

## THE SCHOOL AND THE OUTSIDE WORLD

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Received: 31.08.2014; Accepted: 11.11.2014; Published online: 30.12.2014

*The teaching profession can't be schematized and to provide uniformity, the basis of quality management in the teaching process is almost impossible. Teaching is a people to people profession and the personality, the capability and the circumstances (private and professional) of all parties (teachers, students, parents) alter the outcome. Moreover the effects are hard to detect and often appear delayed even after the school years. In an ideal world only perfect and adaptive people with extensive subject knowledge should be employed as teachers. But how could it be decided who is suitable for the profession? The fact that our personality changes during our lifetime also makes it impossible to foretell who is going to be a good teacher and who is not. During the different life and career stages the teachers' personality changes, they face different challenges. Considering the above mentioned facts I intend to examine to what extent these affect the student – teacher relationship and the actual work in the classroom. For this aim I questioned undergraduate teachers, trainee teachers and their mentor teachers about success, failure, everyday life, happiness, personal tragedies, professional targets and private life goals. Recently I have had the opportunity to participate in two extensive researches. One was about the professional concepts of the students of four Hungarian teacher training institutes (n: 153). The questions were aimed at the reasons why the students had chosen the teaching profession. I also asked about their future prospects and the ways of becoming a good teacher. The other research targeted trainee and mentor teachers about the interinfluence of their professional and private lives. The respondents (n: 150) honoured me with earnest answers about their everyday problems and happiness as well as about their career. In my presentation I would like to highlight some of the most relevant findings of these two surveys.*

**Keywords:** teaching, teacher, profession of teaching, career stages, teacher's personality, teachers' private life

The issues I am going to highlight in this study are the first steps of an extensive research about the interference of a teacher's private life and school work. In two previous pilot studies I was examining the teaching profession and its drawbacks (burnout) and the teacher personality.

Studying the personality in the different life stages and family life stages is not a new phenomenon but it is also true that though some generalization can be done the circumstances in different times modify the overall consequences. Even Levinson in his two books about the different life stages - written 18 years apart - modified his overall conclusions and not only based on the gender difference (Levinson et al., 1978; Levinson & Levinson, 1996).

IBM is a household name in computer technology though IT consulting requires some people skills the field cannot be compared to teaching where teachers deal with humans – not computers. Private life – work interface is very important in any profession concerning the satisfaction and success or failure in one's private and professional life. But it is even more significant in the professions dealing with people when a third party is involved.

In Utopia only perfect children would come off the production line and only highly efficient, 'teacherly' and suitable people would teach them. Fortunately Utopia exists only in our mind and diversity makes our world challenging and interesting. Diversity needs highly adaptive behaviour. The personality and the actual mood are essential in the professions dealing with people especially if one of the parties is in inferior position. The attitude, the style and the personality of the doctor is as important in the curing process as his knowledge about the illness and its cures. The above mentioned qualities are equally important in the teacher student relationship and the effects often remain undiscovered.

Truism is not adequate in a scholarly article, I agree, but still I cannot leave out the early Greeks, namely Heraclitus who noticed that change is constant. It is hard to generalize as we change, the students change and the circumstances also change. Actually this obvious inference was not considered for a long time (Allen & Wergin, 2009).

The above mentioned facts all justify the importance of studying a teacher's private life and its consequences. The concepts of life stages and career stages are useful when mapping the different types of challenge people have to face in private life and work and their coping strategies. The student teacher interaction has effects on both parties and these effects can be measured only on a long-term basis. While the students' performance and personality are examined from a lot of points (considering also the family background) the teachers' private life and the changing attitudes, styles and personality in the different life and career stages remain unexamined.

In the late 1990s Mária Nagy et al. carried out an extensive research about the living and working conditions of Hungarian teachers. Among others they examined the prestige of the teaching profession, the financial circumstances and their social position, living standards and lifestyle (Nagy, 1998). The research did not deal with the effects of all the above mentioned factors on the educational and pedagogical work performed in the classroom. My research is aimed at examining the interrelation between the private life and work circumstances of teachers at the different career and life stages.

In the following part I intend to highlight some of the findings of the two researches on the interference of a teacher's private life and school work.

## Students of teacher education about the teaching profession

Together with Andrea Ritter we examined the views of students in teacher education in a pilot research. We aimed to study the different attitudes of the students of different Hungarian teacher training colleges. In the following I will concentrate on the three questions concerning the reasons why the

respondents chose the profession, if they are prepared to start a teacher career and with what prospects. The questionnaire was designed on the webpage [kerdoivem.hu](http://kerdoivem.hu) and was distributed online. 153 students filled in the questionnaire from four teacher training institutes in Hungary.

We asked the students why they chose the profession. When we speak about the teacher profession it is hidden behind the words or expressed clearly that some of the teachers chose this career because they had no other option. Those who are not extraordinary in any fields to become an expert but only fairly good at some of the subjects tend to choose the teaching profession. Do they have the faintest idea what they have undertaken? Based on my own experience I doubt it.

Firstly we were interested why the respondents chose the teaching profession. The next table shows how many respondents gave the following reasons:

decision made on somebody's advice (family, friends, teachers)	74
own decision	50
college is close to home / unsuccessful application to other institutes	29

It is understandable that at the age of 18 it is hard to make a decision what profession one would choose and it is also acceptable that young people rely on other people's advice. The disturbing number is the 29 students whose deciding factor had nothing to do with the teaching profession. Although I understand that even those students can become excellent teachers who chose teaching as a profession because the college was close to home or their secondary school results were not good enough to start studying something else still the choice should have been made on more relevant grounds.

The next question asked who were prepared to qualify as teachers. Before starting the teacher training college these students had concepts about the teaching profession based on their own school experience.

Based upon experience gained at the college 53% of the respondents answered that they would like to qualify as teachers while 43% had already considered leaving the college before graduation and 4% were hesitant. This means that approximately half of the respondents felt unsure about their chosen profession during their studies.

In consequence of the above facts only 58% of the respondents were optimistic about their future career and 10% of the respondents were sure they would never take a job as a teacher.

### Mentor and apprentice teachers' views

Earlier this year I had the opportunity to participate in the work of a research team (*Iván Falus, Éva Hartl, Judit Orgoványi Gajdos, Andrea Ritter, Éva Sallai*) studying the mentoring scheme in Hungary. An extensive questionnaire was designed about concepts and views on the mentoring programme. The questionnaire was completed on-line. Mentor and apprentice teachers were examined (n: 228). Within the research my aim was to find out about the respondents private life and work circumstances and their interaction. I targeted to map what type of private life problems people meet at different life stages and how they feel these problems affect their work. As some of my questions were aimed at delicate private life matters the answers were voluntary. It was surprising that in spite of the possibility

of skipping the questions an unexpectedly high number of the respondents answered them (n: 150 on average out of 228). In most cases the respondents gave honest and detailed answers. The answers of both the mentor and the apprentice teachers were analysed separately and also jointly. The same questions were asked and the answers clearly show how priorities and problems and satisfaction change as life passes.

In this study I would like to show the answers for some of the open questions e.g. the reasons why the respondents chose the teaching profession and also the answers for the most delicate questions if they had difficult private problems and if these problems had any effects on their school work. When reading the answers I had the feeling that the majority of the respondents answered these questions with pleasure as if they felt contented that somebody is interested in their private matters not only in their professional performance. The following tables show the frequency of the given answers for some of the open questions.

Q: Why did you choose the teaching profession? (n: 165)

	apprentice	mentor	all
I like people/children	43	26	69
Decision was made on somebody's advice (family, friends, teachers)	19	32	51
I always wanted to be a teacher	18	22	40
I enjoy passing on knowledge	19	15	34
I like to help people	12	20	32
I like the subject	7	11	18
I feel loved and acknowledged	7	11	18
I had no other choice	1	15	16
I like creativity and challenge	4	6	10

In the above table we can find the same motives why students currently in teacher training decided to become a teacher, but the reasons given by practising school teachers are diversified by those motives which contribute to job satisfaction and also appear the children themselves. It is also interesting that in quite a lot of cases the teacher believes that s/he is the main source of knowledge.

Q: Have you ever had major private life problems? (n: 136)

	apprentice	mentor	all
illness	13	18	31
death	9	20	29
family problems	11	15	26
work problems/stress	5	16	21
financial worries	6	11	17
nothing	13	3	16
problems of every kind	3	9	12
insecurity	4	5	9
work overload	1	4	5

The above table justifies the theory that in later life stages we have to cope with more difficulties. Unfortunately some of the answers indicate that some mentor teachers have already reached different stages of burnout and still they undertake mentoring and training.

Q: Did your problems affect your work? (n: 136)

	apprentice	mentor	all
negative effect	22	25	47
affected the respondent's life / family	9	31	40
no effect	13	12	25
positive effect	4	4	8

The answers show that major private life problems affect work. I believe that those who thought that these problems affected only their life and their family their work performance did not remain intact either.

It can be stated that that it is highly advisable to take care of the teacher as a person not just as a professional of a given subject. Our children, the future generation is at stake.

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