

Combining Theory and Practice in the Professional Preparation of Future Special Educators – the Perspective of Students

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Abstract. The theoretical part of article contains observations on contemporary challenges facing modern schools and a modern educator/teacher. The specific character of future special educator training at the Institute of Special Education of the Pedagogical University in Cracow were presented. The authors shared the findings of their own research on realization of curriculum and expectations of students towards academic education, with particular emphasis on the role of practical teaching.

Keywords: *modern school, teacher, theoretical preparation, teaching practice, students, self-esteem.*

Introduction

The primary task of the modern school is to prepare students to function in the dynamically changing reality. This task should be implemented by competent educators/teachers, professionally-trained to work with children and youth. What tasks are therefore included in the work of educators/teachers? What is the professional preparation for these tasks? How do the universities educating future educators/teachers implement the preparation? and, above all, as the same students assess their preparation for the profession?

In Poland, the most important laws regulating the work of teachers-educators include: *The Act of 26 January 1982. Teacher's Charter* (Ustawa z dnia 26 stycznia 1982 r. Karta

Nauczyciela Dz. U. 1982 nr 3 poz. 19 z późn. zm.) and *the Act on the System of Education of 7 September 1991* (Ustawa z dnia 7 września 1991 r. o systemie oświaty Dz. U. 1991 poz. 425 z późn. zm.). The Acts define the broad and differentiated scope of the responsibilities of teachers. *Article 4 of the Act on the System of Education* reads that every “teacher in their teaching, education and care activities is required to be guided by the good of students, the care about their health, their moral and civic attitude of respect for the dignity of students” (the Act on the System of Education of 7 September 1991). *Article 6 of the Teacher’s Charter Act* includes the basic tasks of a teacher: “The teacher is obliged to:

1. Reliably perform the tasks related to his/her post and the basic functions of the school: teaching, educating and caring, including the tasks related to ensuring the safety of students during the activities organized by the school;
2. Assist each student in his/her development;
3. Strive to his/her complete own personal development;
4. Teach and educate young people to love the motherland, in compliance with the Constitution of the Republic of Poland, in the atmosphere of freedom of conscience and respect for every human being;
5. Take care of the development of students’ moral and civic attitudes, in the spirit of democracy, peace and friendship between people of different nations, races and belief” (the Act on the System of Education of 7 September 1991).

Pursuant to the *Regulation of the Minister of National Education and Sport of 23 December 2008 on the core curriculum and general education in particular types of schools* (Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej i Sportu z dnia 23 grudnia 2008 r. w sprawie podstawy programowej wychowania przedszkolnego oraz kształcenia ogólnego w poszczególnych typach szkół Dz. U. z 2009 r. nr 4, poz. 17), the teacher should take “measures to individualize support for the development of each student, according to his/her needs and capabilities. Teaching students with disabilities, including lightly mentally disabled students, he/she adapts to their mental and physical capacity and the pace of learning” (Regulation of the Minister of National Education and Sport of 23 December 2008 on the core curriculum and general education in particular types of schools). Pursuant to the Regulation, the task of schools, the teachers as well, include, among others:

1. “the implementation of the curriculum focused on the child, according to his/her own pace of development and learning opportunities;
2. respect the three entities of teaching and educational activities: student – school – home;
3. develop aptitudes and capabilities of the child” (Regulation of the Minister of National Education and Sport of 23 December 2008 on the core curriculum and general education in particular types of schools).

Particular emphasis should be put on point 7 of the quoted Regulation recommending “care about children’s possibility to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to understand the world, including guaranteeing their access to various sources of information

and opportunities to use them” (Regulation of the Minister of National Education and Sport of 23 December 2008 on the core curriculum and general education in particular types of schools) and point “encouraging the development of the children’s personality traits necessary for an active and ethical participation in social life” (Regulation of the Minister of National Education and Sport of 23 December 2008 on the core curriculum and general education in particular types of schools). The examples do not exhaust all of the tasks faced by the modern school and the contemporary teacher. They are very wide and varied, and subsequent dates of updated Regulations testify the changes that are being gradually introduced for the school to meet the challenges. Such a task is creating optimal conditions for the development of all students, including students with disabilities, who currently also learn in mainstream schools and for the inclusion of modern information technology in teaching.

The multiplicity and diversity of the tasks of modern schools and the tasks which should be realized by contemporary teachers need professional preparation. The responsibility for this preparation is born by colleges/universities. The element which cannot be absent in the preparation of students to performing their educational future functions is teaching apprenticeship, because “practice is inseparable from the pedagogical sciences. It is a source of educational problems, the realm of testing hypotheses and theoretical concepts. <...> The practice inspires the creation of socially-useful theoretical knowledge” (Palka, 2011, pp. 24–25). Already in the views of Plato and his student, Aristotle, we find the division of knowledge into *episteme* and *doxa (techne)*, meaning theoretical and practical knowledge. The attention of many researchers is drawn to the need for joining/connecting them (Głogowska, 2004; Kuźma & Wroński, 2002; Baraniewicz, 2012) however, the relations between theory and practice “<...> are not only an assimilating, unilateral transfer of ideas for pedagogical apprenticeship of teachers, but a process between each other’s conditioning and stimulating spheres” (Palka, 2006, p. 126). W. Krajewski (1998, p. 70), defines the functions of apprenticeship as:

- a) driving (it is the drive of knowledge, as it generates impulses, incentives for learning);
- b) informative (it is a source of information about the reality);
- c) final (it is the goal of knowledge, research objective);
- d) criterial (it is a criterion of the truth).

The need for a close cooperation between theorists and practices exists for “the former to create not only theoretical knowledge with a high degree of generality, but also the knowledge adequate to the needs of the practice, while the latter should not remain passive in their research, but also contribute to the theoretical practical knowledge” (Głogowska, 2004, p. 7). It should be remembered that today “in the pragmatic, ideological, critical, conceptual multitude in the works in the field of educational sciences and educational practice, inducing a sense of uncertainty and disorganization of young teachers – researchers and in teachers-educators attempting to create a common basis of the pedagogical theoretical and practical reflection – so desirable” (Palka, 2011, p. 25).

Pedagogical apprenticeship as an integrated element of the training of educators/teachers at the Institute of Special Education at the University of Pedagogy in Krakow

The State Pedagogical University (WSP) was established on May 11, 1946 in Krakow but it started its educational activities on October 25 the same year. At the beginning, the university trained primary school teachers and secondary school teachers since the academic year 1949/1950. On October 1, 1999 the University was transformed into the Pedagogical Academy and on November 20, 2008, it was granted the status of the KEN University of Pedagogy in Krakow.

From the onset, the chief task of the current University was to educate future teachers and educators for both mainstream and special schools. Currently, the educational offer of the University of Pedagogy is much richer than seventy years ago and includes 41 fields of study with several thousand students. To meet the expectations and the changing reality, the University of Pedagogy has become a university educating not only teachers and educators but also specialists, brokers, designers and entrepreneurs. It should be emphasized that the University of Pedagogy for many years has been at the forefront of teacher education institutions in Poland and in 2014, 2015 and 2016, according to the prestigious journal *Perspektywy*, it was ranked the first (Education publishing house *Perspektywy Press*).

For some time now, more and more is talked about inclusive education, where students with disabilities attend schools with non-disabled peers. For children with disabilities to have the best start in the future ensured, teachers need to know how they can work with them. Therefore, Special Pedagogy begins to enter a whole new dimension, and thanks to the Institute of Special Education at the KEN University of Pedagogy students can prepare for the role of a teacher and a special educator.

At present, the educational offer of the Institute of Special Education includes a Bachelor's degree and a Master's second degree. At the first-degree studies, the Institute of Special Education offers education at Special Education for teachers and Special Education for non-teachers. After the first year, the students of the studies for teachers can choose from among three basic specialties, such as Education and rehabilitation of students with intellectual disabilities (oligophrenopedagogy), Education and rehabilitation of deaf and hard-of-hearing students (deaf education), Education and rehabilitation of blind and the visually-impaired students (tyflopädagogy) and two additional specialties (which are not mandatory, the students can choose them but they do not have to), such as preschool and early childhood education, and Polish. For several years, tyflopädagogy has not been inaugurated due to the insufficient number of applicants. In order to inaugurate a specific specialty in a given academic year, the minimum of twenty people must apply. As far as Special Education is concerned, the non-teachers can opt for one of two specialties, such as occupational therapy of people more deeply and profoundly intellectually disabled or an assistant to a disabled person. At the master's second degree, the Institute of Special Education offers the opportunity to study at the Special Education where students can

choose one of the three specialties, such as education and rehabilitation of people with intellectual disabilities, pedagogical therapy and individual rehabilitation or early child development support.

The following describes in detail the plans for apprenticeship in force for third-year students of Special Education for teachers of all three specializations that are currently open at the Institute of Special Education, as they directly relate to the research group. Depending on the chosen specialty, the students of the first degree of teacher training are required to take an apprenticeship. The apprenticeship is divided into two cycles. The first cycle is discontinuous individual apprenticeship for which students can choose a location (kindergartens and public schools, special, integration, psychological-pedagogical counselling centres and specialized therapeutic centres and other therapeutic – teaching – educational institutions) and, during spare time at the second semester, 30 hours of apprenticeship take place during the students are required to:

1. Learn the entire institution's life (its history, traditions, organization, structure, teaching staff and other specialists, school documentation, pedagogical and therapeutic documentation, forms of cooperation with the surrounding environment);
2. Learn the workshop of the teacher (teacher-therapist: the scope of his/her responsibilities: diagnostic tools, therapeutic methods, documentation, rules of cooperation with other professionals and parents), and fulfil the tasks under his/her auspices;
3. Draw up, with the help of the teacher (teacher-therapist), a diagnosis of a student and develop a treatment plan for him/her;
4. Assist during the implementation of therapeutic tasks.

The students are also required to attend apprenticeship with their tutor¹, these are modular courses which include: lectures, tutorials and discontinuous practical classes (usually held once a week in the semester). On the other hand, continuous apprenticeship takes place at the third year of study. The students, during the whole time determined by their coordinator, within the whole week, attend their selected special care facility every day (it must meet the requirements in accordance with the guidelines for apprenticeship), where they observe and conduct classes.

During the individual discontinuous apprenticeship and the continuous apprenticeship, each student is required to keep records which consist of completing the apprenticeship's log, preparing protocols for supervised activities and teaching syllabuses for conducted lessons. In addition, the duties of each student include providing their supervisor's opinion². The opinion is a document in which the supervisor assesses the student's knowledge, their skills, commitment, creativity, ability to cooperate, organizational skills

¹ A researcher at the Institute of Special Education, conducting lectures, tutorials and/or practical exercises of the given subject.

² A person helping, supervising and evaluating students during individual discontinuous and weekly continuous apprenticeship appointed by the institution where the student takes the pedagogical apprenticeship. Most often, it is a teacher, a special education teacher or a school counsellor.

and personal culture (their attitude to the pupils, teachers, punctuality). On the basis of the written opinion, the students are granted credits from the year coordinator³ (Fig. 1).

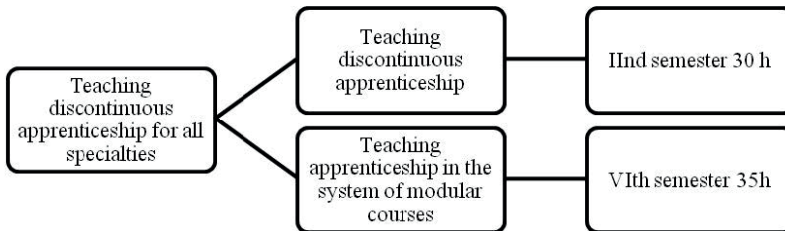


Fig. 1. Teaching discontinuous apprenticeship mandatory for all specialties

Teaching discontinuous apprenticeship for all specialties looks as follows:

- Teaching discontinuous apprenticeship takes place at IIInd semester in dimension 30 h;
- Teaching apprenticeship in the system of modular courses takes place at IVth semester in dimension 35 h.

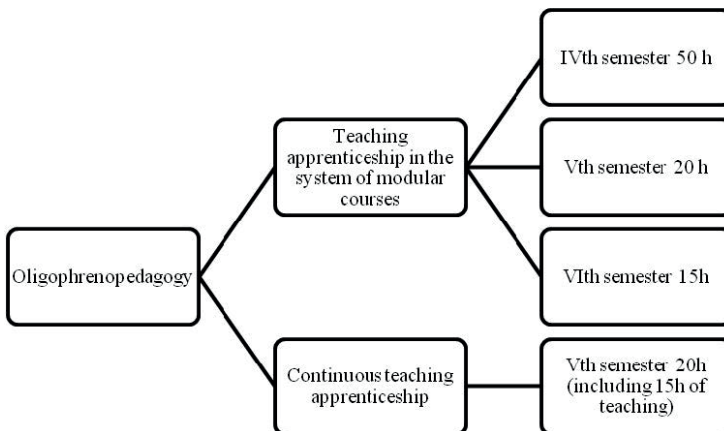


Fig. 2. Teaching apprenticeship for selected specialties – oligofrenopedagogy

On the Oligofrenopedagogy teaching apprenticeship in the system of modular courses looks as follows (Fig. 2):

- Teaching apprenticeship in the system of modular courses takes place at IVth semester in dimension 50 h, at Vth semester in dimension 20 h, at VIth semester in dimension 15 h;

³ A researcher at the Institute of Special Education responsible in the given academic year for a specific field of study, helping students with various issues related to education.

- Continuous teaching apprenticeship takes place at Vth semester in dimension 20 h (including 15 h of teaching).

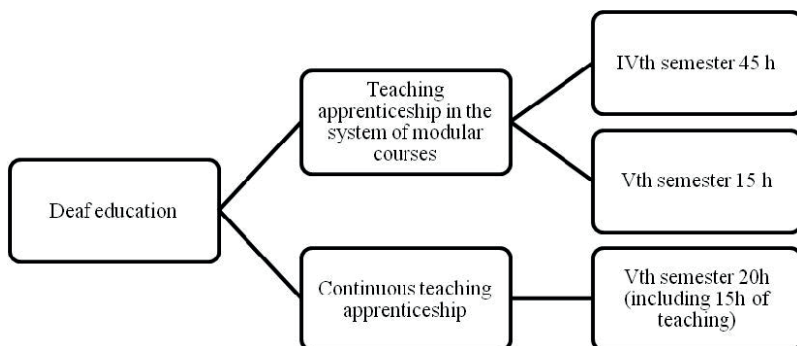


Fig. 3. Teaching apprenticeship for selected specialties – deaf education

On the Deaf education teaching apprenticeship in the system of modular courses looks as follows:

- Teaching apprenticeship in the system of modular courses takes place at IVth semester in dimension 45 h, at Vth semester in dimension 15 h;
- Continuous teaching apprenticeship takes place at Vth semester in dimension 20 h (including 15 h of teaching) (Fig. 3).

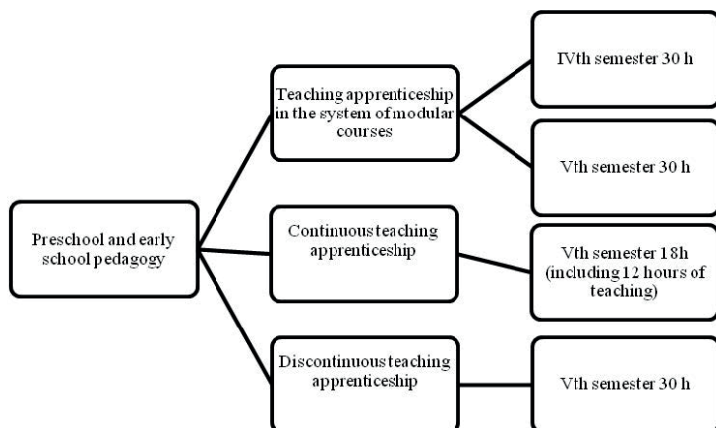


Fig. 4. Teaching apprenticeship for selected specialties – preschool and early school pedagogy

On the Preschool and early school pedagogy teaching apprenticeship in the system of modular courses looks as follows (Fig. 4):

- Teaching apprenticeship in the system of modular courses takes place at IVth semester in dimension 30 h, at Vth semester in dimension 30 h;

- Continuous teaching apprenticeship takes place at Vth semester in dimension 18 h (including 12 h of teaching);
- Discontinuous teaching apprenticeship takes place at Vth semester in dimension 30 h.

Due to the large number of students currently studying at the Institute of Special Education, there are two coordinators for apprenticeship. One of the coordinators is responsible for full-time students, the other for extramural students. The coordinators must, among other things, provide students with conditions for being granted credits for the apprenticeship, make them familiar with the rules and program of apprenticeship, discuss the principles of student documentation necessary for them to pass, what is more, cooperation with schools, centres and institutions in which students are to participate in apprenticeship and site visits and observation of classroom activities by the students who participate in the apprenticeship.

Teaching apprenticeship undoubtedly play a crucial role in the education of future teachers and educators. It is due to apprenticeship that students can decide whether they really want and, above all, whether they are ready to become teachers, educators, therapists. This is possible, inter alia, due to the apprenticeship during the second semester during which prospective teachers face the reality of school for the first time. When a student decides that it is his vocation to be a teacher, he/she shall, participating in further apprenticeship, learn the job from experienced teachers, pedagogues and educators as well as, under the supervision of specialists, develop their own individual style of work.

Methodology

When “<...> there is still a discrepancy between theory and practice, the conflict the perpetrators of which are on two sides: the theorists who do not always include the need for apprenticeship in their work, and teachers – convinced of the uselessness of theory in their didactic and educational activities” (Głogowska, 2004, p. 7) there is a constant need for empirical research in this area. The subject matter and scope of the study, concerning the assessment of combining theory and practice, may vary depending on the assessor and the skills that are assessed. The authors acknowledged that the most interesting assessment will be the self-assessment of students, a subjective perspective of young men who are to become teachers. The range of the skills assessed was dictated by three basic functions that the teacher carries out during lessons/activities. The functions are: substantive, didactic, educational and care.

Due to the range of the issues, three main objectives of the research have been formulated. The first concerned the knowledge of students' self-assessment regarding their professional preparation, the second was getting to know the assessment of combining theory and practice in the training of future teachers/special educators in the perspective of students, and the third referred to the proposed by the students solutions on connecting

theory and practice. The main issues force formulate the main research questions and specific questions:

- I. What is the self-assessment of students regarding their professional preparation?
 1. What is the self-assessment of students regarding their professional preparation in the view of the implementation of substantive functions?
 2. What is the self-assessment of students regarding their professional preparation in the view of implementing the functions of teaching?
 3. What is the self-assessment of students regarding their professional preparation in the view of implementing the educational and care functions?
- II. What are the expectations of students regarding the implementation of apprenticeship in the preparation of future teachers/special educators?
 1. What are the expectations for the students concerning apprenticeship in the view of the implementation of substantive functions?
 2. What are the expectations for the students concerning apprenticeship in the view of implementing the functions of teaching?
 3. What are the expectations for the students concerning apprenticeship in the view of implementing the educational and care functions?
- III. How do students assess combining theory and practice in the training of future teachers/special educators?

The self-assessment of students was conducted using the method of diagnostic survey. The survey technique was used. *The modified estimate scale of the functioning during the lesson* was used as a tool (Jodłowska, 1988), it was developed on the basis of the three basic functions performed by the teacher during lessons/classes: the teacher as a substantive specialist; the teacher as an educator, the teacher as a tutor and guardian. The estimate scale includes an extensive set of tasks during lessons/activities that have been organized into the categories mentioned above. They were evaluated according to the scoring: 0; 1; 2. The scores obtained were multiplied by the multiplier set in the key, after summing up, that resulted in the final score, also precisely defined in the key. The diagnostic value of the *Estimate scale* was tested in studies concerning the functioning of the teacher in class. Using the described scale enables analysing multiple teachers' functions, and the results are detailed and representative. For the study, introduction has been replaced with instructions. What is more, at each of the scale sections assessing, respectively: substantive, didactic, educational and care functions, there is an open question of what is expected of students with respect to the practical implementation of the preparations in the tested range of diagnostic value.

The study group was formed of IIIrd year students, the last year of *Special Pedagogy* studying full-time at the University of Pedagogy in Krakow. The survey was completed by 62 people, including 18 students of deaf education and 44 students of oligofrenopedagogy. The research was anonymous.

Results: The self-assessment of students concerning joining theory and practice in the professional preparation of future special educators

The results of the study on the overall self-assessment of students in all of the three functions performed by the teacher during lessons/classes are very high (cf. Baraniewicz, 2002). The assessment Very good was dominant (52%). It is worth emphasizing that the highest assessment Distinctive (9%) was recorded and there was no Unsatisfactory assessment (0%). The figure below (Fig. 5) shows the percentage of all of the results.

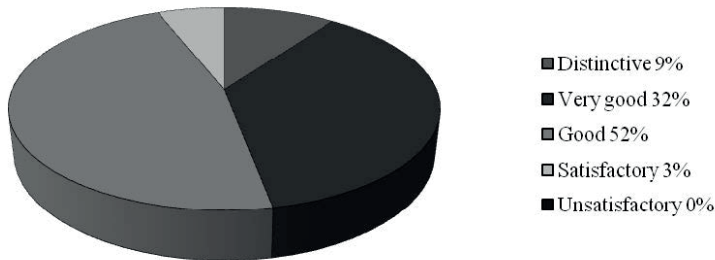


Fig. 5. The overall self-assessment of students at oligofrenopedagogy and deaf education

The overall self-assessment of students at oligofrenopedagogy and deaf education looks as follows:

- 9% of respondents assessment yourself distinctively,
- 32% of respondents assessment yourself very good,
- 52% of respondents assessment yourself good,
- 3% of respondents assessment yourself satisfactory,
- 0% of respondents assessment yourself unsatisfactory.

Placing all of the results of the students of oligofrenopedagogy and deaf education in one figure enables their more detailed analysis. It is an interesting dependence that the two most common, although diverging, assessments recorded a similar frequency of selection: 50 and 52% and 32 and 33% (see the Fig. 6). The assessments which were recorded most frequently, however, were divergent, because the self-assessments of the students of oligofrenopedagogy for all functions: the substantive, didactic, educational and care, were most common Good (52%), while the dominant assessment among the students of deaf education (50%) was Very good. At the second location the situation is quite opposite, as the dominant assessment in the first group was Very good (32%), and Good in the first group (33%).

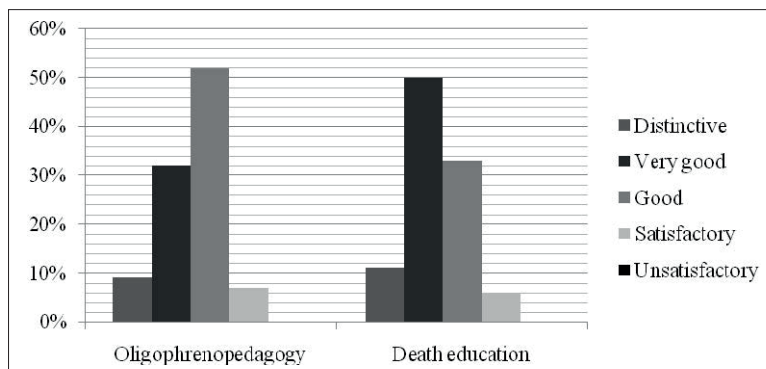


Fig. 6. Self-assessment of the students of oligophrenopedagogy and deaf education

Self-assessment of the students of oligophrenopedagogy looks as follows:

- 9% of respondents assessment yourself distinctively,
- 32% of respondents assessment yourself very good,
- 52% of respondents assessment yourself good,
- 7% of respondents assessment yourself satisfactory,
- 0% of respondents assessment yourself unsatisfactory.

Self-assessment of the students of deaf education looks as follows:

- 11% of respondents assessment yourself distinctively,
- 50% of respondents assessment yourself very good,
- 33% of respondents assessment yourself good,
- 6% of respondents assessment yourself satisfactory,
- 0% of respondents assessment yourself unsatisfactory.

An interesting analysis concerns the assessments that students recorded in the different areas taking into account the performance of the teacher's functions: substantive, didactic, educational and care. The overall self-assessment (the Fig. 7) of the respondents turned out to be not very diverse. Given the small percentage differences, the highest assessments concerned the educational – care functions, the second location was occupied by didactic functions, followed by substantive functions.

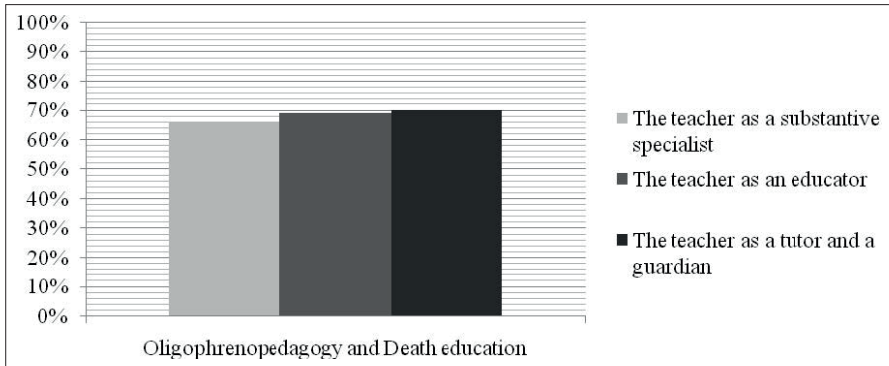


Fig. 7. The overall self-assessment of students in the three spheres of teacher's functioning

The overall self-assessment of students in the three spheres of teacher's functioning looks as follows:

- 66% of respondents see themselves as teacher as a substantive specialist,
- 69% of respondents see themselves as teacher as an educator,
- 70% of respondents see themselves as teacher as a tutor and a guardian.

The analysis taking into account the distribution of students into those studying oligophrenopedagogy and deaf education shows that the highest scores among the first group refer to the skills within educational and care functions, while among the second group – to the skills within the didactic functions.

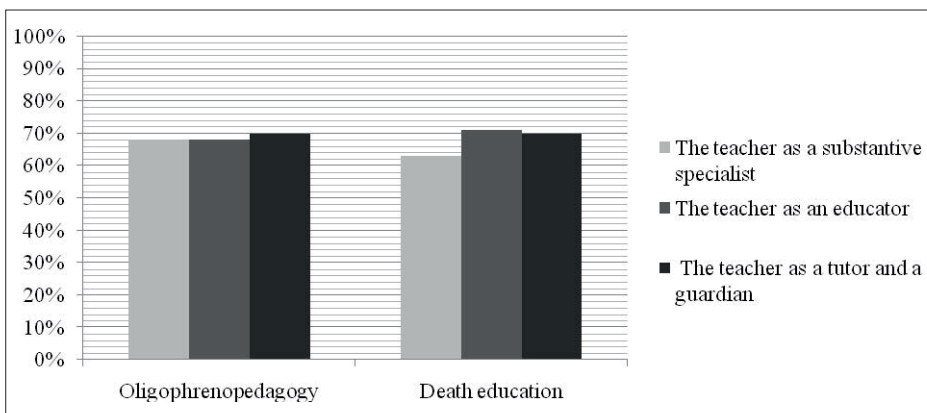


Fig. 8. Self-assessment of the students of oligophrenopedagogy and deaf education in the three spheres of teacher's functioning

Self-assessment of the students of oligofrenopedagogy in the three spheres of teacher's functioning looks as follows:

- 68% of respondents see themselves as teacher as a substantive specialist;
- 68% of respondents see themselves as teacher as an educator;
- 70% of respondents see themselves as teacher as a tutor and a guardian.

Self-assessment of the students of deaf education in the three spheres of teacher's functioning looks as follows:

- 63% of respondents see themselves as teacher as a substantive specialist;
- 71% of respondents see themselves as teacher as an educator;
- 70% of respondents see themselves as teacher as a tutor and a guardian.

What, then, is the self-assessment of students regarding their professional preparation? The results obtained are high. The assessment Good was recorded in 52%, Very good in 32%, and finally the Distinctive in 9%, which is a proof of that. The detailed self-assessment, analysed from the perspective of the function performed by the teacher, was equally high in all planes. Can we therefore say that the responding students of special education are well prepared to fulfil the tasks of the modern teacher/therapist? No, because it would be too hasty a conclusion, hardly objective. The high notes can be read also as a result of professional preparation. But it must be remembered that it was a self-assessment of the respondents, requiring the capability of self-criticism, distance, reflection, experience in evaluating each other... The high results cannot therefore be read unilaterally and the measures optimizing training, both theoretical and practical, cannot be discontinued.

The second research question was open, but the responses were similar. Due to the special importance (in the opinion of the authors) of the expectations of the students themselves to practical training, the table below presents some selected quotes illustrating their responses. They are quotations, placed on the figures assigned to the function, as respondents placed them.

Table

The expectations of the students to practical training – quote

	Oligofrenopedagogy students	Deaf education students
Substantive functions	“knowledge of the functioning of the children in different school situations”, “better knowledge of students and their problems/needs”, “teaching syllabus for classes should be discussed with the supervisor and the teacher in the institution”.	“more apprenticeship”, “apprenticeship should be implemented from the first year”, “small groups”, “the very observation of outdated methods and ways of working with students does not necessarily positively affect the perception of the future profession by students”.
Didactic functions	“more continuous apprenticeship”, “earlier discussion on the syllabus”, “knowledge of different teaching methods”, “not providing too many goals for one class”, “it’s best to learn from one’s own mistakes, I think we should have as much apprenticeship as possible”, “I think that we should bet on the quality of apprenticeship – not quantity”, “after classes, a meeting should take place which would discuss the quality of the classes”, “the possibility of reading more school documents”.	“more independent teaching”, “apprenticeship should be with great theoretical background”, “possibility of using new technologies”, “should be supported in every way possible”, “teachers preparing us to apprenticeship should not only focus on methodology but also on issues related to the daily life of the school. During apprenticeship it only matters if everyone has complied with the objectives and wrote a syllabus. Natural predispositions of students are not validated”, “An important role is played by teaching syllabuses and the operationalization of goals”.
Educational and care functions	“more observation of the work of educators/group leaders”, “it is important to gain the trust of children through positive attitude”, “sharing with students your work experience and ways of solving various problems encountered in the classroom”, “follow the student, support, motivate”.	“individual lessons with students to know them better”, “more consultations with class teachers”, “more presence and conversations with students”, “greater help of university teachers at preparation of courses”, “more freedom for students to feel responsibility for pupils”.

The quotes and their implications for practice are necessary, that is why the authors refer to them in the final conclusions.

The last main research question concerned the students’ opinions on how to connect theory and practice in the already realised school apprenticeship. The following pie figure illustrates the overall responses of all respondents. The vast majority of the respondents, as many as 85%, responded “rather yes”. Optimistic is the fact that there was no (0%) negative response “definitely not”. Reflection if, however, is needed over why the answer “definitely yes” was recorded only in 2%. Another disturbing result, although appearing occasionally, only 8% of the responses, was the answer “I don’t know”. This result can be

interpreted as a lack of interest and emotional involvement on the part of the respondents in the process of education offered by the university. It is a disturbing fact, as it does not concern theoretical, sometimes incomprehensible pedagogical theories, but a personal, direct contact with the student/pupil, where the indifferent attitude is highly undesirable.

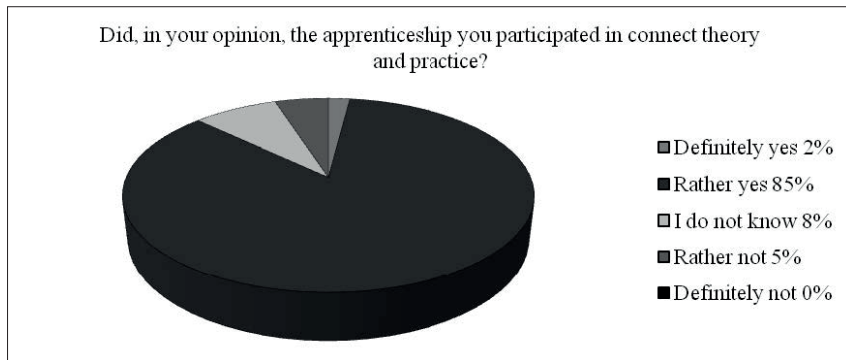


Fig. 9. The overall opinion on connecting theory and practice on the basis of the apprenticeship participated

The overall opinion on connecting theory and practice on the basis of the apprenticeship participated looks as follows:

- 2% of respondents think that their apprenticeship participated definitely combine theory with practice;
- 85% of respondents think that their apprenticeship participated rather combine theory with practice;
- 8% of respondents do not know whether their apprenticeship participated combine theory with practice;
- 5% of respondents think that their apprenticeship participated rather not combine theory with practice;
- 0% of respondents think that their apprenticeship participated definitely not combine theory with practice.

A detailed analysis, taking into account the division of students into the students of oligofrenopedagogy and the students of deaf education enables the finding of further dependencies. In both groups, the overwhelming response was the same, but in the first group, the responses of students were more diverse than in the second.

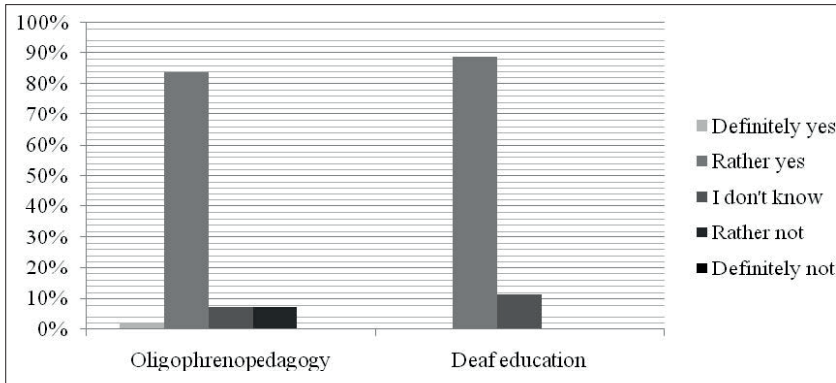


Fig. 10. Opinion of the students of oligofrenopedagogy and deaf education on connecting theory and practice on the basis of the apprenticeship participated

Opinion of the students of oligofrenopedagogy on connecting theory and practice on the basis of the apprenticeship participated looks as follows:

- 2% of respondents thinks that their apprenticeship participated definitely combine theory with practice;
- 84% of respondents thinks that their apprenticeship participated rather combine theory with practice;
- 7% of respondents do not know whether their apprenticeship participated combine theory with practice;
- 7% of respondents thinks that their apprenticeship participated rather not combine theory with practice;
- 0% of respondents thinks that their apprenticeship participated definitely not combine theory with practice.

Opinion of the students of deaf education on connecting theory and practice on the basis of the apprenticeship participated looks as follows:

- 0% of respondents thinks that their apprenticeship participated definitely combine theory with practice,
- 89% of respondents thinks that their apprenticeship participated rather combine theory with practice,
- 11% of respondents do not know whether their apprenticeship participated combine theory with practice,
- 0% of respondents thinks that their apprenticeship participated rather not combine theory with practice,
- 0% of respondents thinks that their apprenticeship participated definitely not combine theory with practice.

How then do the students assess connecting theory and practice in the training of future teachers/special educators? 85% of the responses “rather yes” entitles the conclusion

that the assessment is positive. One particular success in the organization of training for future teachers/educators at the Institute of Special Education should be considered the lack of a negative response, which demonstrates the gap between theory and practice. As suggested earlier, particular care must, however, be taken for other, less numerous variants of responses. They should mobilise to continued search for an optimal model combining theory and practice.

Conclusions

The necessity for close links between theory and practice in teaching is a priority in the training of future teachers, as it “is not a desired situation for the subjective theoretical pedagogical knowledge to substitute the objective knowledge of teachers. It is advantageous, however, when these two types of know ledges complement each other in the activities of teaching and educational practitioners. The theoretical pedagogical knowledge can, therefore, be used by teachers in practice, but the practice itself – practical actions – can be a source of theoretical pedagogical knowledge, and the desired state is when the two situations are not antagonistic to each other and take place at the same time” (Głogowska, 2004, p. 7).

What actions should than be taken to effectively teach theory and practice at the same time? Solutions can also be searched using the key: *theory-practice*. The theory, as numerous studies on the issue provide many valuable tips (Baraniewicz, 2013). R. Głogowska (Baraniewicz, 2013, p. 178) proposes a model of the effective use of theoretical pedagogical knowledge in educational practice. It postulates, among others, the increasing number of hours devoted to pedagogical practice and the need for a two-way flow of information between theoreticians and practitioners, as “senders of theoretical pedagogical knowledge (theorists) can only respond to the needs of practice when they receive feedback signals from the teachers concerning theoretical pedagogical knowledge” (Baraniewicz, 2013, p. 183). In the case of classes with students, active methods should be used. *Microteaching* should be particularly noted, consisting in conducting by students the so-called “teaching exercises” (Sajdak, 2011). An interesting proposal is the *practitioner research* study type, meaning educational research practice (Madalińska-Michalak, 2014) – it is a way for a smooth transition to practice, and the presented article follows the trend.

In the opinion of the authors, dealing directly in their professional work with both the theoretical and practical preparation of students for the profession of teachers/educators, there is a constant need for empirical research among students, because they are the recipients of the educational offer of teaching universities, and should be taken into account. The postulate related to the research concerns both quantitative and qualitative studies. Qualitative studies conducted among a large number of respondents give the possibility of observing certain regularities, and qualitative research will enable finding

the answer, why it is this happening?, what are the expectations of respondents, and what should be changed? The nature of these studies can and should vary, however, should any of them include self-assessment studies? The capability of making objective and fair self-assessments is one of the difficult tasks, it should be thus shaped during the course of studies. The prospective teacher must know one's strengths and weaknesses in order to know what he/she can base on and what he/she still needs to work on and what should be the future direction of his/her professional self-development. In line with the above, on the basis of the previously presented expectations of respondents, specific/student demands have been formulated to optimize the organization of teaching apprenticeship. They concern:

1. Preceding apprenticeship with a theoretical preparation;
2. The need for cooperation with model working schools for organising apprenticeship;
3. Increased number of the hours of apprenticeship to be able, among others, to get to know students better;
4. Decreased number of students/trainees in apprenticeship classrooms, so that everyone could independently conduct classes with students;
5. The need for preparing by students/trainees detailed syllabuses and consulting them with both the tutor and the apprenticeship teacher;
6. Supporting students/trainees, both at the conceptual stage, and after the conducted lessons/classes indicating the positive elements and a common discussion on what and how to improve;
7. Enabling students/trainees access to documentations of schools;
8. The search for new solutions, among others, by giving students/trainees more flexibility in the implementation of activities;
9. Creating opportunities for the use of new technologies during lessons/classes.

The ending postulate (derived from the authors) emphasizes the need for taking into account the specificity of academic didactics resulting from the age of students. As young people search for their own way, both in life and in their professional (Palka, 2004, p. 32). It should be remembered that teaching apprenticeship can verify their career plans, encourage or discourage the professional path of an educator/a teacher.

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Teorijos ir praktikos derinimas rengiant būsimojus specialiuosius pedagogus: studentų požiūris

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Santrauka

Pagrindinis šiuolaikinės mokyklos tikslas – parengti mokinius veikti nuolat besikeičiančioje realybėje. Šį tikslą turėtų kelti kompetentingi ir profesionalūs pedagogai / mokytojai, tinkamai parengti dirbti su vaikais ir jaunimu. Straipsnyje autorės atsakė į klausimus: kaip atrodo mokytojų profesinis rengimas? Kaip universitetai moko būsimojus pedagogus / mokytojus? Ir, svarbiausia, kaip patys studentai vertina savo pasirengimą profesijai?

Vienas iš pagrindinių metodų, taikomų studentams / būsiesiems pedagogams ir mokytojams parengti, yra teorinių žinių derinimas su praktiniu mokymu. Teorinėje dalyje pateikiami pastebėjimai apie šiuolaikinius iššūkius, su kuriais susiduria šiuolaikinės mokyklos ir šiuolaikinis pedagogas / mokytojas. Autorės pristato savitą būsimųjų specialiųjų pedagogų rengimą Krokuvos pedagoginio universiteto Specialiojo ugdymo institute ir savo atlikto tyrimo apie ugdymo programos įgyvendinimo bei studentų lūkesčius dėl universitetinių studijų, ypač pabrėžiant praktinio mokymo vaidmenį, rezultatus. Tiriamųjų grupę sudarė specialiųjų poreikių pedagogikos specialybės paskutinių metų nuolatinių studijų studentai. Jie pateikė savo įgytų įgūdžių 3 pagrindinėse mokytojų profesinio veikimo srityse vertinimą. Nagrinėjamos sritims buvo reikalingi nemenki didaktiniai ir pedagoginiai gebėjimai. Straipsnyje apibūdinami respondentų lūkesčiai, kurie susiję su jų profesinio rengimo metodais ir pedagoginės praktikos organizavimu. Studentų savęs vertinimas rėmėsi pačių studentų asmenine patirtimi, kurią jie įgijo studijų programose numatytų ir atliktų praktikų metu.

Esminiai žodžiai: *šiuolaikinė mokykla, teorinis rengimas, pedagoginė praktika, studentai, savęs vertinimas.*

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