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Portfolio Within Pedagogic Diagnostics in Primary Schools

Přeglédni znanstveni članek

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ABSTRACT

At the present time, the importance of pedagogic diagnostics at primary school level has been increasing strongly, given the deepening needs to approach every child and every pupil individually. For the above-mentioned reasons, teachers must really search for methods and procedures that will help them understand pupils better in order to be able to support them and help them address certain issues that emerge at school as well as at home. Therefore, portfolio seems to be one of the most suitable tools to get to know a pupil's personality in detail since it allows the pupil, the teacher, and the parents to monitor the progress and the development in different fields within longer periods. In spite of that, portfolio has not been widely used in schools and it appears to be a rather marginal tool instead. Therefore, a group from the Pedagogical Faculty of the Palacký University in Olomouc has decided to find out how the concept of portfolio is perceived and accepted by future primary teachers.

Key words: pedagogic diagnostics, primary school, portfolio, research

Portfolio v okviru pedagoške diagnostike v osnovni šoli

POVZETEK

Pomen pedagoške diagnostike na nivoju osnovne šole dandanes strmo narašča zaradi vse večje potrebe po individualnem pristopu k posameznemu otroku oziroma učencu. Iz zgoraj navedenih razlogov morajo učitelji poiskati tiste metode in postopke, ki jim bodo resnično pomagali pri boljšem razumevanju učencev, hkrati pa jim bodo ti postopki nudili podporo pri morebitnih težavah, s katerimi se srečujejo bodisi v šoli bodisi doma. Zdi se, da je portfolio eno najprimernejših orodij za podrobnejše spoznavanje učenčeve osebnosti, saj učencu, učiteljem in staršem omogoča spremljanje učenčevega napredka in razvoja na različnih področjih v daljšem časovnem obdobju. Kljub temu pa se portfolio le redko uporablja v šolah in velja za bolj marginalno orodje. Skupina s Pedagoške fakultete Univerze Palacký v Olomoucu se je odločila, da bo raziskala, kako koncept portfolio dojemajo in sprejemajo bodoči osnovnošolski učitelji.

Ključne besede: pedagoška diagnostika, osnovna šola, portfolio, raziskava

Introduction

The word “diagnostics” is normally associated with professional activities within a specific profession. However, one may encounter diagnostics every day, in our daily routines, behaviour, and conduct. We assess and evaluate specific situations and our behaviour on a daily basis, just as we reflect the attitudes that we adopt on everyday issues. We monitor the behaviour of people around us, trying to identify their moods and needs. Thus, diagnostics is an inseparable part of our life, without us noticing or being aware of it in full. Therefore, speaking about diagnostics, we should focus on the fields of medicine, psychology, technology, as well as pedagogy.

According to Pedagogický slovník or “Pedagogical Dictionary” (Průcha et al., 2004, p. 154), “pedagogic diagnostics” (in English: assessment; in special pedagogy also the term “diagnostics” is used) is a scientific discipline that deals with issues related to diagnostic assessment of subjects in educational environments (mainly in school). Within this discipline, the theory of pedagogic diagnosing is formulated, as well as the diagnostic methods and the ways pedagogic diagnoses are interpreted. Peter Gavora (1999) defines pedagogic diagnostics as “measurement, identification, characterization and evaluation of the level of the develop-

ment in the pupil(s) as the result of the educational effort. When diagnosing, we find out about the pupil at the specific moment (phase) of the educational process and we examine whether the pupil's characteristics (i.e. the development level) is in compliance with our expectations (i.e. with educational objectives and intentions). Following from the diagnosis on the pupil (pupils), the teacher and other participating pedagogues can plan subsequent steps for the pupil's (or the pupils') further development" (p. 10).

Based on the afore-mentioned definition, the subject-matter of pedagogic diagnostics as such can be specified as a set of phenomena, actions, and their relationships in pedagogic situations. From the view of the content, pedagogic diagnostics maps and analyses personality development of the individuals and the groups being observed, as well as the effects of the conditions that may influence these individuals or groups. Thus, the result of pedagogic diagnosing is a pedagogic diagnosis which should allow responsible planning of follow-up educational efforts and activities.

In view of the already mentioned new approach to pupil, the pedagogic diagnostics conducted directly by teachers in schools is becoming increasingly more important. Formerly, as far as child's behaviour, response, and conduct were concerned, it was very common to search for deviations from other children. Nowadays, we have the opportunity to integrate individuals with special needs, emphasising each child's individuality and accentuating the normality. Such a shift is possible mainly due to new curricular documents and framework educational programmes for educational levels, or to be more specific, the Framework Educational Programme (FEP) for Preschool Education (Smolíková et al., 2006), followed by the Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education (Jeřábek & Tupý, 2005), which focuses on institutional education of pupils aged between 6 and 15. By its structure and character, the Basic Education FEP derives from the Preschool Education FEP. Thus, this document offers teachers a lot of freedom in terms of their effort to develop every young individual in an optimal way. Furthermore, the two documents hold great perspectives for the future of pedagogic diagnostics. Teachers are recommended to systematically involve the latter in pedagogic processes and continuously evaluate gained information. Ideally, continuous diagnostics, followed by making conclusions and taking relevant measures, should result in significant achievements within the education standard also in those pupils who would otherwise have problems achieving the standards as such. In their Pedagogical Dictionary (2004) Průcha, Mareš, and Walterová define the concept of the education standard as "specific, obligatory requirements that must be met by the pupils within the concrete year of study or concrete education level. Education standards are defined as the (target) knowledge, competences, etc. in relation to the scheduled content of the education within the school subjects, for the specific education level and relevant competences which the pupils should acquire" (p. 306).

Teachers' diagnostic competences

If teachers are conscious of the importance of continuous, long-term, and targeted diagnostics - both with regard to the class and the individual - their work and effort will be more effective and efficient. More importantly, the work and the effort of pupils will be more effective and efficient as well. The teacher will be able to respond flexibly to the signals coming from the class, as they will understand the needs of their pupils better. Moreover, the teacher will be able to help the pupils who are unsatisfied in school or have problems.

In order to implement all the afore-mentioned processes successfully, thereby achieving the desired progress and development in pupils, teachers need deep knowledge and great command of appropriate procedures and methods so as to be able to respond to the needs of each individual. Teachers should be well versed in pedagogic diagnostics, having knowledge of the methodology and being able to apply the methods and the procedures properly. They should be capable of conducting diagnostic examinations, evaluate data after it has been collected, and draw conclusions as well as recognise pedagogical measures based on the interpretation and the analysis of the diagnostic data. Moreover, they should be able to evaluate their own activity during the diagnostic process and define their strong as well as weak points emerging in the course of the diagnostic process. Teachers should in fact have the so-called diagnostic competences. This type of teacher competences stem from analysing the stages within teacher's activities pertaining to pedagogic diagnostics.

It is only natural that professional diagnosticians (psychologists and physicians) show much higher diagnostic competences than pedagogues or parents, as the former are strongly focused on the diagnostic problem area. Professional diagnosticians use selected instruments and appropriate methods knowingly. Moreover, they follow specific procedures and plans with very specific objectives in mind. On the contrary, a pedagogue uses pedagogic diagnostics merely as support in their work. Teacher's diagnostics is based on the knowledge gained during their own studies or from scientific publications. Teachers may only use the methods and the instruments that are available. Thus, a teacher's diagnosis cannot provide exactly the same expert and detailed results as a diagnosis provided by a professional diagnostician. In fact, this is not that relevant. In terms of children and their school issues, it is essential that their teachers make effort to identify root problems and that they are interested in each child's needs and interests, keeping in mind the main objective which is the development of qualities, skills, and competences in each individual.

However, teachers should avoid the so-called inadvertent diagnostics deriving from their long teaching experience. It is imperative that all activities are systemati-

cally planned and recorded, and that data are collected, duly processed, and correctly interpreted. This is of utmost importance. Teachers have a great advantage of everyday contacts with children and pupils in a natural environment. All that gives them the opportunity to provide apt diagnoses that may be more comprehensive than any results achieved by professional diagnosticians from expert institutions.

Self-assessment and diagnostic portfolio

It follows from the afore-said that pedagogic diagnostics is mainly conducted by teachers. However, pupils may be actively involved in the diagnostic process as well. Pupils can build on the assessment provided by their teacher in form of grades or verbal assessment, and peer assessment may be involved, too. Pupils can also assess their own skills and competences, as self-assessment is an important part of self-reflection. In fact, self-assessment is an inner dialogue which a person has with himself or herself. From the point of view of pedagogy, this is an educational method that helps pupils parallel their opinions of themselves with the views of their teachers and classmates, which makes the picture of their “self” more realistic. Self-assessment derives from the developing capacity of a child or a pupil to think about their knowledge, skills, and achievements on their own, while the assessment provided by other people means that the same knowledge, skills, and achievements are evaluated in a more objective manner. The ability of self-assessment is vital from an early stage of child’s development, as later on, people (mainly teenagers) tend to develop a distorted view of themselves, which has a significant impact upon their self-assessment and self-esteem.

Keeping a diagnostic portfolio is an extremely effective form of self-assessment from early childhood onwards. Portfolio is an “organized set of pupil’s works collected during a specific period of the school education that may provide relevant information on the child’s work achievements.” (Zelinková, 2001, p. 45) A child or a pupil keeps collecting a portfolio of their written or artistic work, including records, comments, and opinions provided by their teachers, parents, and classmates as well as their own, thus creating a unique document to demonstrate both, their progress and their achievements, as well as any weak points which should be addressed later on. Along with the undoubtedly positive effects of portfolio, we also need to mention the disadvantages, since these are the reason why this diagnostic instrument has been perceived by many schools rather as taboo. The opponents often argue that keeping a portfolio is extremely time-consuming, that such a portfolio occupies too much space, and that there is danger of abuse of the information kept in it. All those objections are definitely well-grounded but schools may take various steps to prevent such issues or at least part of them. Pre-prepared materials may be helpful, as schools would not need extra time to develop them. Moreover, schools would be able to avoid the ineffective trial-and-error stage,

being provided with the concept of an optimal scope and the content of pupil's files. There is no need to collect the entire pupil's work. On the contrary, based on teacher's common sense and supported by a second opinion, a portfolio should include only those documents and samples of pupil's work that are significant and may be relevant for the future as well.

Working with diagnostic portfolios in practice – research by future teachers

We have conducted a survey to find out how working with diagnostic portfolios is perceived by future primary teachers, and whether teachers-to-be are optimistic or sceptic with regard to the matter. The survey involved students at the Pedagogic Faculty of the Palacký University in Olomouc, Czech Republic.

The survey was designed as a quantitative study using a specially designed questionnaire with the objective to see the examined phenomenon from the perspective of future primary teachers. Survey questions were focused on the following goals:

1. How do students understand the term 'portfolio'?
2. What is their idea about working with portfolio?
3. Do they have enough information on portfolio?

In total, 57 future primary teachers were asked to fill in a non-standardized questionnaire comprising 11 items with open answers and to provide their opinions of portfolio as well as their idea of a portfolio's content. We have sorted out the answers to categorize them and draw relevant conclusions.

As regards Item no. 1, asking students what a pupil portfolio actually was, most of the respondents replied it was a collection of materials used in class (worksheets, additional exercises, texts copied from other sources, own materials related to currently studied topics, etc.). Only 11 % of the respondents noted that portfolio was a tool used for the presentation of pupil's best achievements, and only two students mentioned that portfolio may be used for diagnostic purposes (assessment and self-assessment) by both pupils and teachers, or possibly by parents as well.

Item no. 2 inquired about what age group portfolio was most useful for, according to the students. The prevailing answer was that mainly younger pupils should work with a portfolio, as it was a motivating tool for them. On the contrary, according to respondents, older pupils in elementary school would find working with a portfolio boring and uninteresting. Some respondents thought that very young pupils would be too young to work with a portfolio and would not be able to cope with the task.

As regards Item no. 3, inquiring about whether keeping a portfolio is important to pupils, the results were, to a certain extent, the same as in the preceding questions: most of the respondents found a portfolio useful in terms of collecting materials for school subjects (79 %) and as a motivating tool for pupils (68 %). Again, there was a (sporadic) opinion that a portfolio may be used as pupil's presentation or as a diagnostic tool.

On the other hand, according to students i.e. respondents, portfolio may be an assessment and feedback tool for teachers and parents. It is evident from the results in Items 4 and 5 that 84 % of the students see portfolio as a useful tool for teachers because it helps the latter to get to know a pupil's personality and enables individualisation of the teaching process. A rather frequent opinion was that the introduction of portfolio was a matter of prestige for the teacher. As much as 56 % of the respondents think that teachers who use portfolios in their classes are praised by the school management and branded as modern teachers. As regards the importance of portfolio for parents, the students said that it would provide an opportunity for parents to browse through pupil's work and prepare themselves for meetings with their teachers.

Item no. 6 dealt with types of the materials to be kept in portfolios. 95 % of prospective teachers answered that portfolios should comprise worksheets and major written tests. Other, relatively frequently mentioned materials in reference to portfolio were materials and information sought by pupils, as well as records of the activities conducted in class. Questionnaires, peer assessments, diplomas, and photographs were mentioned only rarely.

As regards the question on how often pupils should work with portfolios, most students responded with "once or twice a month" (67 %). There was a wide variety of other responses, ranging from everyday activities related to portfolio, to irregular usage when deemed appropriate, and even to absolute rejection of portfolio.

The question in Item no. 8 asked the respondents about who should decide which materials should be kept in a portfolio. Most of the students (77 %) responded that a pupil's works should be sorted out by their teacher, or possibly by the teacher and the pupil (63 %). On the other hand, only 11 % of the respondents thought that it was the pupil who should decide, as it was his or her portfolio and it should reflect the pupil's needs.

In response to the question as to why, according to the students, portfolio was rarely used in schools, nearly 90 % of them mentioned excessive time demands. Quite often (47 %) the answer was that portfolio was a new method, unknown to teachers, or that teachers were not willing to get acquainted with this new method. Close to half (42 %) of the respondents said that the work with portfolio would be worthless, which is alarming.

The last two questions in the questionnaire mapped the respondents' awareness of the portfolio concept. The students were asked if they had already worked with portfolios in schools and if they had enough information on the matter. As much as 93 % of the respondents said that they were familiar with portfolio but the actual results of the survey do not correspond to such a statement.

Conclusion

Portfolio is a structured set of a child's work collected over a certain period of time, which provides information on the child's achievements and their development. It allows one to monitor a child's development, to see what progress has been made during a specific period, and identify the ways of further development. Portfolio assessment is very beneficial in many respects. Using a portfolio, it is much easier to focus on developing a child's skills and independence within the educational system as defined by Framework Educational Programmes. It allows teachers, parents, and also pupils to assess their acquired skills and knowledge on a comprehensive and long-term basis; it combines formative and summative assessment aspects, points out the strengths and weaknesses of a child, encourages the involvement of children in planning and evaluating their learning, and increases motivation for learning.

Portfolios can contain different types of materials depending on portfolio type. A portfolio should always include a variety of materials in order to provide a comprehensive picture of a child's knowledge and skills. It is also convenient for a group to have a similar structure of portfolios. This accelerates the learning process and also allows comparison among children.

Most importantly, portfolios help children gain a deep, detailed, and comprehensive feedback on their performance. Evaluation by teachers according to clear and explicit criteria deepens children's understanding of the criteria, based on which their performance is judged. Along with data based on the evaluation by teachers, portfolios also include a space for children's self-assessment. Children have an opportunity to comment on individual areas of assessment and to supplement evaluation produced by teachers. Children's self-presentation is facilitated by a selection of sample materials and results of their work. Involving children in creating a portfolio increases their motivation to learn, supports their self-reflection, and develops their communication skills. Ultimately, children's motivation for learning and their responsibility for their own educational development are strengthened. Portfolios deepen child-teacher or child-parent relationships. This promotes active involvement of children in the learning process and supports the development of key competences.

Survey results indicate that future teachers do not understand the concept of portfolio or the principles of working with one. Of the responses we received, only few corresponded to the true concept and principles of the diagnostic tool in question. The only positive outcome is the fact that although students do not have enough information on portfolios, they are eager to learn more about them. Therefore, the Faculty of Education of the Palacký University in Olomouc has set to innovate the subject of Pedagogical Diagnostics in order to incorporate pupil portfolios as one of the most effective diagnostic tools into the training of future primary school teachers. Only time will tell whether these steps will increase students' interest in portfolios or not.

DALJŠI POVZETEK

Glede na že večkrat omenjen nov pristop k učencu bistveno narašča pomen pedagoške diagnostike, ki jo izvajajo učitelji v šolah. V zvezi z vedenjem, odzivanjem in obnašanjem otroka je bilo včasih običajno, da so se iskala odstopanja pri posamezniku glede na druge otroke. Dandanes pa obstaja možnost vključevanja posameznikov s posebnimi potrebami, pri čemer se poudarja otrokova individualnost in izpostavlja normalnost. Tak preskok omogočajo predvsem novi učni načrti ter okvirni izobraževalni programi za posamezne stopnje izobraževanja. Gre za Okvirni izobraževalni program za predšolsko vzgojo (Smolíková idr., 2006), ki mu je sledil še Okvirni izobraževalni program za osnovno izobraževanje (Jeřábek in Tupý, 2005), osredotočen na institucionalno izobraževanje učencev med 6. in 15. letom starosti. Program za osnovno izobraževanje izhaja iz programa za predšolsko vzgojo, tako po svoji strukturi kot po osnovnih značilnostih. Ta dokument ponuja učiteljem precej svobode pri njihovem prizadevanju, da razvijajo mladega posameznika na najbolj optimalen način. Poleg tega pa ta dva dokumenta napovedujeta dobre možnosti za pedagoško diagnostiko v bodoče. Priporoča se, da učitelji sistematično vključujejo pedagoško diagnostiko v učni proces ter stalno zbirajo pridobljene informacije. V idealnem primeru so rezultat konstantne diagnostike ter iz nje izhajajočih zaključkov in ustreznih ukrepov vidni dosežki glede izobraževalnega standarda tudi pri tistih učencih, ki bi sicer le s težavo dosegali standarde kot take.

Če se učitelj zaveda pomena kontinuirane, dolgoročne in ciljno usmerjene diagnostike – tako v razredu kot celoti kot pri posameznikih – bosta njegovo delo in prizadevanje bolj smotrna in učinkovita. Še pomembneje pa je, da bosta tudi delo in prizadevanje učencev bolj smotrna in učinkovita. Učitelj bo sposoben bolj fleksibilnih odzivov na signale iz razreda, saj bo boljše razumel potrebe svojih učencev. Poleg tega pa bo lahko pomagal tistim učencem, ki so v šoli nezadovoljni ali imajo težave.

Da bi uspešno vpeljali zgoraj omenjene procese ter tako dosegli želeni napredek in razvoj pri posameznikih, morajo učitelji do potankosti poznati in zelo dobro obvladovati ustrezne postopke in metode, da se lahko ustrezno odzovejo na potrebe vsakega posameznika. Učitelji bi morali dobro obvladati pedagoško diagnostiko, poznati metodologijo ter znati ustrezno uporabljati metode in postopke v praksi. Znati bi morali izvajati diagnostične preizkuse, oceniti pridobljene podatke, na podlagi interpretacije in analize diagnostičnih podatkov priti do pedagoških meril in zaključkov, oceniti lastno aktivnost med diagnostičnim procesom ter definirati močne in šibke točke, ki so se pri tem pokazale. Učitelji bi torej morali imeti ustrezne diagnostične kompetence.

Pedagoške diagnostike v osnovni šoli pa ne izvajajo samo učitelji. V ta proces so zelo aktivno vključeni tudi učenci sami. Učenci gradijo na številčni ali ustni oceni učitelja, izvaja pa se lahko tudi medsebojno ocenjevanje v razredu. Poleg tega lahko učenci tudi sami ocenijo lastne veščine in kompetence. Samoocena, ki je pomemben del samorefleksije, je pravzaprav nek notranji dialog, ki se dogaja v posamezniku. S stališča pedagogike je to ena izmed učnih metod, ki je v pomoč učencu pri primerjanju mnenja o samem sebi z mnenji učiteljev in sošolcev, s čimer si ustvari bolj realistično sliko o sebi. Samoocena izhaja iz razvojne sposobnosti otroka oziroma učenca, da sam razmišlja o svojem znanju, veščinah in dosežkih, ocena drugih pa pomeni zgolj to, da so to isto znanje, veščine in dosežki ocenjeni bolj objektivno. Sposobnost samoocene že od zgodnje stopnje otrokovega razvoja je bistvenega pomena, saj kasneje ljudje (pretežno najstniki) pogosto izoblikujejo izkrivljeno podobo o sebi, kar močno vpliva na njihovo samooceno in samozavest.

Vodenje diagnostične mape je izredno učinkovit način za samoocenjevanje že od zgodnjega otroštva. Zelinková (2001) navaja, da je mapa organizirana zbirka del učenca, ki se zbirajo v določenem obdobju šolskega izobraževanja, ki lahko zagotavlja ustrezne informacije o otrokovih delovnih dosežkih. Otrok oziroma učenec hrani mapo svojih pisnih ali ustvarjalnih izdelkov, vključno z zapisi, komentarji in mnenji učiteljev, staršev, sošolcev ali samega sebe, in tako ustvarja edinstveno dokumentacijo, ki priča o napredku in dosežkih kot tudi o šibkih točkah, ki bi se jim bilo dobro posvetiti v prihodnosti. Ob nedvomno pozitivni vlogi take mape je potrebno omeniti tudi njene negativne strani, saj so le-te razlog, da za mnoge šole to diagnostično orodje predstavlja skorajda tabu. Nasprotniki pogosto zagovarjajo dejstvo, da vodenje take mape zahteva ogromno časa in da mapa zavzame preveč prostora, opozarjajo pa tudi na nevarnost zlorabe informacij v njej. Vse te trditve so seveda osnovane na trdni podlagi, vseeno pa imajo šole na voljo najrazličnejša sredstva, da izpostavljene probleme popolnoma ali vsaj deloma rešijo. Vnaprej pripravljena gradiva bi bila zagotovo koristna, saj šolam ne bi bilo potrebno porabljati časa za njihovo pripravo. Poleg tega bi se šole tako izognile neučinkovitemu poskusnemu obdobju, saj bi že imele koncept z določenim optimalnim obsegom

in vsebino učenčeve mape. Tudi ni potrebe, da bi se v mapi zbirali vsi učenčevi izdelki. Celo nasprotno, mapa naj bi vključevala le tiste dokumente in primere izdelkov učenca, ki jih učitelj po lastni presoji in na podlagi mnenja drugih izbere kot pomembne in bistvene. Ne glede na to pa se tovrstne mape v šolah ne uporabljajo pogosto in veljajo za bolj marginalno orodje.

Iz tega razloga smo na Pedagoški fakulteti Univerze Palacký v Olomucu želeli raziskati, kako tako mapo dojemajo in ocenjujejo bodoči osnovnošolski učitelji. Študenti, vključeni v program izobraževanja osnovnošolskih učiteljev, so izpolnjevali nestandardiziran vprašalnik, ki je vseboval 11 točk, namenjenih analizi mnenj bodočih osnovnošolskih učiteljev o pomembnosti mape učenca kot orodja za pedagoško diagnostiko pri posameznikih. Rezultati raziskave kažejo na nezadostno poznavanje in razumevanje tega diagnostičnega orodja, zato smo na podlagi ugotovitev raziskave začeli z uvajanjem novosti pri tem predmetu, da bi študentom predstavili ter zbudili zanimanje za uporabo mape učenca v osnovnošolskem izobraževanju.

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