and communicated in lexical definitions of meaning where the meanings of value-words are defined in relation to other words. Explanatory principles in a living-educational-theory are clarified and communicated as embodied expressions of meaning in the course of their emergence in practice. We first encountered the idea of empathetic resonance through the work of Sardello (2008). Our meaning of empathetic resonance is similar to that of Sardello, in that we focus on the feeling of an immediate presence of the other’s expression of values, through the digital visual data.

Sardello’s meaning, in his language of holy and soul, is influenced by his religious faith. Our humanistic commitments are influenced by flows of life-affirming energy that accompany the expression of values of human flourishing. Huxtable (2009) focused on the importance of empathetic resonance in response to Whitehead’s work.

What the method of empathetic resonance, with digital visual data, is designed to do, is to focus on the meanings of the expression of the embodied values of ourselves or the other as we move the cursor backwards and forwards along a digital video-clip until the moment of greatest resonance.



We can then check with the other that our recognition and description of the embodied value we are experiencing has validity in relation to the other's response.

We accept Popper's (1975) point that objectivity is grounded in inter-subjective criticism and that we can strengthen the objectivity of an explanation through subjecting the explanation to the mutual rational controls of critical discussion. We use validation groups of some 3–8 peers to provide such controls by responding to four questions that are related to Habermas' (1976) four criteria of social validity as one person seeks to be understood by another:

- How can I improve the comprehensibility of my explanation?
- How can I strengthen the evidence I use to justify my claim to educational knowledge?
- How can I deepen and extend my understanding of the sociohistorical and sociocultural influences in my practice and explanations?
- How can I enhance the authenticity of my explanation in the sense of showing that I am living my values as fully as possible?

### **Spirals and living-interactive-posters as research methods developed by Mounter**

Spirals and living-interactive-posters have been developed by Mounter (2014). In her doctoral research, with the provisional title, 'A Living Educational Theory research approach to continual professional development in education: How am I contributing to enhancing the professional development of educational practitioners accepting educational responsibility for their Living Professionalism?', she developed Spirals and living-interactive-posters as research methods. In the introduction to a draft of her thesis she indicated that she perceives Living Educational Theory Research 'as a way of professional life' through research-led professional development. She created and offered a Living Educational Theory Research Master's programme, validated by Newman University, UK, which incorporates the use of both Spirals and living-interactive-posters and comprised by both a given curriculum and living curriculum. Mounter identifies a Master's 'given' curriculum as that composed by the knowledge, skills and attainment targets the university prescribe. She identifies a 'living' curriculum as that generated by the practitioner them self and is created as the practitioner engages with the given curriculum.

She created Spirals as a research method and as a 'living archive', which she incorporated into the Living Educational Theory Research Masters programme.

Mounter created Spirals as a research method and living archive to enable educational practitioners of any age to capture and continually engage with, data from their educational practice and research. Sections of Spirals were designed to enable educational practitioners reflection and reflexivity on passed experiences and learning to help them create new knowledge and improve their thinking and practice.

A Spirals journal is composed of a vast multi-media compilation of the educational practitioners data, on-going analysis, thoughts, new connections, memories, profound questions and conclusions, values and links.

Spirals was initially developed by Mounter with children in her class, in her role as a primary school teacher fulfilling her responsibilities as professional educator as she explains:

Over many years as a Living Theory teacher-researcher, I found myself in a social context co-creating a living-theory TASC methodology with my class. The process of this research looked at theories of learning and developed our understanding of the journey of education and learning. We, my class and I, wanted a space we could hold open for our learning and reflections: a space for reflection and reflexivity over time: a space to generate our own understandings and self-identity, giving us the energy of motivation. This space became Spirals. (Mounter, Huxtable, & Whitehead, 2019, p. 9)

Mounter went on to create Spirals for adults. For adult researchers she created sections: Dear Me (educational influences in my own learning) – for reflection on values, beliefs and practise in their role as an educational practitioner; Prism – for notes on national and other standards and work-life balance; MeSearch (educational influences in the learning of self and others) – for developing living-interactive-posters, multi-media data, ideas for research projects bringing threads together to explore; Projects (educational influences in social formations) – focused research projects and papers undertaken, questions researched, work published and conference workshops.

Mounter created 'living-interactive-posters' as a research method and as a form of Master's level assessment. Students create a multi-media academic presentation of their research in the form of an interactive poster to submit for assessment as part of the Masters:

The originality of Living-Interactive-Poster (LIP) lies in how it enables the researcher to clarify what constitutes the practice they want to research and the values that form their explanatory principles and standards of judgment. A Living-Interactive-Poster as a research method offers a challenge for the researcher to use multi-media data to produce a representation that provides a window into their research. A requirement of the Master's assessment is for students creating their poster to be part of an active Peer Validation Group. This enables challenge, ensures social validity and rigour as well as preparing students to defend their research. (Mounter, personal communication, 2020)

### **Living Theory TASC as a research method developed by Huxtable**

#### **Living Theory TASC:**

... comprises a synthesis of a Living Theory approach to action research (Whitehead, 1989a, 2012) and TASC (Thinking Actively in a Social Context) developed by Belle Wallace (Wallace & Adams, 1993; Wallace, 2008) and incorporates multimedia narratives as a means of recognising, understanding and communicating energy-flowing values. (Huxtable, 2012, p. 223)

In bringing TASC and Living Educational Theory Research together, Huxtable (2012) sought to describe a research method that holds together the organic and systematic phases of educational research in a relationally dynamic multidimensional manner and offer it as an educational tool:

Coleman (ibid.) offers a metaphor of:

... 'theory as tool', which advances the idea that theory should function as a tool not as a goal, for organising disciplined inquiry (Marx, 1963), a tool that may come in different forms. (Huxtable, 2012, p. 67)

My living-theory is a tool in so far as it offers generative and transformational possibilities, which emerge and are clarified in the process of researching to improve my educational practice. I have in the process of evolving my living-theory praxis developed Living-Theory TASC to help me organise my disciplined, relationally dynamic and multidimensional, enquiry. As I employ this 'tool' I critically engage in the living-boundary between different worlds, with, for instance, psychological theories of learning and intelligence generated by academics and knowledge of practice generated in the classrooms. My purpose is to bring knowledge from different worlds/fields into the living-boundary between academic, practitioner and politician, and in

that space to work with it co-creatively to improve educational theory and practice. I am not concerned with asking, “Is this a ‘good’ psychological, neurological, sociological... theory?” or “Does this help me implement the latest government strategy?” Rather I am concerned with questions such as, “What do these ideas offer me as an educator researching to improve the educational experience of children and young people coming to know themselves and the person they wish to be?” and, “How does this theory help me extend or challenge my living-theory praxis?” (Huxtable, 2012, pp. 168–169).

## Contribution

In this paper we illustrate the implications for teachers, in Croatia, England, Pakistan, India, South Africa and Bangladesh, of taking professional responsibility for their practice as educators and educational practitioners. We have selected these teachers in these contexts to illustrate the global spread of a Living Educational Theory Research approach to continuing professional development. The cultural influences in each country are different but are similar in that they express a wide range of values that count towards human flourishing. The humanistic traditions in Europe and elsewhere are represented, as are Hindu and Islamic influences in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The African value and way of life of Ubuntu as a value of human flourishing is also recognised.

Each teacher has accepted their educational responsibility to use a Living Educational Theory Research approach to their continuing professional development. This involved making public, accounts of their living-educational-theory research, by creating and submitting papers to journals such as EJOLTs and making public their research accredited at Doctoral and Masters level.

These professional educators also present at various international conferences for professional educators and those concerned with developing and implementing local and national government and international policies and strategies. In doing so they contribute to systemic improvement in education for all, now, and as we have argued elsewhere, in 2030 and beyond.

Examples are given of the difference adopting Living Educational Theory Research approach has made to educators improving their educational and professional practice and realising their professional educational responsibilities to contribute to the knowledgebase of education.

Teachers face similar challenges presented by their employing Education institution and governments, irrespective of the time and place within which they are working. The following illustrate how some, as they engage in Living Educational Theory Research as continuing professional development, have addressed those challenges. We quote at length so the authentic voice of each educator can be heard.

Bognar and Zovko (2008) working in Croatia developed their 10-year-old pupils' ability to research to improve something important in their lives and support each other's research. The children presented their research to the class to share and test the validity of their knowledge claims. In the abstract to the paper they stressed that "In our inquiry the pupils determined their own challenges with the aim of improving something important in their own lives." (Bognar & Zovko, 2008, p. 1).

Mounter (2014, p. 14) in working in a rural English school as a head-teacher faced the challenge of having an educational influence in the learning of her staff and her school:

As a Head-teacher of a state funded English primary school I have a duty to implement government policy, and a personal and professional commitment to providing children with the best possible educational experience. There are times I, like many other educators nationally and internationally, experience tensions between these two drivers when my values are contradicted. This paper offers my living-theory (Whitehead, 1989), a description and values-based explanation of how I am working to resolve these contradictions and the educational influence I am having in my own learning, the learning of staff and children, and the learning of my school.

In a university in Pakistan, Panhwar (2020, p. 48) set about improving the teaching and learning of English as a Second Language and the process of education. In the abstract of the paper his pointed out:

I aim to find an accessible solution to the problem that the majority of students are not autonomous or motivated and do not actively engage with the learning process in these classes and, therefore, they fail to make satisfactory progress with their language learning. Through this inquiry, I narrate the processes and procedures, which were used to improve the situation with my students and colleagues. The findings come from two phases: the situational analysis and the intervention. I used a highly structured approach to group work, involving permanent groups and carefully selected cooperative learning activities and, hence, helped students to increase their motivation and engagement in English language support classes at the University level. From the overall inquiry and the use of Living Educational Theory research, I claim that a living-educational-theory may be a very effective methodological

approach for improving one's own academic practices and also student autonomy, motivation and engagement with ESL learning activities.

Parekh (2020, p. 21) as a head-teacher in a primary school in India transformed the education in her school and sought to have an educational influence in the learning of the social formation within which her school was situated:

I believe primary school teachers and students are the key people who can transform society. Additionally, as a teacher, I believe that a democratic and negotiated learning environment fosters accountability in a human being. Keeping this in mind, I had initiated a few educational projects with teachers and students in Lavad Primary School during the years 2015 to 2019. This paper describes how reflective practices enabled me to address the contradictions in my values and allowed me to put together creative solutions to avoid acts of autocracy. To influence my teachers and students towards transformation I tried to establish a 'culture of reflection' in the school environment. Those educational projects were designed in a manner in which teachers and students had to negotiate first and then absorb the values if they wished to. The purpose was to initiate democratic teaching and learning processes to empower teachers and students to be able to generate knowledge independently.

Gumede (2020) tackled the problems he faced as a head-teacher managing a rural South African school with few resources, "... It provides a narrative through which my living-educational-theory based on Ubuntu (humanity) and Ukuhlonipha/inhlonipho (respect) was developed and applied in my management of a rural high school..." (p. 1).

Qutoshi (2016) researched to develop transformative teacher education and address the challenge of the culturally disempowering nature of teacher education and research practices in the context of Pakistan. The knowledge he created was recognised as making an original contribution to a global educational knowledgebase with the award of a doctorate by Kathmandu University:

My aim in this research was to identify alternative ways of addressing research problem which invoked me to generate a host of research questions that came up with five key emergent themes of my inquiry: 1) Dictating and communicating views of leadership; 2) Narrowly conceived traditional view of curriculum images; 3) Conventional and somehow learner-centered pedagogies; 4) Assessment as 'of' learning and 'for' learning approaches; and 5) Objectivist and constraint pluralist research practices. (Abstract)

Tofail (2020) building on her doctoral research working in Bangladesh with:

... teachers against a backdrop of policy level introduction of communicative approach to English Language Teaching and dissatisfaction of different stakeholders, particularly teachers, with curricular reform that was not resulting in learners' 'increased proficiency'. A key reason typically given was 'teacher resistance'; teachers' perceived unwillingness to incorporate communicative principles in their teaching. Despite considerable consensus about the efficacy of teacher-research what practitioners from postcolonial communities actually say, think or believe about this and the influence on practice of teachers engaging in teacher-research has remained considerably under-reported. ... The process of initiating and facilitating collaborative research with colleagues led me to critically reflect on my own beliefs, practices and lived experiences as an ELT practitioner which, while largely shaping my embodied values has hitherto remained implicit. Through critically reflecting on my professional journey I clarify my previously unarticulated values and create my living-educational-theory. I conclude with how I am trying to enhance my educational influence in the learning of social formations, such as the private university I worked for and the Bangladesh government, with recommendations that emerged from my research. (p. 93)

## Summary and Conclusion

The research questions focused on professional educators exploring the implications of asking, researching and answering questions of the form, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' and enhancing the rigour and validity of their explanations. We believe that this paper has answered the question and justified the claims that:

- What are the consequences of professional educators exploring the implications of asking, researching and answering questions of the form, 'How do I improve what I am doing?' and enhancing the rigour and validity of their explanations?
- Adopting a Living Educational Theory Research approach to their professional enables professional educators to realize their responsibilities?

In this paper we tried to fulfil our aim of presenting a Living Educational Theory Research approach to continuing professional development in a way that helps teachers to recognise that:

- They are already using action-reflection cycles and other research methods to improve what they are doing.
- They can use their values, clarified as they research their educational practice to understand and improve it, to explain and judge their educational practice.

- In fulfilling their educational responsibility it is necessary to ask, research and answer questions of the kind, ‘How do I improve what I am doing in my professional educational practice with values of human flourishing?’ This research is focused on improving teachers practice to understand, improve and explain it. It involves teachers creating and making public valid, values-based explanations of their educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learning of social formations they are working in and are part of.
- By formulating and acting on a plan to extend teachers living-educational-theory approach to improving their continuing professional development programme they benefit themselves and us all.

We have presented an argument for adopting a Living Educational Theory Research approach to the process of continuing educational, professional development. We have provided illustrative examples of how a Living Educational Theory Research approach to professional development has been used to enhance professionalism in diverse fields of practice and cultural contexts over many years. We have provided details of where to access information about Living Educational Theory Research as a well-established internationally recognised academic paradigm and form of professional development for practitioner-researchers who want to improve their ability to realise their professional, educational responsibilities in practice.

We conclude with an invitation to teachers to test the validity of the following claim. We are claiming that by adopting a Living Educational Theory Research approach to your continuing professional development this will make a significant difference to your ability to realise your professional and educational responsibilities. These include contributing to the knowledgebase of education, the knowledgebase of your profession and to a global educational knowledgebase for the flourishing of Humanity.

We also invite teachers to extend their knowledge, understanding and practice of Living Educational Theory Research for their own benefit and for the benefit of others. Teachers can do this by contributing to the growth and influence of a global community making a contribution to the flourishing of Humanity by creating and making public their living-poster and inviting others to do so too. Details can be found on <https://www.actionresearch.net/writings/posters/homepage2021.pdf>.



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## **Combining Storytelling with the Performing Arts of Natya Shastra to Support Comprehensive Development of Children: Reflections from India and International Comparisons\***

### **Summary**

There are multiple different narrative modes in the Indian tradition with stories told mainly through performances and the storyteller often seen as a teacher. Education in India often has to cater to diverse needs, respond to extreme challenges resulting – among others – from multiplicity of languages and cultures and lack of students' motivation, which are present in many other countries. I observed the endeavours of a non-profit organisation Katha in its real environment in New Delhi. I gathered the data on Katha's activities using mostly narrative inquiry focusing on Katha's specific categories which in turn revealed Katha's narrative approach – the most important initiatives are underpinned by the stories and the desire to allow children to take joy from reading them. I describe some of the similarities I observed in other educational projects in Brazil and Colombia in order to show their interconnectedness, the integration of the teaching and learning processes with stories, the holism of the endeavours, where all the activities are governed by the common goal of relevancy to the lives of the children and emotions forming an essential part of classroom activities. The observations made me realise that besides the teacher training and curriculum curation it was the engagement of the community that was the core of the success of Katha's activities enabled by the stories and storytelling.

**Keywords:** StoryPedagogy, stories in education, storytelling, education in India, Katha, Natya Shastra

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## Introduction – the study background and rationale

Though I noticed that majority of inspirations and solutions presented at educational conferences were coming from Western countries, I was able to observe intriguing educational initiatives elsewhere, especially during my work in one of publishing companies in Poland. Some of the best ones – like project GENTE (Ginásio Experimental de Novas Tecnologias Educacionais) in the slums of Rocinha (Rio de Janeiro) or the library project in the slums of Medellin (Colombia) – occurred in impoverished areas. When I received the invitation from Ms Geeta Dharmarajan<sup>1</sup> – the founder of a non-profit organisation Katha – to come over and volunteer for some time, I did not think twice. I learnt that education in India had to cater to diverse needs, respond to extreme challenges resulting – among others – from multiplicity of languages and cultures and lack of students' motivation. These challenges are present in Western countries as well and with the growing cultural diversification in the European countries I thought we might learn from Katha's practices.

When I first looked up Katha's website (Katha, n.d.)<sup>2</sup>, I thought it was a publishing house in which content was of high importance. I soon realised that Katha was much more than that but without its own books Katha wouldn't be able to do all it has been doing for the past 33 years<sup>3</sup> as they gave Katha the freedom of designing books<sup>4</sup> they found "good" to shape children's "souls", to paraphrase Socrates' words (Plato, ca. 370 BCE/2004). Katha occupies itself with multiple initiatives directed mostly towards women and children from the poorest neighbourhoods which are very diverse. Most Katha's activities take place in the slums and people who live there come from all over the country, bringing with themselves different perspectives, needs and knowledge. The problems Katha deals with are often basic in nature: gender and economic

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<sup>1</sup> Geeta Dharmarajan is an award-winning writer, editor, social entrepreneur and educationist, with over 48 published books, more than 450 articles and over 40 years of professional experience, having served at the India Today Group of Companies, The University of Pennsylvania and INTACH, before Katha. She conceptualised and developed Katha's StoryPedagogy and its curriculum that is the bedrock for all Katha reading and education programmes ("Leadership," n.d.).

<sup>2</sup> Stating "Where content is Queen".

<sup>3</sup> Thanks to the support of Katha's donors and partners that cooperate with Katha, which may also taint the reports drafted for marketing rather than scientific purposes ("Partners," n.d.).

<sup>4</sup> Similarly Rosana Mont'Alverne in Brazil founded a cultural institute and a publishing house, with multiple storytelling projects (Aletria, n.d.).

disparities, lack of access to education or equal opportunities and difficult living conditions with scarcity of safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene and they need to be taken into account together with education<sup>5</sup>. And even if these issues seem not applicable in the developed countries at first glance, they are all human-centric, therefore Katha's holistic approach can be generalised to the problems schools and students face in other countries (even United States, see: Aura et al., 2021). Many of the projects I visited in the impoverished areas in Brazil or Colombia had similar needs (see: Fundação Telefônica Vivo, 2016), though none of them catered to them so holistically, often concentrating on the educational aspects mostly (Gałęcka, 2021b; Castrechini Fernandes Franieck et al., 2014). The COVID-19 pandemic showed how important students' well-being, relations and human contact are in education and how difficult it is to sustain students' attention<sup>6</sup>. Still one might ask how education from impoverished slums can be applied in any way to the so called modern, developed countries. For one, Katha has a different perspective on what poverty means. They recognise SPICE poverties: social, personal, intellectual, cultural and environmental<sup>7</sup>, which they approach both separately and in regards to all the others. There are very few countries I could think of that could claim none of those poverties existing and Poland is definitely not one of them.

Observing Katha's complex and holistic practices I started to notice certain similarities with other projects I had seen before so I decided to gather as much data as possible to prepare an intrinsic case study (Stake, 2005). I took a pragmatic approach and concentrated on the practical implications of the research, using methods and techniques that best served my research needs (Strumińska & Kołodkiewicz, 2012). The few months that I had to understand all the intricacies of Katha's work were still not enough to grasp all the projects. Katha can best be described through its efforts, programmes and projects it

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<sup>5</sup> Education in India is handled by multiple NGOs that the government willingly relies on (EducationWorld, 2016). Their work often combines social and health services with education, literacy with happy environment or technology implementation (see Pratham, n.d. or Swamy, 2021).

<sup>6</sup> These were repeating themes in the interviews I conducted with teachers in Poland.

<sup>7</sup> They are connected to the same strengths or skills recognised as given by formal education. It was developed by Geeta Dharmarajan. The catalogue resembles varied dimensions of poverty identified by the World Bank, Habitat for Humanity or Sida (Sida, 2002) but mostly those provided by Wess Stafford (Compassion International, n.d.), which is rather coincidental as SPICE was developed in the early stages of Katha.

undertakes. However the amount of activities, constantly adapted models and revised approaches made it difficult for me to build a simple, unified model I could describe within a single article. At the same time it was quite easy to establish what Katha's main approach was – its uniqueness lies in the multiplicity of endeavours being interconnected with the original goal of its founder: the desire for children to read for joy and meaning, as everything Katha does is directed towards the reading, the love of reading and the ability to read for enjoyment. So, though the COVID-19 pandemic made it impossible to finish the case study as planned, I gathered enough data to share the core of Katha's practice, hoping that this example may one day be useful for more generic implementations in approaching educational projects in multicultural environments (Gerring, 2017).

### Stories, storytelling and their power in education

Kathá is a form of narrative (Kapoor, 1992)<sup>8</sup> classified as well as “that which is true” (Chatterji, 1986, p. 95) and in the rich Indian tradition it is one of the many story categories and storytelling styles, narrating ancient Sanskrit texts, making them understandable for the audience<sup>9</sup>. There are multiple different narrative modes in the Indian tradition (Ayyappa Paniker, 2003; Ramachandran, 2017). Despite storytelling being rich and ancient and Indian stories having an “influence on the fictional imagination of the west”<sup>10</sup>, “comparatively little has been written about the narrative discourse in Indian books” (Ayyappa Paniker, 2003, p. 4, p. 2).

“The tendency to narrativise is perhaps inherent in every human being living in an interactive social group, and the stringing together of events is a natural psychological process” (Ayyappa Paniker, 2003, p. 18). Humans have been telling stories “to communicate knowledge and experience in social contexts” since “they developed the capacity of speech” (Zipser, 2012, p. 2) as

<sup>8</sup> Raja Bhoja enumerated at least 24 categories of kathá in *Sringara Prakasa* in 11<sup>th</sup> century (Kapoor, 1992, p. 86).

<sup>9</sup> And within Katha there are many styles, e.g. Kathakalakshepa that literally means “narrating the stories of ancient text in a comprehensive manner to the common people.” (All Good Tales, n.d.); see Kathakalakshepa (n.d.) for more types of storytelling styles.

<sup>10</sup> *Kathasaritsagara* (Ocean of Stories) (Ayyappa Paniker, 2003, p. 58) or *Panchatantra* influenced the world literature (Chandiramani, 1991).

we are “story-telling animals” (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 216) and “each human life tells its story” (Arendt, 1998, p. 184). Apparently because “(w)e seem to have no other way of describing ‘lived time’ save in the form of a narrative” (Bruner, 2004, p. 692). Stories are also “meant to give order to human experience” (Fisher, 1984, p. 6) since narratives bring self-understanding, the explanation of the “who” (Arendt, 1998; Ricoeur, 1994), self-constancy (Ricoeur, 1990) and the benefits of “self-confrontation” (Kirkwood, 1983, p. 67) to human life and experiences and they are our best tool to build one’s identity with personal and narrative (Ricoeur, 1990) as “(we) consider human lives to be more readable when they have been interpreted in terms of the stories that people tell about them” (Ricoeur, 1994, p. 114). Stories also help conceptualise human actions and give them a certain “order” (MacIntyre, 1984). “(S)stories function as a powerful tool for thinking” (Herman et al., 2005, p. 349) and “cognition is fostered” through language and story (Zipes, 2012). “Telling a story (...) is deploying an imaginary space for thought experiments in which moral judgment operates in a hypothetical mode” (Ricoeur, 1994, p. 170). Narratives capture our mental processes integrating our “attention, imagery and feelings” (Green & Brock, 2000, p. 701).

Stories help build relationships as the act of storytelling often recreates a parent-child relationship between speaker and listener (Kirkwood, 1983) and can enable a dialogue with community (Alonso & Murgia, 2018). Storytelling often induces deep listening<sup>11</sup> that forms an in-depth relationship between the listener and the teller but also between the listener and the story – its characters, actions, values, emotions and beliefs. Sharing stories can evoke empathy and our prosocial behaviour (Johnson, 2012), and allow people to gain insight into themselves (Goodson & Gill, 2014). Storytelling can also have health benefits, increasing oxytocin and decreasing cortisol (Brockington, 2021) and can even be used for therapy (Barreto & Grandesso, 2010).

Stories provide a holistic and emotional experience and dialogic encounters, bringing understanding of the self and providing “the major link between our own sense of self and our sense of others in the social world around us” (Bruner, 1986, p. 69) through widening of our horizons<sup>12</sup>. They have transformative potential, opening people up to invite the unknown. “(T)he

<sup>11</sup> Which is similar to the demands of hermeneutical experience which “has its own rigor: that of uninterrupted listening” (Gadamer, 2004, p. 461).

<sup>12</sup> Gadamer believed hermeneutical experience to surpass world travelling and immersion in a foreign language when it comes to widening one’s horizons and “thus enriching its world by a whole new and deeper dimension.” (Gadamer, 2004, pp. 391–392).



major function of language is to manipulate the attention of other persons – that is, to induce them to take a certain perspective on a phenomenon” (Tomasello, 1999, p. 151).

Reading Gergen, Gadamer, Ricoeur, Arendt, MacIntyre and others allows us to see that there is a deep relationship between life and narrative, with the narrative providing some sort of perspective, bringing structure, order, meaning and a better understanding of one’s life. Such a powerful tool should have a prominent place in education (Lucarevski, 2018). Especially when you take into account the characteristics of narrative synthesised by Kenneth Gergen (2005)<sup>13</sup> that allow for “a sense of coherence and direction in life events. Life acquires meaning and happenings are suffused with significance” (p. 4). A story can be vague and broad enough to accommodate a lot of needs, goals and environmental conditions. This allows for swift changes, quick adjustments and quite an easy yet effective training of the new (teaching) recruits regardless of their background. A prerequisite however is a solid scaffolding that holds everything in place, allowing for the stories to fill the gaps, whatever they might be in a particular moment, place and condition. For an egalitarian and mass education it seems to be a perfect fit.

The need for narrative approaches in education or their usefulness is not a new phenomenon. It’s been pointed out that a “careful analysis of the teacher-student relationship at any level, inside or outside the school, reveals its fundamentally narrative character.” (Freire, 1970/2000, p. 71), “(t)he relationship between the teacher and the learner is the key to narrative learning” and “(i)n facilitating narrative learning, the teacher and the learner both share their understanding, knowledge, worldviews, values and personal experiences” (Goodson & Gill, 2011, pp. 123–124). “(T)he activity of storytelling has an impact on participants’ interpersonal relationships, empathy, and sense of ‘connectedness’ in the classroom. Therefore, telling stories aloud (...) needs to have primacy in classrooms” (Mello, 2001, p. 12). Storytelling can “be used as an effective teaching tool in a language classroom” (Mokhtar et al., 2011, p. 163). Storytelling can also “help convey science by engaging people’s imagination and emotions.” (Martinez-Conde et al., 2019, pp. 82–85). They also provide a “safe and nonthreatening” world (Nell, 2002).

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<sup>13</sup> An “established goal”, “outcome of significance” or “valued endpoint”, events selected that are relevant to that endpoint and “typically placed in an ordered arrangement” and characters typically possessing “a continuous or coherent identity across time”, providing an explanation “by selecting events that by common standards are causally linked” and employing “signals to indicate a beginning and ending” (Gergen, 2005, pp. 2–4).

Jerome Bruner's (1986) narrative mode of thinking, structured "in the mode of story and narrative" (p. 88), assigning meaning to our experiences, is based on common knowledge and stories. This mode being equal and complementary to the paradigmatic mode, is however, marginalised at schools (Bruner, 1986). Bruner was hardly alone in this observation. Freire (1970/2000) was even harsher, stating that: "(e)ducation is suffering from narration sickness" (p. 71) where "(t)he students are not called upon to know, but to memorize the contents narrated by the teacher" (p. 80). When we add that "storytelling is among the most common of communication acts" (Kirkwood, 1983, p. 59), it brings a logical (as well as narrative) conclusion that the schools should be filled with stories if we indeed cared about learning. "(U)nderstanding learning from the life narrative perspective can enable us to develop pedagogical strategies that facilitate the individuals' journey through life's nuanced implications, ambiguity in meanings of activities, contradictions and dilemmas. Learning thus takes place in this space of inquiry, questions and questioning, which only an unfolding and coherent narrative can serve to respond. In and through such emergent narrative, we develop a sense of who we are, how we have become and where we are heading" (Goodson & Gill, 2014, p. 37), "narrative interpretations as the fruit of critical inquiry can unfold knowledge and understanding that is robust and satisfying" (Goodson & Gill, 2014, p. 90).

"Indian civilization has always attached great value to knowledge" (Kapoor, 2005, p. 11), which is not, and has not been, a repository of the few as "(a)long with the learned, scholarly tradition, there has always been a parallel popular tradition of narration (...)" (Kapoor, 2005, p. 29). India had stories told mainly through performances (Venkatraman, 2011). A performance in India does not separate acting from dancing, singing (Verma, 2011). The performers in India learnt to use their bodies: gestures, facial expressions, movement of the eyes, hands, feet, neck and head, the tone of voice, the music, costumes, masks and puppets<sup>14</sup>. Similar aids were suggested for classroom effectiveness by Aïex (1988). We do not know what "hierarchy of primacy is between speech, song, dance, and drawing" (Bruner, 2006, p. 99) and even though each of them can symbolise the same thing, they do so differently. And a recent study exploring the effectiveness of instructor's gestures showed that students who saw the instructor use structure gestures

<sup>14</sup> The combination of these elements were used in NAVE programmes, e.g. Night of the Masks, Physics in Comics, Through Words or Tell a Story (Lopes et al., 2020).

outperformed the other groups on an inference test, which would suggest that structure gestures help students mentally organise the content of a lesson according to its macrostructure (Pilegard & Fiorella, 2021). John Niles found singing and “storytelling practices” essential to the role of stories in society, noticing that “oral narrative can influence both thought and behaviour” (Niles, 1999, p. 34), since storytelling is “a form of somatic communication, hence a powerful vehicle for ideas and emotions” (Niles, 1999, p. 34). The increasingly necessary art of telling (or singing) stories is also recognised in other countries (Bedran, 2012).

Every human being is a storyteller (Niles, 1999). Narratives are everywhere in countless forms according to Roland Barthes and “there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative” (Barthes, 1977, p. 237). The storyteller in India is often seen as a teacher who is familiar with ancient texts in Sanskrit or proficient in classical music. A text is often a multiplicity of layer upon layer of signification – Indian narrators often “try to coax the reader to wind his way into the core of a text” (Ayyappa Paniker, 2003, p. 5). In Katha stories are embedded into basically every bit of their practices. In this article, I focus on the most important initiatives and what underpins them all – the stories and the desire to allow children to take joy from reading them as I found them highly beneficial for human learning (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

## Methodology

I observed the endeavours of Katha in its natural settings (Hijmans & Wester, 2010), and gathered the data on Katha’s activities using mostly narrative inquiry focusing on Katha’s specific categories (Creswell & Poth, 2018), which in turn revealed Katha’s narrative approach (Clandin & Rosiek, 2007). Narratives come in many forms and sizes (Riessman, 2008) – “a single situation can sometimes sustain a narrative” (Ayyappa Paniker, 2003, p. 25), “(a) narrative may be oral or written and may be elicited or heard during fieldwork, an interview, or a naturally occurring conversation.” (Chase, 2005, p. 652); they can also be visual (Verma, 2011) “(i)n the performing and graphic arts of India too, the encrypting of narratives was a common device” (Ayyappa Paniker, 2003, p. 23). I accompanied various employees and volunteers in their daily journeys and activities, I listened to their personal narratives that often changed to lengthy stories (Riessman, 2002) and tried to make sense of

various situations (Bakker, 2010), obtaining a deeper understanding of Katha phenomenon (Clandinin et al., 2016). People working for Katha come from different parts of India, so they use English on a daily basis and so do Katha's employees and volunteers. I could participate in conversations and meetings, review documents, talk to employees, or listen to the interviews that Geeta Dharmarajan gave over the years. The recordings were made available to me. I went to the same schools several times to observe their daily activities and to talk to students, teachers, school and vocational programme principals. I also participated in some research interviews conducted by Katha employees. Additionally, I spoke with women in the slums<sup>15</sup>, with the former slum dwellers educated by Katha and with Katha volunteers. All that gave me a picture, which I then supplemented with shared documents, reports, scientific research, opinions, videos and articles on the Internet (Gałęcka, 2021a). As a result, a comprehensive image was created not only of the organisation itself and its numerous activities, but also of its pedagogical approach and the social changes it implements. I do realise that my participation created some of the meaning I am sharing here (Mishler, 1986), I did try to participate in the flow of what was already going on, limiting my questions to the minimum and showing my open curiosity rather than an intent to study, hoping for "genuine discoveries" (Riessman, 2008, p. 24).

I do realise that the documents I collected are selective, incomplete and can be tainted by the fact that most of them were a part of marketing packages that are often provided to the partners and donors in order to obtain the necessary funds. I need to take into account that I was a guest, and a white female, so not only did my presence alter the behaviours of those I observed but the respondents might have been polite not wanting to leave negative comments. The students I talked to knew I came from Katha – their benefactor, so they were being nice but many of them were young so I am hoping they were sincere in their satisfaction I observed. Also the fact that Katha's beneficiaries come from impoverished areas influences their perspective on Katha's undertakings. However it was not enough to open the school, the beginnings were not easy for Katha as the parents could not afford to send their children there<sup>16</sup>. When Katha started its work the environment in

<sup>15</sup> Often through volunteers or Katha employees. Recorded with the consent of the interlocutor and translated with the support of the students who lived in my dormitory.

<sup>16</sup> Geeta Dharmarajan (2010) provides the story of realising Katha's mission "to enhance the joy of reading".

India wasn't "too conducive to education" ("StoryPedagogy," n.d.), yet as I am writing this article their impact is impressive (though in Katha's approach "numbers come second and changes in people's lives come first"<sup>17</sup>):

- 2,474 slum communities were served,
- 1,862 school partnerships formed across 17 states of India,
- 475,159 grassroots women impacted most positively,
- 10,402,655 children and youth brought into the joy of reading<sup>18</sup>.

And the life changes are substantial. I was able to meet with some Katha Lab School (KLS) graduates who were able to move their parents out of the slums, starting their own business, speaking English and making their own life (more: Galecka, 2021a, 2021b). I also participated in the interviews where children from KLS were asked what they thought about the school, what could be improved or changed and what they liked most. Some of the kids loved the art projects, many loved the theatre performances they were preparing, the boys talked about robotics and computers. The small children really enjoyed the meals provided by the school and the older ones valued the chance to learn English as this gives them more opportunities to earn money in the future. As I observed the children on the corridors and inside the classrooms I saw them happy and focused. They eagerly answered questions though they probably wanted to show off in front of me. They were also open to talk which was not the experience I had in two public schools I visited where nobody spoke English and people (including children) were generally cautious of me. I talked to many Katha students about their experiences but one sentence is still ringing in my head: "I don't like Sundays cause I cannot come to school". This article outlines what it is that Katha does that induces such statements.

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<sup>17</sup> Quote from one of the conversations I had with Ms Dharmarajan.

<sup>18</sup> Those figures on May 29, 2020 were respectively: 1,142; 1,157; 399,500 and 9,649,567 (Katha, n.d.), which shows the progress. However, I was unable to obtain a satisfactory explanation for the way those numbers were calculated. This is probably the biggest weakness of my study as I had to rely on whatever was provided to me in this aspect and some of those numbers seemed to have been prepared with marketing in mind. Nevertheless, I noticed first-hand that Katha provided support to multiple communities and schools as I was not even able to visit them all during my stay.

## StoryPedagogy as the common link of Katha's projects and undertakings

Ms Dharmarajan had studied both Freire and Bruner among other Western philosophers to which she added a few-thousand-year-old tradition of Indian arts<sup>19</sup> and its ways to create performing arts in order to enable the understanding of messages that one wants to pass forward, which had been described in a Sanskrit treatise on performing arts (as well one of the most essential texts on drama, dance, music, arts and fine arts in India) – *Natya Shastra*<sup>20</sup>. It contains a very detailed description of the performing arts. Performing arts of India are all interconnected and they have been used for educational purposes. Comparisons are drawn between Indian narratives and the Indian temple and palace architecture and village structures (Ayyappa Paniker, 2003), poses used in the performance and the temple iconography (Verma, 2011). Everything is intertwined.

The idea of storytelling as a pedagogical tool is not unique for Katha (Bhati & Aggarwal, 2021; Hofman-Bergholm, 2022; Kuyvenhoven, 2005; Landrum, Brakke, & McCarthy, 2019). The pedagogic approach developed by Geeta Dharmarajan called StoryPedagogy<sup>21</sup> uses all the components she had learnt and imbibed from *Natya Shastra* traditions. This framework of teaching connects all the activities under one common umbrella: the reading, prevalent in all Katha's undertakings, is built on stories and StoryPedagogy stems out from those stories, and revolves around them. Despite the rich tradition of stories and storytelling in India<sup>22</sup> not only aren't the stories embedded in children's education in India but – as Ms Dharmarajan realised – children do not read well (or at all) mainly because the reading offered at school is not relevant to them. The lack of relevancy is one of the main culprits of the resulting lack of reading skills, which in turn causes lack of engagement. One

<sup>19</sup> Geeta Dharmarajan learnt classical dance since she was 7. Classical Indian dance tradition has three aspects, *Nritta* – pure dance, *Nritya* – dance showing expressions and *Natya* – acting in the form of dance. A typical classical dance combines all three and narrates a story from one of the ancient texts (Verma, 2011).

<sup>20</sup> The word *Natya* means the activities of *Nata*. *Nata* is somebody who performs, passes on a message through gesture, speech, dance, singing, even playing an instrument. *Nata* is the person who communicates and the whole activity of that *Nata* is called *Natya* (Gupt, 2020).

<sup>21</sup> Written this way in all Katha's materials.

<sup>22</sup> With every state or even district having their own style of storytelling (Ramachandran, 2017).

cannot enjoy reading while struggling to decipher the letters, words and their meaning. And since stories entertain, stimulate our imagination, preserve culture, teach, provide continuity, reconcile us to the life we lived, point out the wonder as lived and make us look beyond ourselves (Venkatraman, 2011), they are relevant.

As Ms Dharmarajan often states, the difference between traditional school (textbook) approach and a story-based one is that schools usually provide the answers, and the stories usually lead to questions. Stories rarely – if properly designed – provide ready-made solutions or one-sided outcomes and they allow for multiple perspectives, unlike schools. So one of the first quests Katha embarked on was to design great books, that would touch on Big Ideas – important life issues, interesting topics that could poke children imaginations. The stories showed empowered girls and women, talked about environmental and health issues, about the importance of education, about math, geography, physics and many other school subjects embedded in everyday situations, helping them to regain their space in the society (Verma, 2011). And of course – just like *Natya Shastra* specifies – the books and the stories within them were not created with words only (Gupt, 2020). The pictures, the art<sup>23</sup>, the book design, and everything around the books were thought through carefully<sup>24</sup> and adjusted to the local needs. Slowly but surely this approach brought the development of a full-fledged education design.

StoryPedagogy forms an umbrella protecting and guiding all the main initiatives: Katha Lab School (KLS), I Love Reading Programme (ILR) and Katha School Quality Enhancement Programme (SQEP). The content stories published by Katha Vilasam (the publishing house) feed into the integrated learning in KLS, the iterations of the integrated learning in SQEP and the holistic development of the language skills (ILR). StoryPedagogy also forms the connections and enable the interactions among teachers and students within the school interventions as well as help form the identities of girls and women within the community interventions (Galecka, 2021a).

According to Katha, a traditional approach enables the continuation of the circle of exploitation: when the school does not care about child's engagement (especially in the areas where every pair of hands counts towards

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<sup>23</sup> Katha uses a variety of Indian art in their books, inspired by the multitude of Indian ancient traditions and the characters look like locals.

<sup>24</sup> I remember a book, where the picture of God was portrayed as an elderly woman. In India there are female deities but gods are male and a masculine pronoun is always used so it was a powerful image.

possible earnings), then the schools are basically empty<sup>25</sup>. The programmes developed in Katha target those children in particular and the main three are:

- Katha Lab School,
- I Love Reading Programme,
- School Quality Enhancement Programme.

Within those programmes Katha is active both in the schools (school interventions) and the communities (community interventions). Connecting educational work at schools with the work within communities turned out to be crucial to progress. Ms Dharmarajan quickly discovered that it is the work within the community that determines educational success.

### **Katha Lab School (KLS)**

An effective connection with a community requires assessing its actual needs. Each community may have different needs and different struggles even if they are adjacent to one another. And Katha Lab School was built in the 8-slums cluster of Govindpuri in New Delhi, where – despite huge poverty, diversified needs (including disputes among the clusters) and the resulting devaluation of traditional education – Katha managed to impact over 100,000 children through various programmes offered in KLS (“Katha Lab Schools,” n.d.). The programmes also demonstrate the close connection to the communities, where the actual needs were addressed even if they were not – at first sight – directly connected to education. As a result a crèche was established to cater to the needs of the families, allowing older kids to participate in school activities instead of taking care of their younger siblings. Nutrition was provided to the youngest children and to those in need and the on-site kitchen provided a regular job to a few women from the community, a source of knowledge on healthy eating habits, an opportunity to buy cheap, healthy and locally made food, and a place to learn cooking skills. Apart from cooking classes, other entrepreneurial skills are being taught like dressmaking or tailoring. The life stories of successful graduates are pinned to the walls providing a valuable trigger for other students. Theatre classes are provided on regular basis with a professional acting teacher. Art classes are a huge part

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<sup>25</sup> Which is exactly what happened in one of the schools Katha took under its management (Kilokari Tank in New Delhi): about 40 (out of 200) kids were regularly attending, as compared to 170 coming now.



of the curriculum. And all those innovative practices developed and “tested” in this school form the basis for other Katha’s initiatives.

### **I Love Reading Programme (ILR)**

ILR – a reading and school transformation initiative – is Katha’s flagship programme (“ILR government schools,” n.d.) as it represents the engagement of a story, its educational qualities, the joy of reading and the empowerment through the stories, all in one diversified initiative. The impact is huge: in 122 slums, 80,000 children have regularly been coming to learn to read<sup>26</sup> despite having tough life and many competing obligations. They have plenty to choose from as Katha has already published over 500 books so far. Apart from the traditional, printed format, technology has been aiding all the reading initiatives, with Padhopyarse.net – a repository of resources, Katha Khazana app with stories and games for kids and Katha books on Kindle (“Kindle E-Books,” n.d.).

The ILR programme feeds into many initiatives, most importantly the 300M initiative, which aspires to build the capacity for all 300 million children in India to read well as well as for fun and meaning (“Katha 300M,” n.d.). 300M falls within Katha’s intensive cooperation with government schools, which aims at spreading Katha’s approach among all the children and improving the level of educational attainment through enhancing their quality, which brings me to the third programme run by Katha – the SQEP.

For those who love reading there is Katha Utsav – a multistage, well-organised series of events, competitions, conferences, workshops, etc. where the children who are natural storytellers, learn to write like professionals, and their stories get published (“Utsav,” n.d.). This competition growing in popularity also helps spreading Katha approach.

### **School Quality Enhancement Programme (SQEP)**

SQEP is “a complete school transformation programme to bring qualitative positive changes in teaching-learning practices” (“SQEP,” n.d.). Katha develops

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<sup>26</sup> A study on the effect of ILR curriculum in schools concluded that the attendance jumped from a mere 59% to 89.33% – an overall increase of 30.33%. Overall retention of 100% was also observed in this period (“ILR Communities,” n.d.).

model schools, working with the government and brings its model programmes into government schools. The work in KLS was appreciated by the government so much that Katha was asked to manage several schools which faced closure and were located in impoverished neighbourhoods. Five schools were taken under such management: the schools were repainted (with characters from stories painted on the walls), remodelled (on a very tight budget) and restructured. Gardens were built where kids could learn gardening, the basics of market dynamics, enjoy fresh produce in their meals, acquire healthy eating habits and learn maths among other subjects. I have already witnessed what colours and creative space arrangement can do to educational engagement of both students and teachers (e.g. Escuela Nueva in Medellin, Instituto Lumiar and Politeia Democratic School in Sao Paolo, apart from GENTE and NAVE), especially when close attention is paid to a bigger picture. In Katha this is achieved through the connection between school and community work<sup>27</sup>.

School and Community Interventions intertwine with one another. If a person is not educated, they are going to stay fixed in the vicious circle of exploitation. This is why Katha cannot concentrate on working in the school settings only but needs to spread within the communities because they both feed into each other. And the community work is in fact what brought the immense success to all Katha's undertakings. Stories help immensely with this undertaking. They are easy to share even among the parents without any education<sup>28</sup>. The work within communities has double purpose: to help the development of children, empower them (especially women and girls) and improve their educational attainment, and – on the other hand – to spread the knowledge about Katha's approach. Each person touched by Katha becomes its ambassador to increase the impact.

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<sup>27</sup> It is also worth noting that Katha employs a varied group of people including artists, accountants, managers and scientists among others. This allows them to jump start many of the initiatives which are then continued by the engaged community.

<sup>28</sup> Community Owned & Operated Libraries (COOL) are set up in people's homes – a set of books and magazines moving around "in a suitcase" allowing families to share common stories the child had learnt at school.

## Capacity Building – Teacher Training and Curriculum Curation

The first thing that one notices when entering Katha's offices are the teachers. Many of them fill different rooms: the mentors<sup>29</sup>, the trainees, the helpers, the guests (I could not always figure out who is who as the mentors become trainees and the trainees or helpers may become teachers at a particular moment, depending on the issue at hand)<sup>30</sup>. Katha pays special attention to teacher training (which was one of the aspects I found similar to other projects I had visited<sup>31</sup>). Limited resources often bring creativity. Teachers learn how to use a variety of tools that would engage children in the learning experience through stories, music, dance or theatre and how to use their facial expressions, hand gestures, tone of voice and other *Natyan* resources to engage them in the Active Story Based Learning. And those resources cost little to nothing.

Katha does not believe in “teaching” teachers but in showing them and then letting them work with lots of feedback. And feedback is one of the elements that is missing the most from the teacher's education and that prevents many of them from achieving mastery. The goal is to make sure the teachers become independent as soon as possible. All Katha initiatives involve teachers or mentors as they are the ones who will impact the children most, either directly or through the communities. Making sure they are better equipped to make the lives of the children better. Because at the end of the day what Katha is trying to do is to find out what will make the child come to school the next day and what it is that is going to make the child smile when they enter the classroom. And the teachers need to learn just that.

In the school year of 2019/2020 Katha has been working for 12 months within 200 MCD Schools (Municipal Cooperation of Delhi). Every school is visited once a month. During those visits a live demonstration is conducted in each one of the grades (primary school grades 1 to 5), in front of the teacher of that grade and with the students present, on StoryPedagogy – how it works,

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<sup>29</sup> Katha mentors (trainers) are the teachers trained by Katha.

<sup>30</sup> I witnessed a similar approach in the GENTE project I mentioned earlier, and at the NAVE school (NAVE, n.d.). It was explained to me that it was almost impossible to find teachers with the experience they wanted to create in the projects so they needed to “be made”. Another similarity were the colourful interiors and paintings on the walls.

<sup>31</sup> GENTE and NAVE I mentioned earlier, and Insituto Lumiar in Sao Paulo.

how it is done, how it is supposed to work with the children, what is the way a teacher is supposed to behave<sup>32</sup>.

The beauty of Katha's approach also lies in the integrated curriculum which is "sewn" together by the stories published by Katha and by their careful immersion within the traditional curriculum. Each year a new theme is chosen and the teachers link all academic and co-curricular lesson plans and activities to this theme, coordinating the activities across subjects. When Katha wants to teach math they are also teaching concepts of English and environmental science. The learning is integrated (with subjects interwoven with the themed stories) and the approach holistic. Thanks to the practical approach in teacher training which allows for a lot of freedom on the teachers' side combined with the natural effect of embedding stories within education, there is nothing very complicated at work here. Katha has prepared demonstrative compilations showing the different ways specific subjects may be related together with particular stories or life issues for the teacher's use. The rest comes with practice, reinforced with feedback and regular meetings among the teachers practicing Katha approach.

The activities are governed by the goals of relevance to children's lives and their empowerment to solve real-life problems by bringing the most crucial community challenges (e.g. water, sanitation, health, eating habits, women empowerment) into the classrooms. Since human experience has narrative foundation and humans pursue a "narrative rationality" from infancy, we are essentially "symbol-using" storytellers (Fisher, 1987). Stories can therefore be used for any subject as nothing that is being taught within the school curriculum falls out of human experience. Everything, including math, physics and other science subjects form part of it and some people even claim that they are simply different ways of communication<sup>33</sup>, of organising our thoughts and being able to understand others<sup>34</sup>. Putting them into stories can bring

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<sup>32</sup> To use expression, body language the entire classroom space and all the materials at hand including of course the books published by Katha. Because the child is constantly observing and absorbing everything that the mentor is providing.

<sup>33</sup> And liberating narrative from literary forms allowed it to "invade" other fields (Herman & Jahn, 2005, p. 344).

<sup>34</sup> It is often quoted – presumably after Galileo Galilei – that "Mathematics is the language in which God has written the universe." Narratives provide order, bring meaning and offer insights about the world or about human experiences.

connections and meaning to otherwise often dry and rote approaches to teaching those subjects<sup>35</sup>.

Studies conducted by Diana Arya and Andrew Maul (2012) showed that “(s)tudents exposed to the scientific discovery narrative performed significantly better on both immediate and delayed outcome measures” (p. 1022). The authors argued that one of the reasons behind the results was that “personal reader-to-text connections result in greater attentiveness to conceptual content” (Arya & Maul, 2012, p. 1030). They suggested that “the SDN (narrative account of the scientific discovery process) exposes the readers even more to the humanness of science, which encourages greater invested attention on the part of students, in that the readers have the opportunity to vicariously experience the scientific journey of discovery. This increased interest and attention can facilitate deeper understanding and recall of the pertinent information” (Arya & Maul, 2012, p. 1030). Nevertheless “researchers argue that narrative is largely neglected in science learning and instructional practice” (Arya & Maul, 2012, p. 1022).

Since the whole purpose of Katha’s activities is to change the orthodox (disengaged and irrelevant for children) pedagogy, curriculum curation is very important. Ms Dharmarajan has curated the original curriculum, designing it with her extensive knowledge of all the books authored and the public curriculum. This serves as a framework that is being revamped constantly by Katha mentors with the feedback gathered from the fieldwork. Everything that Katha does is interlinked with a bigger picture: the development of the love for reading, reading for fun and meaning. I saw the stories being performed by teachers as well as the students. Children were visibly engaged. I watched theatre preparations and performances, multitude of students’ artwork lying or hanging around everywhere. The students were actively participating in the classes and their attitude showed they enjoyed it. However I have to take into account the fact that their alternative was pretty daunting<sup>36</sup>. Students from one of the KLSs took me to his home after I had a bite of his lunch and complimented his mother’s cooking. Only then did I understand the change

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<sup>35</sup> In one of the schools in New Zealand narrative materials have been used to support science learning in New Zealand’s *kura kaupapa Māori* schools for example. It was found “that narrative can easily become ‘faction’ rather than ‘fiction’ when the story’s primary purpose is to teach science” (Gilbert & Hipkins, 2005, p. 1).

<sup>36</sup> Working on the street, being in a room made of tin, not having much to eat, not having a bathroom.

that Katha was providing: his dwelling was a small tin, there was no floor, no beds, his mother spoke only her local language, father was absent, yet this man was a nice, a bit shy but well-spoken. The few Katha alumni I managed to interact with also spoke decent English but what set them apart from other poor-background people who constantly hassled me on the streets, was their rather withdrawn attitude, more typical to Western countries, and good manners. This may be the result of frequent visits paid to KLSs by foreigners (including Prince Charles in 2013) as Katha's efforts have been universally recognised ("Awards," n.d.).

## Conclusions

I do realise that there are "other possibilities, interpretations, and ways of explaining things" (Clandinin et al., 2016, p. 46) than what I presented here. Watching Katha in action I tried "to inquire into experience, to inquire into the stories" (Clandinin et al., 2016, p. 15) that the people I met lived and told and I couldn't help but notice multiple connections with many practical approaches that I had already witnessed around the world. The attention to community needs and holistic approach were similarly pronounced in the GENTE project and in Escuela Nueva<sup>37</sup>, the importance of different art forms were especially significant in Instituto Lumiar (Lumiar, n.d.) and Politeia (Politeia, n.d.), the attention to surroundings and teacher training – in GENTE, NAVE and Politeia to name a few. I found StoryPedagogy approach with its umbrella-like design similar to Universal Design for Learning, where the goal is to use a variety of teaching methods accommodating diverse needs of the learners, to remove any barriers to learning and give all students equal opportunities to succeed (UDL, n.d.).

When I was trying to design a succinct picture encompassing the workings of Katha, I came up with an upside down pyramid, with the efforts spent on the community at the top. Those efforts, even if seemingly indirect to education attainment are in my opinion essential. By engaging community they engage the learners, their peers and their parents. And these efforts are combined and strengthened with the integrated approach to learning, with the curriculum that is designed for life rather than for testing purposes, the content filled with

<sup>37</sup> Even the website holds similarities: <https://escuelanueva.org/en/>

stories covering Big Ideas, the classroom practices participative and engaged and the assessment holistic and continuous<sup>38</sup>. And stories help with that, acting as natural glue and a filler. Reversing the focus and adapting the approach to the actual needs of the people, putting community first and curriculum as the second was in my opinion most significant. I wonder if the reason for such adaptability arises at least partially from the fact that the needs of the community are so easily visible and – to an extent – so basic. Now, that I have been interviewing teachers during pandemic, I noticed how important the connection to the community was for them. Teachers who were able to form closer connections to parents, often reported remote teachings as more bearable compare to those who struggled on their own<sup>39</sup>. The same goes with teacher cooperation, which in Katha – considering the way they are trained, helping one another – forms another basis for a more general wellbeing. Teachers in Poland valued cooperation with other teachers during lockdowns as they struggled with the technological problems of remote teaching<sup>40</sup>.

In order to make a difference in education, you need to include people in it, so that education can become a valued part of their lives. Stories, being very egalitarian, make it all possible. Unfortunately, as Eisenhardt (1991) pointed out, “(r)esearch that must fit into the page limit of a journal article is necessarily limited in scope and story detail” (p. 626). And so I had to leave out a lot of details from the context and patterns I chose and saw (Lilienfeld, 1978). Even Eisenhardt (1991)<sup>41</sup> agrees that “storytelling is a wonderful and necessary first step as well as a terrific way to persuade and entertain readers” (p. 626). I am hoping that this article is the beginning of my comparative journey in search of idiographic examples of meaningful and holistic approaches to education.

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<sup>38</sup> With colour coding applied with detailed criteria, which allows for an easy, comprehensive and child-friendly assessment.

<sup>39</sup> Often having parents against them as there were multiple media campaigns targeting teachers in Poland.

<sup>40</sup> Katha had its own struggles due to lack of equipment among its students and their parents. Still, they managed to transform many of the books into audio or even video storytelling but that is yet another story to tell.

<sup>41</sup> Her preference for multiple-setting studies is just one of many approaches (Steenhuis, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2018), as case studies can be multi-paradigm, have different goals (Hassard & Kelemen, 2010), methods of data analysis, etc. (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

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## Informacja o czasopiśmie

„Kwartalnik Pedagogiczny” (Education Research Quarterly) to recenzowane czasopismo naukowe, które istnieje od 1956 roku. Powstało z inicjatywy badaczy żywo zainteresowanych problemami współczesnej edukacji i pedagogiki. Wydawcą czasopisma jest Uniwersytet Warszawski we współpracy z jego Wydziałem Pedagogicznym, a usługodawcą są Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego. Czasopismo jest prenumerowane zarówno w Polsce, jak i za granicą.

„Kwartalnik Pedagogiczny” jest czasopismem punktowanym, umieszczonym w bazie The European Reference Index for the Humanities and the Social Sciences (ERIH PLUS), Central and Eastern European Online Library (CEEOL), The Central European Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities, (CEJSH oraz POL-index i Google Scholar. Zgodnie z wykazem czasopism naukowych MNiSW z 31 lipca 2019 roku za publikację w „Kwartalniku Pedagogicznym” przysługuje autorowi 20 punktów.

„Kwartalnik Pedagogiczny” jest objęty Programem Wsparcia dla Czasopism Naukowych MNiSW.

Misją czasopisma jest upowszechnianie najnowszych, oryginalnych wyników badań dotyczących edukacji i jej uwarunkowań oraz pedagogiki w Polsce, krajach europejskich i na świecie. Prezentujemy badania, których celem jest rozwój tych obszarów wiedzy oraz poszukiwanie rozwiązań aktualnych problemów.

W „Kwartalniku Pedagogicznym” publikujemy teksty w językach polskim i angielskim w formie artykułów oryginalnych, artykułów przeglądowych oraz artykułów recenzyjnych. Zapraszamy do współpracy naukowców polskich i zagranicznych związanych z pedagogiką, jak i reprezentantów innych dyscyplin naukowych. Zależy nam na tym, by na łamach czasopisma konfrontowane były perspektywy, z jakich na te same bądź zbliżone zagadnienia z zakresu pedagogiki spoglądają przedstawiciele różnych dziedzin nauki.

Wydajemy również numery specjalne (tematyczne), w których prezentowane są badania nad tym, w jaki sposób konteksty globalne, europejskie i regionalne oddziałują na pedagogikę oraz podejmowaną przez nią problematykę.

Czasopismo „Kwartalnik Pedagogiczny” prowadzi swoją działalność zgodnie z obowiązującymi przepisami krajowymi i międzynarodowym oraz przyjętymi standardami wydawniczymi, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem oczekiwanych zachowań etycznych będących podstawą akademickiej kultury wydawniczej.



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# KWARTALNIK PEDAGOGICZNY NR 4/2021

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