

**A comparative overview of teaching practice  
in Porto University (Portugal)  
and Uman State Pedagogical University (Ukraine)**

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A *central aspect* of any teacher education programs is the provision of experience in schools or teaching practice to student teachers.

The *objective* of any school practice is to ensure that student's education has the essential balance between theory and practical experience.

A common feature of both teacher education programs in Portugal and Ukraine is the provision of field experience or teaching practice for student teachers, but the provision for teaching practice varies greatly between the Universities in its organization, in the amount of time devoted to it, and in how students' progress is monitored.

Generally, Ukrainian and Portuguese student teachers are provided with opportunities to visit freely the place of practice, to consult with the class teacher and to meet "the pupils", the principal and other members of staff, to spend some time on classroom observation, and to give lessons under the supervision of experienced faculty members and mentors.

On the other hand, in Ukraine students are provided by brief periods of classroom placement (5 weeks) while in Portugal they have a year-long internship (the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of master degree) with regular teaching obligations. We should also mention that places of teaching practice are quite different. In Porto University master students undertake their teaching practice in schools, in Ukraine – in higher educational establishments.

Both Universities set out detailed requirements for their students with regard to short-term (in Ukraine) or long-term (in Portugal) planning, lesson preparation, classroom performance, and pupil assessment. Students are also advised about protocols for making contact with educational establishments, dealing with pupils, punctuality, attendance, and dress code. In both countries student teachers also have two supervisors, the university supervisor of the practice and the mentor, who both advise and evaluate students. But, in Ukraine, following each classroom visit the supervisor gives immediate feedback to the student in oral form, where strengths and weaknesses are identified and strategies for improvement are recommended. Ukrainian supervisors use criteria for assessing student teachers' work, particularly in the areas of planning, preparation, and classroom performance. The general mark for the teaching practice usually is based equally on

marks for observed lessons and mentor's characteristic of the student teacher. In the end, all students are assessed, and get their professional recommendations.

In Porto University the procedure of analyzing and assessing students is much more complicated. Let start with the fact that in Porto the university supervisor observes only 3 lessons: one – at the end of November, the second one – somewhere in February, and the last one – in May (in comparison, in Ukraine the university supervisor will attend four lessons which can be given one by one or divided between five weeks).

A fundamental requirement in Porto University is that a pass in every lesson is necessary in order to progress. Considerable advances have been made in recent years towards providing a range of supports to assist weaker students to reach satisfactory standards of teaching. Following these interventions, students who continue to fail or who are found to be unsuitable for teaching for other reasons are counseled and advised to reconsider their suitability for the profession.

Another important thing in teaching practice is considered to be student teacher reflection. Dewey (1993) was the first to bring up the concept of reflection in education, though the work of Donald Schon in *The Reflective Practitioner* (1983) and *Educating the Reflective Practitioner* (1990) has brought about a renewed emphasis for reflective educators.

Today, reflection is mentioned as a component in the conceptual framework of education programs as well being a part of ongoing training for student teachers in Porto University. It is also used by supervisors as a part of the teacher evaluations. The process of reflection has two stages.

1<sup>st</sup> stage – reflection diary. In 1983 David Schön wrote the book *The Reflective Practitioner* in which he described his Reflective Practitioner Model and its approach to decision making and problem solving. He describes the difference between Reflection in Action and Reflection on Action and how the use of these practices could help to distinguish an effective practitioner from a less effective one. Teachers deal with people every day, which makes for an unpredictable day. Reflection is a useful method for a teacher to evaluate the day's events and decisions; it also helps prepare a teacher for the unpredictable events to come.

In Porto University after each lesson a student teacher is recommended to write in a notebook about what happened (reflective portfolio). They should also describe their own reactions and feelings and those they observe on the part of the students. In comparison, in Uman State Pedagogical University we have a similar procedure, but it has very formal character, and usually students write down in their diaries everything except real reflections. We can also say that in Ukraine we often are more interested in the form than in the meaning.

2<sup>nd</sup> stage – oral reflection.

How can students be involved in reflection? Though reflection is an important process for teachers and student teachers, it should also be encouraged for the students.

In Porto University the problem of involving students in reflection is solved in a very practical way. Master students are proposed the course “Introduction to professional practice”, which is absolutely mandatory for everybody. The aims of this course unit are as follows: 1. To develop students’ scientific and pedagogical-didactic skills; 2. To consistently establish a relationship between theory and practice, critically integrating knowledge of the scientific area(s), General Education Training, Specific Teaching Methodology and teaching practice; 3. To develop skills and attitudes conducive to reflective, problem-solving, critical and continuously improved professional performance; 4. To reflectively analyze the experiences implemented in each Training Nucleus; 5. To conduct action-research-reflection work that can be applied to the subject area(s) of teaching.

Practically, the course is divided into two parts: theoretical (students are given some theoretical teaching background) and practical (reflection on nature). Practical part of the course is based on the following principles:

- Students are given opportunities to reflect in different ways. Different materials are also used to facilitate reflection and keep the students engaged;

- Students have support and direction for their reflection. Simply asking them to reflect will not be enough for all students; guiding questions or introductory sentences are used to direct the students who need the direction;

- Reflection is a regular occurrence. The more the students take part in reflection, the easier and more natural it will become for them;

- Students’ reflections are kept in a portfolio; this way the students will be able to look back on their own reflections to see how much they’ve grown, learned, and how much they were able to write about their learning;

- All students have been explained beforehand why they are reflecting and that it isn’t a purposeless activity. These reflections help them improve as a teacher, and help them improve as learners; once students know how they learn best, then learning will become easier.

Reflection is organized in such a way that it is not just the process of analyzing and reflecting on practice. It is a group work, group discussion, debate, role playing, etc. The aim is for student-teachers to obtain increasing knowledge by which to support their teaching practice. Thus, they will read relevant texts and discuss the subjects with each other and with their instructors. These lessons also help to raise students’ awareness of themselves as learners and to see that they can direct and change their learning.

So, as our research shows the basic aim of teacher education programme in both countries is to educate competent teachers and to develop the necessary professional qualities to ensure lifelong teaching careers for teachers. But, Portuguese teacher education, as we think, aims more at

achieving a balanced development of the personality of each teacher, a process in which his or her pedagogical thinking plays an essential role. This overall purpose is based on the study of education as a main subject that is composed of three large content areas: the theory of education, pedagogical content knowledge, and subject didactics and practice. These components are in reciprocal interaction, and the main organizing theme, from the beginning of the programme to the end, is a research-based approach.

#### *References*

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