

**Hana Kasikova**<sup>\*</sup>  
**Josef Valenta**<sup>\*\*</sup>

## TEACHER EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SKILLS CURRICULUM

### Introduction

We consider socio-relational dimension of the teacher profession and the competence of teachers to develop the social skills of pupils to be key factors in education nowadays. Teacher education and teacher training focusing on social dimension are closely connected with challenges like societal changes, inclusion, multiculturalism, but also life on social networks, socio-pathological phenomena etc. From that point of view curriculum reconstruction is in need with stronger accent on teachers social competence in the frame of new approaches in education sciences and psychology.

When we mention “stronger accent on sociability”, we mean that social competence is not an entity that is side by side with the teacher academic competence and social curriculum dimension, it is just added to intellectual one, but rather in developing them we can count on support of one area towards the other. As Nemo (Boudon et al. 2001, p. 111) reminds us schools could not be understood like after-school clubs where teachers just monitor students behavior: impulses for students intellectual growth should be the core of their professional endeavour. And based on these ideas, do we know whether teachers are ready for this quite a complex work with children? And if not, how could we help them to succeed?

Teachers social competences are often taken for granted (in the norms, postulates, professional standards), but less attention is paid to its development or building up the conditions for it. Thus it is obvious that a field

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<sup>\*</sup>**Hana Kasikova** – Ph.D. in Pedagogy, Associate Professor, Charles University in Prague; research interests: equity and diversity in education, cooperative frame for education and cooperative learning, teachers social competencies and skills; e-mail: [hana.kasikova@ff.cuni.cz](mailto:hana.kasikova@ff.cuni.cz)

<sup>\*\*</sup>**Josef Valenta** – Ph.D. in Didactics of Latin Language, Ph.D. in Pedagogy, Associate Professor, Charles University and Academy of Performing Arts in Prague; research interests: didactic personal and social education and dramatic, performative concept of education, teacher’s work; e-mail: [josef.valenta@ff.cuni.cz](mailto:josef.valenta@ff.cuni.cz)

for educational research is open with quite important research questions. The general research question which has tied together our research over the last several years (1999-2015), which will continue into the following years, is as follows: How do we create the educational conditions for the development of teachers' social competence for a curriculum in which the social relationship dimension is emphasized? We approached the research field from two essential, mutually interconnected – points of view:

1. Teacher social competences and their development
2. Competences for teaching personal and social education

### **1. Teacher social competences and their development**

In order for us to not stay at a general level, we will specify the teacher social competences with focusing on the issue of cooperation. Cooperation, in the current educational environment, is a key concept and also an essential structure for the teachers social development. Cooperation – between teachers and students – is established as a basic requirement and means of the transformation of schools. However, the reality does not yet meet these requirements. In curriculum documents for primary and secondary education, cooperation has an unshakeable position in the frame of student personal and social competencies. Cooperative learning is considered as an optimal educational model focusing on the cognitive abilities and on the social learning as well (Johnson, Johnson 2009, Kasikova 2009). This is a tendency but a challenge for the practice at the same time: in our research implementation processes break down very often because teachers are not offered systematically with possibilities to develop their social competence for cooperative activities.

Where and how we can find and create conditions for social competence development?

#### **A. In the pre-service teacher education**

We consider the whole conception of teacher education to be the key in forming optimal conditions for social competencies development. In analysis of teacher education in the Czech Republic we have concluded that in pre-service curriculum there are courses focusing on social competencies (courses of personal and social development, courses of communication, and so on) but there are carried in the context of the transmissive paradigm of education at university. The transmission of knowledge pushes out cooperation out of educational processes (Tonucci 1991): the practical cooperative activities become only a small part of the study programs for future teachers: according to our research (Kasikova 2015) it is approximately 5-10% of the entire teaching time. We know the effect of returning to “safe” teaching stra-

tegies like frontal recitation if teachers feel insecure in the difficult first few years of teaching in school practice. If we therefore want for the teachers to deal with cooperative skills smoothly both in the classrooms and staffrooms, there is no other option than to plan and realize pre-service curriculum where cooperative dimension is strongly accentuated. Student teachers should not only have knowledge of cooperation and cooperative learning, they need to learn intensively in a cooperative environment with the help of cooperative educational means.

How to do this specifically? Through cooperative strategies – from the simplest type of “think and share” which can be used also in large lecture auditoriums to the more difficult structures – for example, the use of academic controversy or cooperative projects based on principles of cooperative learning like individual accountability and processing (Johnson, Johnson 2009). The other possibility consists in studying in long-term cooperative learning groups (informal and so called base groups) where the members cooperate for example to complete or check of several assigned tasks, during preparation for exams, for the first supervision of teaching etc.: this is a powerful approach for their academic success and future teacher social competence as well (Johnson et al. 2007, Hui, Grossman 2008).

Results of our research oriented on cooperative strategies in pre-service teacher education (gained by observation, interviews, questionnaires, material analysis) could be summarized in several statements concerning students beliefs, attitudes and a level of social skills:

- Student teachers value these strategies as optimal in the preparation for their profession (both for teaching in the classrooms and for cooperation with other teachers in school practice).
- They appreciate these strategies for bringing trust among students which results in willingness to share ideas, materials etc.
- They are willing to incorporate cooperative strategies into their teaching strategies repertoire in quite a great amount of teaching time because they experienced them and thus believe more in their effectiveness.
- They believe that they will be able to implement cooperative strategies in classrooms and are open to learn more how to use them, elaborate them in various practice conditions. They expect support from management of the school in implementation processes.

- They have formed the basis of social competence for cooperation during studies but they feel more secure for organizing cooperation with their students than cooperate with future colleagues (Kasikova 2015).

#### B. In the in – service teacher education and training

If the teacher himself did not undergo the school curriculum which was explicitly and in a hidden manner saturated with social competencies for cooperation, he will always be somewhat in a position of someone who teaches a language yet is only one lesson ahead of his students. The teacher's fear of failure in implementation of the new strategies is natural but at the same time it is one of the greatest obstacles for their realization. This is why it is so important to rely on systematical support than simply graduate from a course focusing on training social skills.

The systematical approach for staff development is founded on the following factors: knowledge, workculture and environment, educational activities and personal/social competencies. Since our research was focused primarily on cooperation, we will again use examples from this area. Teachers need knowledge especially on the meaning of the curriculum based on social competencies (why) and significance of their personal social competencies during its realization. It is however necessary to provide this knowledge in the framework of schools which are indicated as the learning organization (Senge 1990, Mortimer 1995). Cooperation can then be considered as the main principle of this conception. According to Robert Mucchielli (1996) the greatest psychological barrier to the cooperation of individuals is so-called defense of one's ego, which is explained as an unconscious fear of changes in the perception of oneself. In the conception of school as a learning organization there can be found a number of mechanisms (for example the acceptance of risk in a secure environment), which support the cooperation of teachers. However, according to our findings, the Czech schools are only at the beginning to move towards this: when teachers and directors of schools described social relationship in the schools they seldom indicated higher forms of cooperation – professional opinions sharing and exchange of common work (Kasikova, Dubec 2009).

In the frame of school as learning organization there is a specific conception of educational activities. If we would like teachers to learn for social skills curriculum, we must consider teacher learning communities to be a basic means of this. Work in the so-called mutual assistance teams is based on the principles of cooperative learning that means that teachers follow the same principles as their students in the classroom (interaction face-to face, positive interdependence, individual accountability, using interperso-

nal skills for working in small groups, processing). It is not easy to get into the processes in aforementioned activities in teachers mutual assistance teams. To manage this, we coordinated participative action research: small teams from various schools (primary, secondary) analyzed their work in implementation new educational strategies and members of the teams described also what and how they learn from working in the teams (in diaries, questionnaires, interviews).

The research results clearly show a link to the global school conception (especially the role of school management – supportive or not): but besides that we collected findings concerning teachers' social skills. Among other things there are quite interesting data that teachers do the same thing they often criticize in their students – for example they do not cooperate with those they do not like. Another data show that teachers feel insecure in conflict situation, even in controversies (conflicts of ideas) and they often hurry on with group agreement (avoiding discrepancies, silent individual disagreement etc.) They indicated skills for communication of disagreement and dealing with conflicts as the weak part of their teams: they expressed need for training skills for solving conflicts and importance of training them in safe environment, where they can trust each other (often out of their own school staff). In our opinion to promote cooperation means to deal with conflicts as well (based on the thesis “The strong cooperation brings stronger conflicts which are solved constructively”) but training teachers in this area does not mean to undertake an isolated one-time step (to introduce a course on problem solving). It is about working with the complexity of the whole issue, focusing on the four aforementioned approaches – knowledge, workculture and environment, educational activities and personal/social competencies.

## **2. Competences for teaching personal and social education**

Challenge coming from the curriculum in which the social dimension is accentuated is a challenge especially for the teacher competences to deal with it. Are teachers ready to plan, realize and evaluate possibilities for developing students personal and social competencies (i.e. self-recognition, self-regulation, building trust and respect in human relations and skills for social interaction)? And if not, what is missing and how could we overcome difficulties and help them to succeed?

In this part of the article we present results of research and investigation in a relatively new school curriculum component called “personal and social education” (primary and secondary schools as well). To get ready teachers for teaching this component, courses in preservice and inservice were run by authors of this article: investigation and research have been carried on

(1999-2015) concerning issues connected with our general research question How do you create the educational conditions for the development of teachers social competence for a curriculum in which the social relationship dimension is emphasized? More specifically: What are the difficulties in teaching (in so called methodology/didactics of personal and social education) to overcome? In these courses we worked over time with approximately 500 teachers, we observed approximately 400 sample teaching hours, we analyzed 250 lesson plans. Conclusion of our research could be formulated in this statement: Teachers are not aware enough of lack of knowledge and skills which should be in their competence for teaching personal and social education. We came to the conclusion through following research results:

1. The teachers are not adequately embedded in the theory of personal competencies, theory of trust, respect, human relations and social skills. In defining these phenomena and in working with them they often use “folk-concepts”.

2. The teachers do not have “pedagogical content knowledge”, that is they do not have an adequately clear perception of the practical functioning of social competence. It means that:

- they do not have the understanding knowledge of phenomenon from the area of social competence
- they do not have the skills of practical differentiation/recognition of these phenomenon

3. The teachers have problems connecting to certain themes from the area of personal and social competence and building trust and respect with specific methods (games, exercises etc., despite the fact that they know many games and exercises) (Valenta 2006, p. 139; 2013, p. 47).

The following explanation will include examples of these three areas whether they are separate or connected.

- There is a lack in knowledge. The knowledge level of phenomenon from the area of examined competencies is quite low, the theoretical basis or practical activities are poor.

The teachers do not have adequate knowledge of phenomena associated with self-recognition, building trust and social competence. For example, they do not completely know what is empathy, active listening, or group dynamics. The following problems emerge out of this to a large extent:

- Phenomena are labeled with incorrect terms

For example several aggressive displays are labeled as assertive.

- There are problems in the differentiation and recognition of phenomena in practice

When using the methods of role play the teachers repeatedly said that the students “live”/empathize in these roles, however from the students in the games it was evident that this was not the case. Or: They do not differentiate that in a game training body language students will begin to be interested rather in mutual relations in the classroom than body language. If they do not see this, evidently an important theme which the students bring to the games themselves escapes.

- There are problems in the knowing or understanding of the connection among certain phenomena

A number of teachers – during the period of our investigation – for example believed that dividing students into groups for work on a certain task automatically creates cooperation among all members of the groups. But from the point of observer it was not so.

- They try to apply one pedagogical theory that they know into an area where it is not suitable.

For example, we repeatedly met with efforts to use Bloom’s cognitive goal taxonomy for planning objectives in the area of behavioral skills (Valenta 2013, 2016)

- They do not know how to determine precisely the core of social competencies. Therefore, they often use inadequate teaching methods.

For example although the aim of the lesson is focused on promoting empathy, teacher uses methods of text reading (mismatch) (Valenta 2013, 2016). During research time we finally defined so-called “myths” relating to the personal and social education teaching. Here are several of them:

- Personal and social education (abbreviation P. S. E.): is used whenever we talk about life.
- P. S. E.: Occurs as soon as children are taught in an active manner or can talk to each other.
- P. S. E.: It is not possible to train social competence when children do not have social competence.

- P. S. E.: Reflection after activities means that the teachers say what they think and how it should be.
- P. S. E.: Where there are groups, there is cooperation and cooperation = P. S. E.
- P. S. E.: Everything relates to anything else – whatever game can reach whatever educational goal.
- P. S. E.: Teachers do not need to have the competencies which they want from the children – they are teachers, not students.
- P. S. E.: Every teacher “has” a personality and an university degree – they are therefore experts on how to live (Valenta 2013, p. 48).

We see the solution of aforementioned difficulties in giving more attention to curriculum for social skills, define it more clearly. Here we obviously enter into the field of debate on what social skills curriculum is and what we expect from it. Social competencies – for example, for us in the Czech Republic is often understood as a part of the hidden curriculum or as a part of the informal curriculum and it is expected that social competence as an objective value of the work of schools will grow out of the optimal social climate of schools and from good mutual relationships. In conclusion, there is a need to educate teachers so that they could teach personal and social competencies as explicit ones.

We are on the right path now: in basic curricular documents of the Czech school reform there is “personal and social education” part.<sup>1</sup> We have our own point of view on personal and social competence, respectively skills which the school should pay attention to in order to move within the framework of standard and formal curriculum.

But if we have curriculum in which skills are indicated it still doesn’t mean that teachers will teach them really as skills. There is a need to teach skills, not about skills. Then we arrive at the same platform which was expressed in the 1970’s in the USA, in the nicely titled book by Karen Stone: *The subject is me!* That is the student, where the subject is the student himself, the student’s social competence. The student at this same

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<sup>1</sup>The Czech concept of personal and social education (as a part of the climate of the schools, as a cross-curricular topic or as a subject) was created at the Pedagogical Department of the Prague Philosophical Faculty – and it contains overall 11 themes (further specified) in three areas: personal orientation (self-concept; self-regulation; psychohygiene; social creativity; cognitive development); social orientations (human relations; getting to know others; communication; cooperation and competition; moral orientation (daily morality and solving problems of a moral nature) (Valenta 2007).



time becomes an element of the curriculum: he is the objective; he is the subject and also partially the means.

And in order to be even more complicated, we would like to add that a further element of the curriculum becomes even the teacher, respectively his behavior. Or in the case of the development of social competence, the teacher is not just an actor who thinks up games for social competence and skills. We would be happy if in schools, the skills used in the social competencies of the students and the teachers were not understood only as a part of the hidden curriculum, but also as a part of the evident curriculum. That is: not only the Sahara, not only the Battle of Hastings, not only the past perfect or squirrels is the subject, but also the students and the teacher are teaching materials.

Our school transformation is however based on the principles of competencies. Four of the six key competencies defined in the curriculum documents lead are connected also with personal or social skills. It will therefore be evidently necessary for even universities teaching future teachers to take into account that not only squirrels but also the teachers and students are elements of the curriculum.

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Hana Kasikova  
Josef Valenta

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**Keywords:** teacher education, curriculum, social competence, social skills, personal and social education.

We consider socio-relational dimension of the teacher profession and the competence of teachers to develop the social skills of pupils to be key factors in education nowadays. Teacher education and teacher training focusing on social dimension are closely connected with challenges like societal changes, inclusion, multiculturalism, but also life on social networks, socio-pathological phenomena etc. From that point of view curriculum reconstruction is in need with stronger accent on teachers social competence in the frame of new approaches in education sciences and psychology.

In the article we analyze especially two ways of developing curriculum based on social- relational dimension. First one is focused on promoting the personal level of teacher social competence, especially cooperative competence, the second one on teacher education and training in the didactics of social skills (why, what and how) in the frame of cross – curricular theme of “personal and social education”. The analysis of two ways are based on research and authors experience both in pre-service and in-service education.