

ADAPTATION OF A NOVICE TEACHER IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

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Abstract: This report of theoretical-empirical character deals with the theoretical analysis of the problem of professional adaptation of the novice teacher of primary education. Attention is paid to the overview of international projects and to the results of foreign research dealing with the issue of the adaptation period. Qualitatively focused research aimed at identifying how the initial adaptation phase of a primary school teacher is going on is part of this report. The method of direct unstructured observation and the method of individual semi-structured interview was used to collect qualitative data. The data obtained was analyzed by an open coding technique. In the portion where we interpret the results, we present a complete summary of the research findings that may be the basis for further pedagogical research in the field of professional adaptation of beginning teachers of primary school education.

Keywords: professional adaptation, novice teacher, induction teacher, primary education, qualitative research

1 Introduction

The first years of the teacher's pedagogical practice bring with them certain unexpected situations or problems that have been presented to the novice teacher so far only at the theoretical level. A novice teacher should overcome various difficulties of an objective and subjective nature that do not occur in other professions. The period of professional adaptation of a primary education teacher involves not only the process of adaptation education but also several other new activities and responsibilities in relation to pupils, parents and teachers. Professional adaptation represents a challenging phase of the teacher's career, which needs to be given sufficient attention, since the seamless adaptation of the novice teacher can be a prerequisite for the functioning of the school as a whole (Pol, Lazarová, 1997). The phase of the teacher's career is of the utmost importance since the acquired experience during the adaptation period plays an important role for the teacher's professional development in the context of continuous education.

2 Professional adaptation

The general meaning of the term "adaptation" includes the process of getting used to something. This term can be defined in several ways (biological, medical, sociological, psychological). Given the nature of the report, we will focus on the pedagogical aspect. We call the first years of the teaching profession a professional adaptation, during which teachers acquire the first real experience and practical skills in pedagogical practice. In the context of the teacher's career, this is the second phase and, according to several authors (Kasáčová, Kosová, Pavlov, Šimoník), dealing with the issue of professional development of teachers is considered the most important stage since the experience gained during this period plays an important role for the further development of their professional career. Beginners are at this stage ready to learn, create and change educational and training processes. They have high demands not only for themselves but also for the system itself. However, the adaptation of a novice teacher depends on various factors. One is the degree of adaptability of a novice teacher. Upon entering the teaching profession, a new teacher is expected to adapt quickly, adapting to the new environment and managing all the demands placed on them since the first day. However, the novice teacher might not reach this stage of adaptation for various reasons. There might be misunderstandings with colleagues, disagreements with the mentoring teacher or school principal or non-alignment with the standards and culture of the school. It is therefore important during the adaptation to create a suitable environment and favorable conditions for teachers. Teacher Education Methodology in Europe ETUCE (2008) defines the specific conditions for the adaptation phase, including support from introducing teachers and other colleagues, a reduced lesson plan without lowering rewards, access to adequate sources of

support, mandatory participation in the adaptation program, and the opportunity to introduce a systematic theoretical approach into practice. If the novice teacher's work conditions are inadequate (e.g. school equipment, barriers in communication with colleagues or the school principal), the novice teacher is unable to fully develop their potential, won't be able to apply innovative teaching methods which would make the educational process more effective. As a result, there may be a variety of problem situations or even the teacher's resignation.

3 Adaptive Learning

Part of the period of professional adaptation is adaptive education which, according to Vincejová (2014), facilitates the period of professional start-up and allows the novice teacher to acquire the professional competences necessary for the performance of independent pedagogical activity that cannot be obtained during undergraduate training. The history of adaptive education in Slovakia dates to 1976. It was officially introduced in 1977. The concept of a uniform system of teacher education was developed, where its first stage was the introduction of mentor teachers into practice. Six exemplary introductory programs for teachers of kindergartens, elementary schools, gymnasium teachers, secondary vocational schools and secondary vocational schools as well as educators were created. A methodological manual was developed for these documents. The training program introduces the issue of introducing a functional study for senior pedagogical staff and a specialization study for methodologists. Formal methodical support was issued in 1986. By 1989, each newly qualified teacher had to have their mentoring teacher. However, the inclusion of a novice teacher into the school environment was not legally anchored. Since 2009, the establishment of the novice teacher has become formal in character and the program of adaptive education has become anchored by legislation (Kolláriková, 2016). Adaptive education is currently underway in Slovakia through appropriate adaptation programs that contribute to improving the quality and number of teachers. The law on adaptive education in Slovakia includes Act No. 317/2009 on Pedagogical and Professional Employees, Directive of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Slovak Republic no. 19/2009-R, which publishes the "Framework Program of Adaptation Education" and Decree of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Slovak Republic no. 445/2009 on continuing education, credits and attestations of pedagogical staff. According to the above-mentioned regulations, pedagogical employees who enter the pedagogical workforce for the first time are obliged to undergo adaptation training, which is carried out under the guidance of a senior professional. In Slovakia, it is necessary to complete adaptation training no later than two years from the beginning of the teacher's employment in education. The adaptation period may last for at least three months, but adaptation training is usually done over a one-year period. The school head determines the way and form of how the training is finished. A final interview or an open hour is held before a three-member examination board appointed by the school head, to which he is also the chairman of. The commission must also contain the mentor teacher who will prepare the final report. Upon completion of the adaptation training, a protocol is drawn up, which must be signed by all the members of the Examining Board and the beginning Teacher. A decision on successful or unsuccessful adaptation training is issued by the school head 15 days after signing the protocol. After successfully completing the adaptation training, the novice teacher becomes an individual pedagogical employee and is granted a higher pay grade. However, if a novice teacher fails to successfully complete the adaptation training, they may within 15 days ask the school head for a correction deadline for completing adaptation training. If the beginning teacher is again unsuccessful, the school head must terminate the employment with the novice teacher according to the Labor Code.

Within Europe, adaptation programs are diverse and support for

novice teachers varies from country to country, whether through the length of adaptation education, its nature, or organization. From the point of view of lifelong learning abroad, graduates do not end their education after getting their diploma. By completing their studies at pedagogical faculties, they will acquire a "starting qualification" of a teacher who needs further development and are given a teacher's qualification status, but a license for a full-fledged teacher profession capabilities will be given after one or two years. In some countries, the adaptation is targeted at those teachers who have completed the initial training, obtained the appropriate qualification and permission to teach. In other European countries, adaptive education is targeted at teachers who have obtained the required qualification, but lack the necessary license to teach. In this case, the adaptation phase ends with a formal assessment of the so-called "Trainees" and their decision to enter the teaching profession. Although the adaptation programs are different in each state, they combine several characteristics. First, its complexity, which means that adaptation programs should be structured, comprehensive, thoroughly monitored and have clearly defined roles for all the senior staff. Another common feature of adaptation programs is the focus on vocational education, the growth and professionalism of teachers. An essential element of adaptation programs is cooperation as part of a culture of learning in which novice and mentoring teachers share their views, experiences, or practices (ETUCE, 2008).

4 Overview of foreign research

The issues of novice teachers and their early years of work in the school environment is addressed by several major projects and researches in an international context. An international project entitled "INNOTE: Induction for Novice Teachers", involving the Netherlands, Germany, England, Hungary, Czech Republic, Finland, Estonia and Slovakia, was implemented in the years 2009 to 2012. It is a collaboration of 13 institutions, namely the University of Groningen, the Charles University in Prague, the Grammar School of Jiří Gutha-Jarkovský, Joensuu Lyseon Peruskoulu, the University of Regensburg, St. Mariengymnasium Regensburg, Dr. Nassau College, University of Edinburgh, Esterházy Károly Főiskola, University of Tartu, Comenius University in Bratislava and Primary School of Dr. Milan Hodža. The project was aimed at integrating lower and higher novice secondary school teachers into the school environment. The purpose of the project was to acquire knowledge on the establishment of novice teachers in this environment, and based on these findings develop a comprehensive training program aimed at supporting and assisting beginner teachers in the European Union.

The Comenius 2.1 project titled "TISSNTE" (*Teacher Induction: Supporting the Supporters of Novice Teachers in Europe*) covered the situation of training novice teachers and educating mentor teachers in 12 European Countries (England, Belgium, Bulgaria, Greece, Ireland, Lithuania, Latvia, Hungary, Portugal, Austria, Slovakia, Turkey). The results of the project point to the fact that additional high-quality education and professional teacher support are the main factors contributing to the recruitment and retention of novice teachers in schools, the improvement of teaching standards and learning outcomes. As many young teachers leave schools (less than 50% of starting teachers in England remain in education after 5 years), mentor teachers play a key role in training and supporting novice teachers. However, the needs of the teaching staff remain unanswered. The support system for mentoring teachers within Europe is fragmentary and there is no transfer of examples of good practice, even though a European Framework of Teacher Competencies has been created. The TISSNTE Teacher Training Program is anchored in a European context and has provided mentor teachers with opportunities for mutual collaborative learning and professional development, as well as the ability to constructively generate knowledge based on different views by teachers on the practice of introducing novice teachers. The essence of the TISSNTE project is to conceptualize the introduction of novice teacher training to create learning communities within institutions, cultural and national borders,

thus contributing to a better understanding and improvement of professional practice within the European context (Gadušová, 2008).

Interesting findings have been found in the research carried out at the Faculty of Education of Charles University, which is described by Kosová (2015) in her publication. Research was focused on the assessment of undergraduate training and the reflection of the problems of the teaching profession. It was found that there is a conflict between pre-university education and the needs of current educational system. Respondents in research (graduates and directors) agreed that the theoretical training is outside of the teacher's profession. It turned out that union didactics are overly focused on theoretical knowledge. Novice teachers in this research have argued that for a successful career start, much more practical preparation is needed in the form of pedagogical practices and training aimed at acquiring the necessary pedagogical, didactic and personality skills. The findings also included a reflections of novice teachers by school leaders who positively assessed the theoretical training of novice teachers, a wealth of knowledge, creativity, enthusiasm, computer work, and the introduction of innovative trends in the education and learning process. The directors stated that novice teachers were properly self-confident. On the other hand, the directors criticized novice teachers for not managing administrative activity and conducting pedagogical documentation. Criticism also included the lack of legislative control. Beginning teachers did not know what the rights and duties of a teaching staff were, the law of education and binding pedagogical documents. As further deficiencies, the school principals have stated the lack of readiness to communicate with pupils, the inappropriate behavior towards the pupils' parents, the inability to solve the educational offenses, the inability to explain the student's curriculum and the lack of precision for the work of the class teacher. However, if we look at the situation from the point of view of beginning teachers, studies dealing with the issue of graduates of faculties of education and subsequent beginners point to factors that cause frustration and thus affect the personality of the novice teacher. This is mainly about the overload that the beginning teachers associated with the management of administrative activity. Other frustrating factors include the large number of pupils in the classroom, the fear and uncertainty surrounding the pupil's admission, the increased pupil aggression, objective assessment and the loss of motivation. We can say that teachers perceive the didactics of their subject separately from activities such as keeping pupils' attention or maintaining discipline in the classroom. This suggests that didactics of teaching subjects, other pedagogical disciplines, and psychology have been so isolated during their undergraduate training that teachers do not see a direct link between them. However, it should be emphasized that the teacher's work does not depend only on undergraduate training at college. Significant factors involved in shaping a teacher's pathway are personality traits, motivation for the profession, intelligence, health, or working conditions of the teacher.

Another interesting research was conducted by Bendl (1997) in 1996 at twenty primary schools in the Czech Republic. Its aim was to find out which activities the teachers are tackling without complications and which, on the other hand, are causing problems. The questionnaire method was used to collect the data. Teachers were provided with 26 pedagogical activities, with respondents choosing from two choices: "I have problems" or "I do not have problems". The questionnaire included activities such as selecting material for the lesson, scheduling the curriculum for the whole school year, scheduling the lesson, communicating with pupils, motivating pupils, explaining the new curriculum, retaining the pupils' attention, adapting the teaching to the pupils' age, applying the individual approach, the use of frontal teachings, the maintenance of individual assignments during teaching, the work with above-average pupils, the work with students which are not prospering, the work with average pupils, the assessment and classification of pupils, the resolution of offenses, the cooperation with colleagues, the response to pupils' choice of educational methods, fulfillment of educational duties, fulfillment of

educational duties, formulation of tasks, consulting with parents of pupils. However, the author states that the results of the research carried out should be assessed with great caution as it is difficult to evaluate how teachers are able to objectively evaluate their own pedagogical activity. Another reason for judicious interpretation of the data is the fact that the research was attended by experienced teachers as well as novice teachers who are still learning their "pedagogical craft". The results show that teachers did not have any problems in responding to pupils' questions, pre-class and role-playing, the choice of teaching methods, and working with colleagues. On the contrary, pedagogical activities such as maintaining discipline during teaching, dealing with offenses, motivating pupils, keeping pupils' attention, applying individual approach, working with unscrupulous pupils, assessing and classifying pupils have proven to be very problematic. If we want to categorize individual activities, social activities are more problematic than the didactic ones. The reason for this may be the fact that the didactic or cognitive side differs from the social side of view at teachers' faculties.

The difficulty of individual pedagogical activities evokes the reflection on the causes of deficiencies in the work of novice teachers. The source of the problems may be the underestimation of the teaching profession by the public, unsuccessful school reforms, or the preparation of teachers for their pedagogical career at faculties of pedagogy. There are no seminars, lectures or workshops on pedagogical faculties aimed at acquiring knowledge about practical activities, for example, on the treatment of educational offenses, pedagogical diagnosis of pupils, work with non-prospering pupils or on motivating and retaining the attention of pupils. Even during admissions, talented future teachers should be exposed, for example, through a talent test.

The results of the research on the adaptation of novice teachers (Průcha, 2009) point to the causes of the problems of beginning teachers. These are causes stemming from the teacher's personality, where beginning teachers find out they are not sufficiently mentally prepared to pursue a teaching profession. They do not have the problem of preparing for or implementing their knowledge, but these problems make it hard for them to retain classroom discipline, taking full responsibility for pupils, make it difficult to communicate properly with pupils and their parents or colleagues. Beginning teachers thus experience excessive psychological stress and pressure. Other causes of problems of beginning teachers are associated with the professional competencies of teachers. Young teachers find out that the undergraduate study has not sufficiently prepared them to perform some pedagogical activities such as conducting pedagogical documentation or communicating with parents. Other causes arise from situations that happen in schools and for which teachers have not been prepared because they do not have enough practical experience. However, this experience will only be gained during the next few years of their pedagogical practice.

5 Research Methodology

In this part of the paper we present the methodology of qualitative research. We present the research problem and the research goal, the research questions and the used research methods, characterize the research sample and define ethical standards that we have been upholding in the research. Based on the analysis of the obtained data, we bring together the findings regarding the course of professional adaptation of the novice teacher of primary education.

5.1 Research Problem and Research Objective

Within the subject of this report, we identified the following research problems:

- RP_1. Experience of beginning teachers of primary education during professional adaptation.
- RP_2. The co-operation of the novice and mentor teacher during the period of professional adaptation.

The following empirical objectives are a result of these research problems:

- Analyze the process of adaptation of the novice teacher of primary education, with emphasis on current research findings, including adaptive education;
- identify specific pedagogical activities that are problematic for a beginner primary school teacher;
- identify specific pedagogical activities that are seamless for a beginner primary school teacher;
- examine the elements of co-operation of the novice and mentor teachers.

As part of the analysis of the adaptation process, we were interested in the adaptive education of novice teachers at elementary school, with emphasis not only on the positive experiences of beginning teachers but also the problems that have arisen during this period. Using research, we wanted to find out what pedagogical activities are most challenging for novice teachers and which, on the other hand, are seamless. We were also interested in the quality and form of cooperation between the novice and the mentor teachers.

5.2 Research questions

The above-mentioned research objectives determine the formulation of research questions. As part of finding a solution for the research problems, we will look for answers to the following questions:

- What are the experiences of beginning teachers from the period of professional adaptation?
- Which pedagogical activities are problematic for novice primary school teachers?
- Which pedagogical activities are seamless for the novice teachers of primary education?
- What is the form of co-operation between the novice and the mentor teacher of primary education during the period of professional adaptation?
- What is the degree of conformity of the adaptive education with legislation?

5.3 Methods of research

Since research has been qualitatively oriented, we have used several research methods to collect our data. In the qualitative part, we used the method of individual semi-structured interviewing and the method of direct unstructured observation for data collection. We used a direct unstructured observation method to collect qualitative data. As described by J. Hendl (2005), this is a method that captures the largest possible range of situations in each group, in our case the class. According to Švaříček (et al., 2007), this is one of the most demanding methods of data collection in qualitative research. Unstructured observation does not use predetermined observation systems, scales, or other tools, so the studied reality is not pre-structured (Gavora, 2007). The author claims that this way of collecting data is flexible, revealing new, unexpected and hidden phenomena or contexts. Using the observation method, we have tried to understand the whole context in which the adaptation of the novice teacher takes place, since it is important to understand the problem across its breadth. As it was a direct observation, we were present directly in the studied field - school class. We observed three elementary teachers in the first grade of primary school in a range of 50 lessons, with two teachers being observed for over 40 lessons and one teacher for 10 lessons. The lessons were recorded using audio technique (dictation) to obtain audio material (together 37 hours 30 minutes). During the observation, we focused on teachers' skills, pedagogical communication, and we also observed pupils' discipline during the teaching. Observation was conducted on subjects according to the current timetable. These were the subjects of Slovak language and literature, mathematics, natural sciences, national education, English language and literature, art education and music education. The observation was carried out between October and December 2016. This method was used to capture

situations which the participants rarely talk about in conversations, thus granting us our own opinion and insight into the issue of a novice teacher's adaptation.

We also used the method of individual semi-structured interviews to collect qualitative data. As part of the data collection, three interviews with novice primary teachers were conducted. Each interview was semi-structured with predefined thematic subjects, with the order of thematic subjects changing and adjusting to the situation. This type of interview, according to Reichl (2009) and Hendl (2005), can be described as an interview with instructions. The way the questions were answered was made to remain open, where the teacher could choose the style of their answer. The semi-structured interview is characterized by greater flexibility, making it a more flexible research tool compared to other types of interviews. This type of interview is recommended to use just when working with a target group such as teachers, because it is not easy to motivate participants due to the lack of time in the teacher's work when working with this group. In the creation of thematic subjects of semi-structured interviews, we relied on the results of the observations. The thematic focus of the interviews was conceived in the following areas:

- problematic and problem-free pedagogical activities of novice teachers;
- the process of adaptation education for novice teachers;
- cooperation between the novice and the mentor teacher;

Using this method, we gained information on the process of adaptation education (the extent of conformity between legislation and reality), we focused more deeply on the specific problems of beginning primary school teachers, but also on the positive experiences of novice teachers during the adaptation period, and we found out how cooperation between beginner and mentoring teachers works during professional adaptation.

5.4 Research sample

The choice of our sample was made by a deliberate qualified selection, defined by Maňák and Švec (2004) as a selection that has certain features important for research. One of the features was to meet the criterion of the time limit for the adaptation period of the beginning teacher, and a maximum of 2 years of pedagogical activity at the first level of elementary school. The subjects of the research were 3 teachers of primary education with less than 2 years of teaching experience. In the report, to maintain anonymity, we do not mention the real names of the participants or the names of the elementary schools.

5.5 Ethical principles of research

As our research has been qualitatively oriented, it was necessary during its course to place emphasis on ethical principles in its implementation. According to Gavora (2006), these are much more important in research of qualitative character than in quantitative research, since in the qualitative research a close contact between the researcher and the investigated persons is held. Ethics in research represent decency; it is therefore necessary for the researcher to be honest not only during the research but also after it is finished. As stated by Miovský (2006), ethical rules are based on three basics. They address the impact of the researcher on the research field, the protection of participants and the protection of the researcher. During the research, we followed the following ethical principles:

- Acknowledgment of participation in the research - the teachers who participated in our research were acquainted with the purpose of the research and its course. Teacher participation was voluntary, with the possibility to end their participation in research at any time;
- the credibility of the researcher - it was very important for us to gain the trust of the teachers. It was not just about increasing motivation to participate in research, but we tried to make sure that teachers provided us with sufficiently

valid and accurate information regarding the adaptation of novice teachers at elementary school;

- empathic neutrality - our participants showed interest and understanding during the interviews and, as recommended by Miovský (2006), we were neutral to the findings and tried to avoid any evaluation or assessment;
- freedom of dismissal - Teachers have been informed that they have the opportunity to not answer all the questions they have been asked;
- anonymity - the true names of teachers are of course known to us; however, their identity has remained confidential. This ethical principle is to maintain the credibility of the information and to protect the personal data of the participants. Teachers were informed in advance of who and for what purpose would have access to the gathered information;
- non-harm - our intention was in no way to induce pressure, to manipulate with teachers and we wish to avoid any inappropriate comments on the teacher's personality. We also did not impart our attitudes, opinions or values to teachers, but we respected participants as our partners and co-authors of research;
- correct data processing - our intention was to record, analyze and interpret the research data correctly. Teachers can contact us in case of questions or any other confusion (Gavora, 2006).

5.6 Analysis of obtained data

We used an open coding technique to process and evaluate the qualitative data obtained from interviews and observations. We relied on the procedure described by Švaříček (et al., 2007) in his methodological publication. We divided the text into units that were words, sentences, or paragraphs. The individual rows of the text were first numbered, and each code was assigned to each unit. When choosing a code, we asked questions about what the text says or what topic it represents. We have grouped dozens of codes based on a similarity or other internal context, thus gaining a hierarchical system. We have re-coded and renamed the individual codes to create a list of existing codes. Subsequently we proceed to systematic categorization. We have chosen the category titles in a way recommended by Strauss and Corbin (1999). Our aim was to name the categories as logically as possible with the data they represent. The analysis of qualitative data resulted in the creation of meaningful categories closely related to the adaptation process of the novice teacher of primary education (Tab. 1).

Tab. 1: Categorized list of codes

CATEGORIES	CODES
Positive experience from the period of professional adaptation	Acceptance from students Acceptance from colleagues Acceptance by the school management
Discontent during the period of professional adaptation	Conflicts between pupils Strained relations between the pupils' parents A great deal of pedagogical documentation Insufficient material equipment of the school
The contribution of the mentor teacher	Time-thematic plan Rating and classification Educational issues Working with pupils with special educational needs Pedagogical documentation Creation of writing assignments Organization of parent meetings
Collaboration between the novice and the mentoring teacher	Consultations Mutual observation Analysis of the lesson Initiative from the beginning

	teacher
Novice teacher cooperation with colleagues and other professionals	Cooperation with primary school management Cooperation with colleagues Cooperation with the school psychologist Cooperation with special pedagogues Cooperation with educational counselor
The course of adaptation education	Process and organization of adaptation education Duration of adaptation education Method of completing adaptation education
Preparation for teaching	Short-term preparation for teaching Absence of teaching preparation Sources and materials for preparation for teaching Poorly processed teaching aids Obligation and importance of preparation for teaching
Challenging pedagogical activities	Management of pedagogical documentation Working with pupils with special educational needs Creating an individual education and training plan Solution to socio-pathological phenomena Keeping the lesson time schedule Rating and classification The fast pace of the beginner's teacher's speech Communication with parents of pupils Insufficient theoretical basis for teaching subjects Keeping pupils' discipline Organization of non-traditional forms of teaching Giving out inappropriate amount of tasks Inappropriate written speech of the novice teacher
Problem-free pedagogical activities	Sufficient theoretical basis of teaching subjects Rules and boundaries of pupil behavior Motivation of pupils Pedagogical Communication

6 Research results

By analyzing the obtained qualitative data, we got results which specify the course of adaptation of the novice teacher of primary education. We summarize the findings by identifying the categories that have proven to be significant. In the following chapters, we present specific research results.

6.1 Experiences of novice teachers during professional adaptation

Our intention was to point out the experiences of beginning teachers during professional adaptation. In this sphere two main areas were developed: positive experiences in the form of expectations and negative experiences in the form of disappointments. The positive experience and the expectation of beginning teachers during the adaptation period is clearly acceptance by their colleagues. It was important for novice

teachers to integrate seamlessly into the teaching staff and create optimal relationships with their colleagues. A favorable atmosphere at the workplace and friendly teacher relationships have been beneficial to the work of a novice teacher. Another positive experience from the adaptation period of the novice teacher was acceptance by the pupils. Pupils have been able to facilitate a difficult period of adaptation through their access to a new teacher. The relationship between a teacher and a pupil appeared to be a significant motivational factor in the work of a novice teacher, based on elements of cooperation, respect and understanding. A positive experience was also the acceptance from the school leadership. Regular communication between the school principal, the deputy headmaster, and the novice teacher played an important role in adaptive learning. Beginning teachers experienced, in addition to their positive experience, various disappointments, a so called "shock from reality". The incidence of this phenomenon is borne out by further research dealing with the issue of professional adaptation. Šimoník (2013) argues that during the first year of pedagogical practice, beginning teachers face confrontation between ideas and hard reality, between the preparation and performance of the profession, between theory and practice. Kosová (2013, p. 8) justifies the presence of this phenomenon by saying that *"theoretical concepts do not correspond to the educational reality and, if they are only lectured, they will remain incomprehensible and useless."* During the adaptation period, beginning teachers were disappointed for several reasons. Most often there was a large amount of pedagogical documentation. Novice teachers did not have the necessary experience and skills to manage this administrative activity, so the management of pedagogical documentation felt as an excessive burden in the exercise of their profession. The material and technical equipment of the schools was another significant disappointment for the novice teachers. The intention of enthusiastic novice teachers was to change and refine traditional education and training practices during the first months of their teaching practice. These changes required high-quality material and technical support, including teaching aids. Beginners did not have modern teaching aids or appropriate technical conditions for the use of modern technologies. Interpersonal social relationships between pupils was another major disappointment for the novice teacher. As we have already mentioned, the relationship between the teacher and pupils did not seem to be problematic, but relations between individual pupils were tense. The reason for disagreements among pupils from the point of view of novice teachers was the rivalry, which also affects the temperament of individual pupils. The relationships with the parents of the pupils, which did not surprise the novice teacher, were also dented. The reason for conflicts between parents was the failure to respect the opinions and instability of the teacher in the classroom.

6.2 Problem-free pedagogical activities of novice teachers

In the context of the experience of novice teachers in the period of their professional adaptation, pedagogical activities, which were initially problematic, have emerged as well as activities that have been found to be trouble-free for novice teachers. Seamless pedagogical activities were conditioned by the strengths of the novice primary school teachers, which, based on our findings, included pedagogical communication. The pupils' communication was then reflected when offered new education; such communication was considered by the novice teachers to be their strong point. Problem-free pedagogical activities from the point of view of beginning teachers included the motivation of pupils during teaching and theoretical readiness for individual subjects. Beginners did not have a problem with the teaching of Slovak language and literature, English language, music education and physical education. The absence of problems in teaching these subjects was related to the previous practice gained when teaching said subjects or had a base in the interests of the novice teachers in primary education.

6.3 Problematic pedagogical activities of novice teachers

The adaptation period of novice teachers brought with them several problematic situations. The problematic and, at the same time, demanding pedagogical activities of the beginning teachers included the management of pedagogical documentation. Beginning teachers had difficulty listing documents such as the class book, the classification sheet or the pupil's catalog sheet. Another problematic area of adaptation was also participation in the creation of the school education program. Beginning teachers felt these shortcomings because of their lacking undergraduate training. Furthermore, problems were also found when upholding the thematic education and training curriculum. For beginners, it was challenging to stick to the time-thematic plans, as our findings often found, novice teachers were often behind on teaching. This situation was then addressed by an unreasonable pace of activity, which resulted in the accumulation of a large amount of homework for the pupils. They often tried to catch up using spare time during consultation classes and physical education lessons.

The thematic plans should follow the preparation for teaching, which was another area that has been proven to be another inadequate competence of novice teachers. Such preparation was deemed time-consuming by the novice teachers. They initially formed their own written preparations, which were elaborate in detail. With time, however, they felt that elaborate preparations were no longer needed. Novices created their own preparation for teaching after completing their adaptation training, which were not elaborated in detail, but they contained the basic parts of the unit of instructions, and the individual points represent a skeleton of the lesson that the novice teacher was supposed to perform. Some novice teachers did not even prepare during their entire adaptation period. We critically evaluate the fact that novice teachers rely mostly on teaching aids, such as textbooks or workbooks, when preparing for lessons, but do not utilize professional literature to further extend their plans, even though some textbooks and workbooks are poorly processed. Preparing for teaching should be the responsibility of every teacher, not just the beginning teacher, because the correct preparation affects the course and the results of the teacher's educational activities. Preparing for teaching also includes written assignments. Written assignments meant for pupils were shown to be one of the trickiest problems. Beginning teachers were not experienced in this activity. Problems were especially caused by the creation of dictates on Slovak language lessons. This activity involved the assessment and classification of pupils, which also proved to be a demanding pedagogical activity for novice primary school teachers. Beginning teachers had the problem of objectively evaluating the achievements of pupils, and these problems occurred in both the formatting and the summative evaluation. The grading tables were helpful with being able to judge the pupil's performance. Because of this underdeveloped competence, some novice teachers do not even carry out verbal oral examinations of pupils. Problems in the evaluation also occurred during the pupils' continuous assessment. Extremely demanding activities in the context of the implementation of the teaching curriculum, with which novice teachers meet during the adaptation period, were to work with pupils with special educational needs. These pupils were integrated within the normal class, which greatly complicated the educational activity of the novice teacher. Integrated pupils required individual teacher access, as well as special care by a special pedagogue and a school psychologist. This is a demanding activity that requires the necessary knowledge, skills and experience which the novice teachers simply do not have yet. Because of this, working with pupils with special educational needs seems very demanding. Another challenging activity for novice teachers was the identification of socio-pathological phenomena. Bullying among pupils was one such problem, which is hard to crack. Solving similar situations also required certain skills and experiences that were not too extensive during the adaptation period. The organization of non-traditional forms of teaching has also proven to be another demanding pedagogical activity for novice primary school teachers. It was mainly about the organization of educational and cultural activities for pupils.

This activity was challenging, when trying to ensure the entire organization of events that were under the command of the novice teacher would happen smoothly. Another important problem for novice teachers was to maintain the discipline of pupils in and out of the classroom. Maintaining order in the class had a clear impact on the course of the educational process and the atmosphere in the classroom. Beginner teachers used the methods of rewards and punishments to change pupil behavior. The rewards were in the form of praise, organization of excursions, trips and similar activities. The punishment for pupils who violated the discipline was a written record in a classroom book or detention, which took place after all the classes were dismissed. In the afternoon, the novice teacher paid attention to catching up to the missed lessons. Novices have often tried to keep discipline during the classroom with just simple vocal warnings. Based on our findings, it has proven effective to create clear rules at the beginning of the school year, which pupils should follow in classroom and beyond. Written speech is another activity that appeared to be a difficult and problematic for novices. The written material of the beginner teachers on the classroom board was deemed insufficient, but the teachers were fully aware of this lack of skill and argued by mentioning their insufficient undergraduate training. This is what some novice teachers try to avoid, which is almost impossible in this profession. If a novice doesn't succeed in their educational activity, Vincejová (2014) recommends trying to search for one's own faults, taking responsibility for the preparation of the lessons and the overall approach to work. It is precisely because of the presence of these complications that it is imperative that the activity of the novice teacher be controlled and directed by the mentoring teacher.

6.4 Cooperation of the novice and the mentor teacher

The aim of our research was, besides identifying problematic and problem-free pedagogical activities, to explore the elements of co-operation of novice and mentoring teachers. Cooperation within the framework of the adaptation training takes place most often in the form of regular consultations, during which the mentor teachers provided counseling, communication, or guidelines for teaching activities to novice teachers. Another form of cooperation was mutual observation. Observations conducted by the mentors during the novices' lessons offered optimal conditions for observing pedagogical activities of the teacher, pupils and their cooperation, based on which the mentoring teachers could gather objective information about the process of adaptation. The number of observations done differs, as novice teachers stated that the mentors conducted these observations anywhere between two to five times. The mentoring teachers claimed to have conducted more than five observations of the lessons of novice teachers. As part of the cooperation, the teachers involved contributed to the analysis of the observed lessons, which were excellent feedback for the beginner teachers. Interviews were used by the mentors as an additional source of information they had overlooked during observations. Mentoring teachers' primary focus is not on pointing out mistakes in the pedagogical work of the novices, but primarily to help their personal growth and professional development. Novices' work inadequacies were highlighted sensitively by mentoring teachers, and further steps were suggested to them on how to remove them. The results of our research point to the significant contribution made by the mentor teacher during the period of professional adaptation, which is mainly related to their long-term experience in pedagogical practice at the primary level of education. The most important contribution of the teaching staff was the guidance of novice teachers with how to handle pedagogical documentation. Benefits can also be noted when introducing the basic school organization. Mentor teachers have provided the beginner with the necessary basic information about the course and the day-to-day school regime. Mentors directed novice teachers not only in preparing for their lessons, written assignments, but also in evaluating and classifying pupils, which, as we have already mentioned, is one of the problematic activities for novice teachers. Teaching staff also play an important role assisting when identifying and addressing socio-pathological phenomena.

Mentors were very helpful if novices needed advice on the organization of parental meetings. The period of adaptation of starting teachers has brought about situations that required the co-operation of novice teachers with school heads, colleagues and other professionals. Beginning teachers were most likely to seek help from a special school pedagogue, school psychologist and the educational counselor. According to Vincejová (2014), the work of the mentoring teachers will be successful if the novice teachers learn to apply the knowledge gained during the undergraduate training to the specific conditions of the educational process, and at the same time, if they can use their knowledge of didactics in practice.

6.5 Adaptive education process of novice teachers

One of the objectives of our research was to analyze the adaptation process of a novice teacher, including adaptive education. Our intention was to find out the extent of adaptive education compliance with legislation. Based on our findings, we show and describe the following conclusions. Novice teachers have undergone adaptive education in one school year. During this period, the mentor teachers were assigned to the novices. Adaptation training was conducted based on the co-operation of novice teachers with their mentors. The main forms of cooperation included consultations, mutual visits and analysis of lessons. Beginning teachers received regular feedback, but the initiative was mainly expected from beginning teachers. Beginner teachers completed adaptive education through an open teaching lesson before a commission consisting of a mentor teacher, a school principal or a deputy director of elementary and lower secondary education. After the open lesson, members of the Commission expressed their opinion on the pedagogical activity of novice teachers, submitted feedback in the form of recommendations or guidelines. Upon completion of the adaptation training, a protocol was signed by all members of the commission, and within two weeks a decision was made by the director of the elementary school, which turned the beginner teacher into a self-employed pedagogue ranked with a higher pay grade.

Based on our findings, it can be argued that the course of adaptation education in Slovakia coincides with the legislation, because according to Act no. 319/2009 on Pedagogical and Professional Employees, it is the responsibility of every novice pedagogical staff to undergo adaptation training under the guidance of the mentoring pedagogue. In the EU countries, adaptive education is being implemented in the form of various adaptation programs that combine several features, which at the same time differ slightly from the organization of adaptation education in Slovakia. From the point of view of lifelong learning, there are certain differences between adaptive education in Slovakia and adaptation education in EU countries. Foreign graduates of pedagogical faculties do not end their education after graduation. Upon completion of elementary education, they will only receive a teacher's "beginner qualification" and receive a teacher's testing qualification status, only receiving a full license after one or two years. Adaptation programs abroad differ from ours to organization, structure and complexity, which means that they are well structured and monitored, clearly defining the responsibilities of heads of teaching staff. An indispensable element in the process of adaptation abroad shows a close co-operation between the beginning teacher and the mentor teacher. Both actors of the adaptation program will be accountable responsibly. Abroad, much more attention is paid to the professional education and professional growth of primary school teachers compared to teacher in our conditions.

7 Conclusion

Teachers of primary education, during the development of their careers, go through several stages of their career path, from the career choice phase to the professional extinction phase. Our article has highlighted the beginnings of the teaching profession, namely the period of professional adaptation of starting teachers. Professional adaptation is considered by many professionals to

be the most important stage of the teaching profession as the experience gained during this period plays a significant role for their further professional development.

The process of adaptation of the starting teacher of primary education was determined and judged in real schools or classes during various subjects. The aim of our study was to analyze the process of adaptation of a beginner primary teacher in the widest possible sense and to point out problematic and problem-free pedagogical activities that are challenging for a novice teacher. Our intention was to explore the elements of cooperation during the professional adaptation between the beginner and the mentoring teacher of primary education.

Using research methods of direct unstructured observation and individual semi-structured interviews, we have discovered interesting findings. The research results offer a detailed description of the progress of adaptation of novice teachers. We found out how meaningful were the novices' positive and negative experiences. We identified pedagogical activities that are problematic and trouble-free for novice teachers. We have highlighted the importance of co-operation among novices and mentors, highlighting the presence of mentor teachers in adaptive education. Our findings confirmed the consistency between adaptive education in fact and legislation.

It should be emphasized and pointed out that our findings can't be generalized to the entire population of novice teachers, but based on our results, we can propose measures to streamline the adaptive process of starting teachers in the form of recommendations for pedagogical practice. Based on our findings, we propose to adjust the organization of adaptation education. During the period of transition of a novice teacher to an independent primary teacher, a mentor teacher plays an important role. As part of adaptive learning, we propose to intensify cooperation between novices and mentors in the form of regular consultations, obligatory mutual visits and deeper analysis of individual lessons. Výbohová (2012) argues that direct observation by the mentoring teacher informs them about the current capabilities of the novice teacher, which should be analyzed later. This understanding enables the novice teacher to improve their pedagogical skills and knowledge to the level of an independent teacher. Skills should also be trained with college teachers in parallel years (if the school's capacity permits) and classes in which educational problems occur. By intensely performing observations on the lessons of experienced colleagues, beginning teachers would be able to acquire the skills of working with pupils with special educational needs and would be inspired by methods or forms of work with non-disciplined pupils. In this way, beginning teachers would recognize different methods and forms of work performed their colleagues, which would facilitate the adaptation process. We also recommend introducing the obligation to create written preparation for teaching throughout the adaptation period, which should be assessed by the mentor teacher. We are proposing to complete the adaptation education through open lessons from each subject the novice teaches.

By describing the adaptation period for novice teachers, we believe that the contribution may be an inspiration to discuss the issue. We know that the data obtained can't be generalized because it's not applicable to the sample of all novice primary school teachers, but we hope that our findings can be beneficial and inspiring for further pedagogical research in the field of professional adaptation of beginning teachers.

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Primary Paper Section: A

Secondary Paper Section: AM