

Editorial

This year, like in the previous two years, we are also publishing a bilingual Slovenian and English issue of *Contemporary Pedagogy*. It contains articles interesting to both domestic and foreign specialists, bringing considerations about research work in the educational field in Slovenia and presenting the findings of theoretical and empirical research projects marking current Slovenian pedagogic reflections more or less directly touching on teachers and their work.

Topical debates on the educational concept in Slovenia are reflected in the introductory article about the value basis of moral education in the public school. The authors, M. Kovač Šebart and J. Krek, advocate the thesis that human rights and obligations represent the basis of the common value basis for moral education in the public school. The authors analyse the thesis that the concept of human rights in the public school has only become established as a legal form and not as human rights ethics. They partly confirm the thesis, yet they emphasise that this was also contributed to by pedagogical theory to the extent that it did not manage to present the concept of human rights in a way that could be regarded in the public school as ethics or as an appropriate ethical basis for moral education there. They show that in this context the 'post-modern doubt' about the existence of universal values is unjustified and that the consequence of such doubt is, among other things, the insecurity of teachers regarding the value framework of moral education. They show which ethical principles and values are brought by the concept of human rights and how it places the relations vis-à-vis other, particular values and value systems, and give the grounds why the ethics of human rights and obligations is an appropriate basis for moral education in the public school. They emphasise that the use of this ethics also includes the legal dimension and formal educational acts. Consequently, teachers and students preparing for pedagogical work must be adequately introduced in their studies and enabled to learn about the concept and ethics of human rights and obligations so they can also apply these common values, standards and principles in their educational activities.

Also due to this, the studies and preparation of experts for work in the pedagogical field is an especially topical area as the quality of their work primarily depends on the extent to which the education process manages to appropriately develop such concepts that enable their professional development. These are issues addressed in the article by B. Šteh and J. Kalin. They ask whether during the study of pedagogy and adult education there are changes in the students' understanding of knowledge, the role of the teacher and the student and, if there are, what are the factors influencing these changes. They use as the basis the cognitive constructivist paradigm of education and thus highlight the assumption that constructive education refers to the active (re)construction of knowledge with the emphasis on the active role of the student. Knowledge can thus not be understood as the final truth which can be accumulated and transmitted to others. Based on these starting points, the authors conducted an investigation among students, using a combination of a survey and interviews as the methodology.

They thus gained an insight into changes in the understanding of knowledge, the role of the teacher and the student during studies. The conclusion that can be discerned here is that an extremely important role in the bringing on of changes are those education experiences in which students play a more active and more independent role. This can only be achieved if we consider students as partners in the education process and in decision-making about how to form studies of better quality.

The professional development of teachers through their action research is also examined in an article by a group of authors from the Ljubljana Faculty of Education, treating action research as a process that can contribute considerably to good quality educational work as it is conducted by teachers directly, which enables them to know their work better and plan it more adequately, while it also increases interest in the influence their actions have on pupils. The Slovenian school system has had a tradition of action research since the 1980s and today this is one of the most expanded forms of research in the pedagogical field. The authors find positive effects of action research of teachers, primarily regarding their readiness to participate in researching. This readiness is greater with those who have already participated in research. Therefore, special attention should already be paid to preparing teachers for researching during their studies, already providing the students with profound methodological knowledge and appropriate inclusion in research work during their studies. However, after the conclusion of the study programme, the system of continuing professional training must provide adequate opportunities for the development of research competencies and an appropriate financial and organisational stimulation for research work.

Teachers, their professional development and career models are also the topic of a study about the stage models of the development of the careers of Slovenian teachers by P. Javrh. Based on an extensive study by the Swiss researcher M. Huberman about career stages in the development of teachers, the author conducted a profound qualitative survey on a sample of Slovenian teachers and compared the model thereby formed (called an S-model or the Slovenian model) with the model developed by Huberman on a sample of Swiss teachers. Both models contain so-called desired and undesired sides. The desired side is characterised by positive growth and professional development, while the undesired side involves stagnation in career development and consequential dissatisfaction with one's career. In the Slovenian model, we also encounter a specific stage not known in Huberman's model. This is a stage of critical responsibility characterised by great engagement and positive criticism, releasing the creative potential of a teacher, which happens more the more an appropriate atmosphere is created among the school staff and the more teachers attract their colleagues to co-operate.

All the articles thus concern the work of teachers in one way or another, either through the prism of creating an educational concept and its value basis or through an analysis of the education of teachers, their inclusion in research activities and through the development of their professional careers. All the texts have in common the finding that the teacher is the key factor in a good quality education process. After all, the treatment of teachers and their education also

shows that the process of developing Slovenian education has reached the level where what is primarily needed is qualitative growth and that teachers are those who can ensure this growth. Consequently, special attention must be paid to those teachers whose career is built on the undesired side of the career development model, while it is also necessary to remove the causes bringing teachers into the stage of powerlessness, as P. Javrh calls it.

Two of the above empirical research projects also use a similar methodological approach as they are based on qualitative research methodology. The third article applies qualitative methodology to investigate the influences of action research and thus also indirectly touches on qualitative contributions to research work. In this context, it is therefore reasonable to ask about the theoretical basis of qualitative methodology, which is the subject of the article by J. Mažgon, who primarily asks about the possibilities to form theoretical findings on the basis and through the use of qualitative methodology. She rejects the criticism of qualitative research approaches because of their allegedly questionable validity and consequential small possibility of generalisation. To avoid such criticism, one must be very careful in the formation of a theory when using this type of research. To aid researchers, the author presents basic guidelines for the formation of a theory which indeed cannot achieve the level of generalisation of quantitative research, yet that is not its purpose. The value of qualitative research findings is greater the more the formation of the central categories is consensual and the more the empirical data obtained are tied to existing theory. In this sense, it is related to subject-based theory which provides the best basis for an increase in the validity of the findings of qualitative research projects. After all, their value is also proven by the article published in this issue.

A somewhat different methodological approach was used by T. Vidmar in the historical analysis of *gimnazija* as a general education secondary school in three related regions (countries). Instead of a continuous description of the development of *gimnazija*, which is the usual methodological approach, he uses a synchronic approach and presents for individual chosen periods, including the present period, how *gimnazija* appears as the site where ideas are expressed within these periods in which one must not overlook the documentation value of the historical analysis of the chosen periods. Perhaps, such an approach seems unusual to some experts and they would prefer to satisfy themselves with a diachronic analysis of *gimnazija* development which, however, would require a more extensive study. In the present time of debate about changes in the *gimnazija* programme in Slovenia, it is necessary to have a look at the situation from a distance. This is enabled by this analysis of the selected periods which thus contributes to a consideration of the situation of *gimnazija* as a general education institution today in terms of its contents.

We have thus covered the contents of this year's bilingual issue of Contemporary Pedagogy. We are convinced that, like in past years, readers will find in it some interesting treatises and encouragement for their practical work and above all opportunities for theoretical reflection. At the same time, we believe we have also appropriately presented the development of Slovenian theoretical

reflections in the education field to those who do not encounter it so often due to the language barrier.

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editor-in-chief*