



7th International Conference on Intercultural Education “Education, Health and ICT for a Transcultural World”, EDUHEM 2016, 15-17 June 2016, Almeria, Spain

## Teachers’ beliefs in the Czech Republic: Review study

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### Abstract

This study is part of the research project “Teachers’ beliefs in the pedagogical use of children preconceptions” The author presents a comparison of studies dealing with teachers’ beliefs in their pedagogical abilities, especially from the view of research carried out in the Czech Republic. The author decided to explore this topic as only little attention has been devoted to this topic in the Czech Republic so far. This study aims to identify the term “beliefs” primarily in the studies of Czech authors.

The author presents her readers with an analysis of studies which have been published in journals and relevant anthologies in the period examined. The contents of the analyzed texts of carried out research focus more on related phenomena than on teachers’ beliefs as such. There were no larger coordinated research projects in the Czech Republic in the period examined that would facilitate a deeper understanding of processes associated with teachers’ beliefs.

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Peer-review under responsibility of the organizing committee of EDUHEM 2016.

*Keywords:* overview study, belief, teacher, Czech Republic

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### 1. Introduction

Demands placed on teachers’ activities are increasing. Yet, it is teachers’ beliefs that play an important role in mediating and organizing knowledge and information to students. One could say that teachers’ beliefs work as a filter through which phenomena of children’s perception of curricula, or other information students acquire in the learning process, could be interpreted.

If we understand teachers’ beliefs better, we can significantly contribute to the improvement of teaching methods and potential success of reforms (Sang et al., 2009).

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The aim of this overview study is to highlight the rarity of research in teachers' beliefs in the Czech Republic and to present the state of current knowledge.

## 2. Theoretical definition of the term beliefs

Beliefs can be interpreted in many ways. In foreign literature we find a comprehensive definition of work and dealing with this notion, but the Czech context is far understanding of this concept somewhat vague. The difference is especially understanding of the relationship between convictions, attitudes, knowledge and beliefs. Dates professional beliefs are often considered to be almost identical with the professional attitude (Straková, 2013).

International literature works with a number of terms defining or presenting teachers' beliefs. To illustrate, Janssens et al. (1997) uses the term subjective theories of teachers, which is viewed rather normatively, i.e. as a desirable, stable and functional state. Therefore, it does not represent a neutrally conceived idea of a specific person. Mareš et al. (1996) uses the term teachers' approach to teaching in a similar manner.

The term beliefs is sometimes also described as a system of values and attitudes (Rokeach, 1968). In addition, we can see beliefs as attitudes based on the belief that a certain set of opinion information is true and correct. Beliefs together comprise our picture of the world and based on them we are ready to act (Hartl & Hartlová 2000, p. 466).

Bandura defines teacher's beliefs as a personal belief in one's abilities to organize and solve certain tasks (Bandura, 1997). He also notes that beliefs control our emotions, goals and decisions. Teachers as persons responsible for organization, structure and method of teaching and social development rely on their implicit and explicit beliefs in order to be able to work within a complex context of class groups that are part of the greater national diverse culture.

In practice, teachers often rely on beliefs, particularly those beliefs that form the basis of their intuition so as to meet the curricular content (Bandura in Fives and Gill, 2015).

It can be argued that in the educational process it is the teachers' beliefs that they teach students the curriculum effectively and efficiently. Teachers' beliefs are closely related to their concept of teaching.

According to Pajares (1992, p. 313), teachers' concept of teaching is based on assessment and reasoning, whereas knowledge is based on objective facts.

However, it is often difficult to determine where one term ends and another begins (Maňák et al., 2008, p. 81).

## 3. Research of beliefs and relevant research findings

The author focused on the analysis of research which was published between 1951 and 2016 in journals and relevant anthologies. Only studies in the Czech, English and Slovak languages were considered. However, the selection was conditioned by the fact that they were written by Czech authors.

The main finding is that teachers' beliefs have not been broadly examined in the Czech Republic. Despite the fact that large studies examining this topic have been published abroad (Pajares 1992, Warfield et al., 2005, Joram, 2007, Bedir, 2010, Korthagen, 1992, Pollard, 2001, Klassen et al., 2008, Bandura, 1997), only a few empirical studies explore teachers' beliefs in relation to the teaching profession in the Czech Republic.

Existent studies have focused more on broader professional framework (teachers' identity, subjective theories of teachers, implicit theories of teachers).

Regarding research beliefs of students in foreign language sources, the beliefs of student teachers studied much more extensively than us. Some authors suggest little influence practice student teachers on the development of beliefs (Mtika & Gates, 2010). Many authors talk about that during the study may significantly affect the beliefs, but only under specific conditions (highlighting the impact of constructivist approach and systematic reflection on

practical experience) Korthagen (1992), Valli (1997), Pollard (2001). Rimm-Kaufmann et al. (2006) talk about formulated optimal conditions for changing beliefs of students of teaching.

In the Czech Republic, the focus of educational research in recent years has focused on influencing the professional identity of student teachers, their opinions, attitudes and professional beliefs during their studies through specific teaching methods. Action researches were conducted which, like abroad were to verify the effectiveness of selected strategies for the development of professional identity of students and the possibility of changing professional beliefs: Nezvalová, 1995; Švec, 1995 Svatoš, 1997; Slavík, 2001; Lukášová, 2003; Pišová,

2005; Tomková, Praise & Hejlová, 2010 (Straková, 2014).

We can identify these basic research lines in Czech literature in relation to the international term beliefs:

- Preconditions of students for the pursuit of professional identity
- Professional self-concept of teachers
- Professional beliefs of teachers and students.

### *3.1 Attitudes of future teachers to perform their job*

Interesting research was carried out by P. Urbánek between 2000 and 2002 among Czech and German teachers in the Nisa euroregion (northern and northeastern Bohemia and Saxony). On each side, the sample comprised of approx. 75 teachers. The author points out that the results cannot be fully generalized, yet in some aspects they are surprisingly unambiguous (Urbánek, 2003, p. 111). The research results show that the attitude of Czech and German teachers to their profession differs in the majority of the aspects analyzed. However, there is a group where the teachers of both groups agree: they express a positive attitude to their work, especially in relation to students. They do not think that their profession offers them a possibility to pursue their career.

### *3.2 Professional Self-Concept of Teachers*

Research that in many aspects “only” confirms the findings of foreign authors (Beijaard et al., 2000, Korthagen, 1992) is the study by Heřmanová et al. (2001). It uses quantitative methodology based on which following conclusions are made in relation to the professional identity of teachers. Heřmanová et al. confirms a strong link between the environment in which teachers act (especially a concrete school), their professional identity and the degree of loyalty. This also corresponds with the findings of other scholars mentioned above. It presents no convincing difference between the professional identity of teachers at the first and second stage of primary schools.

### *3.3 Motives of students to the teaching profession*

Svatoš in his research of teaching beginning students personally perceived their professional skills examined the difference motives choice of teaching profession (Wiegerová, 2012).

The research of motives of students to choose a profession kindergarten teachers engaged Nelešovská and Šmelová (2009), et Burkovičová. Al. (2011), and Wiegerová Gavora (2014).

Wiegerová and Gavora implement research themes choice of profession kindergarten teacher. The research method was thematic writing about the motives why students want to become a kindergarten teacher, what were the circumstances of their decisions and also about what is their concept of child and childhood and of policy kindergarten teacher. Research has shown that the decision to become a teacher in kindergarten is the result of complex interactions between the previous personality characteristics of the subject and external factors whose subject does not receive passively, but filters them through their current attitudes and beliefs (Wiegerová, Gavora, 2014).

### *3.4 Personality and self-awareness among students*

One of the oldest found research found on the topic of student teachers beliefs has been research Personality and self-awareness among students. The author is Kohoutek (1998), who which deals with the adaptive problems of university students. Based on these factors he has determined the three basic areas of maladjustment. Later he dealt in detail with causes and possibilities of improving maladaptive problems.

### 3.5 Preconditions of students for the pursuit of professional identity

Research carried out by Stuchlikova in 2005 tries to capture the implicit concept of the teaching profession through direct statements of future teachers on what it means “to be a teacher” from their perspective. Based on these statements she defines three basic areas of their beliefs.

Statements that could not be categorized are separated. These three areas represent the evaluation aspect (pros and cons of the profession), processual aspect (“what the teacher does”) and personality dispositions of teachers (“what the teacher should be like”).

From foreign literature, we can compare this research with e.g. Beijaard et al. (2000), who by analyzing life stories identifies 14 dimensions of professional identity of teachers which are matched with three professional concepts of teachers: expert on the subject, pedagogical expert (ability to work with students and groups) and didactic expert (expert on passing on information).

### 3.6 Professional self-esteem of a student of teaching

Research Professional self-esteem of a student of teaching author Pravdova ran from 2009 to 2013. This research introduces the dominant aspects of student of teaching professional self and their relationship to concepts of selfdiscrepant theory - for to I ideal, desired and actual. Further on, so.called Maybe I am, therefore, wanted and unwanted ideas of students about their future development in the role of teacher. Attention is paid to the process of formation of professional self - its key factors and individual stages. The author proposes an outline of possible or desirable intervention actions on the part of educators of future teachers, which may be the process of creating professional self in student teaching within undergraduate training to support (Pravdová, 2015).

### 3.7 Attitudes of students and teachers to the teaching profession

Rybičková (2009) focused on several areas:

- choice of the teaching profession (the main election theme of teacher training, decision time for studies teacher, influences of the choice of teacher training);
- assessment of the advantages and disadvantages of the teaching profession and teacher evaluation prestige (also related to life satisfaction of teachers);
- perspective the performance of the teaching profession.

The research sample was were students of the Faculty of Education (480 persons). The conclusions show that long-term studies of teaching are chosen by students whose parents have a secondary education. For this reason, it is also understandable that they can not prevail parents-teachers, who usually have a college education. Rybičková estimates that the teaching profession of parents for students is deterrent rather than a motivating factor. There was an increase in the percentage of students who choose to study at 8 teaching faculty primarily due to popular subject, not because of teaching itself. This tendency manifests itself primarily in the program of study General Education Teacher for the 2nd Primary School. We see this as a negative phenomenon because these students are much more probable that after graduation they do not exercise the teaching profession. This option is usually chosen by students who do not have the prerequisites for the study of specialized faculties and study at the pedagogical ?teaching faculty have a second option (Rybičková, 2009).

### 3.8 Professional beliefs of teachers and students.

Research carried out in 2010 was part the research project “Teaching profession in changing requirements on education”. Results were represented by a summary of a quantitative questionnaire survey whose aim was to contribute to the current knowledge in the field of beliefs of Czech teachers. The research explored to what level Czech teachers deem desirable to change the content and methods of teaching so that it would better suit the needs of the contemporary society and what their attitudes are to those aspects of the curricular reform which are new in

the Czech pedagogical environment. In total, 553 teachers from 128 primary schools joined the research. The research showed a difference in beliefs of teachers at the first and second stage of compulsory education and differences in attitudes to changes and autonomy in relation to age. The highest degree of consensus among teachers exists on the necessity of cooperation among the teaching staff and the need of constructivist approaches. On the other hand, the biggest disagreements are on issues concerning the role of primary schools and on attitudes to teachers' autonomy.

### 3.9 Czech Republic in the international comparison *Teaching and Learning International Survey (Talis 2012)*

In 2012, an international OECD survey Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) took place in the Czech Republic aimed directly at teachers. The main target group consisted of teachers of the second stage of primary schools. The survey was conducted on a representative selection by using electronic questionnaires. Issues such as reasons for choosing the teaching profession, course of initial and further education, remuneration, satisfaction with the profession, methods of evaluation of teachers, workload of teachers, school environment and ethos, teaching methods and methods for assessing students, professional beliefs, problems associated with effective teaching, cooperation among teaching staff, participation on decision-making, and management of the educational process were examined.

The results showed that overall, as well as in all partial areas of subjectively perceived personal proficiency, teachers in the Czech Republic achieved values below average. Lower values were reported only in Japan.

Table 1. Research of beliefs and relevant research findings in Czech Republic

Authors, year	Research area
Heřmanová (2001), Pravdová (2015)	Professional self-concept of teachers and students of teaching
Nelešovská, Šmelová (2009), Burkovičová (2011), Svatoš (1997), Wiegerová, Gavora (2014)	Motives of students to the teaching profession
Kohoutek (1998), Stuchlíková (2005), Nezvalová (1995), Slavík (2001), Lukášová (2003), Tomková, Hejlová (2010)	Student self-knowledge, Professional identity of students
Uránek (2003), Rybičková (2009)	Attitudes of students and teachers to the teaching profession
Spilková (2010), TALIS (2012)	Professional beliefs of teachers and students

## 4. Conclusion

With a certain degree of simplification we can say that the conception of undergraduate teacher training is typical of the gradual development and maturation of the teacher's personality, which varies through constant reflection of their teaching activities -from student to teacher, an expert on learning and developing others. For all featured models are common socioconstructivist starting that consider the student teacher at "constructing a subject" (Kosová et al., 2012, p. 39).

Talking about the motives for choosing to study teaching, these motives can not be seen as identical with the motives for selecting the teaching profession. Some students choose to study teaching, knowing that they do not want to teach in the future. So they have an incentive to graduate from college teacher discipline, but not to be in the future devoted to the teaching profession. However, it should also be noted that for a large number of students preparing for the teaching profession are the same motives as their choice of university programs was clearly motivated by the desire to become a teacher.

According Průcha (2005, p. 205), we can assume that the motivation to the teaching profession in our country today - despite considerable interest in the study of teaching - relatively low and shallow. At the same time raises the question of how to find quality students who are not only interested in the teaching profession, but also prerequisites for it.

Research carried out so far suggests that the content of realized studies focuses rather on related phenomena than on teachers' beliefs as such. There were no larger coordinated research projects in the examined period that would facilitate the building of a deeper understanding of processes associated with teachers' beliefs and beliefs of students of teaching.

A finding that there is no published study in the Czech Republic that would map beliefs in the teaching profession in detail is very significant for us. This absence of current empirical data is a motive for our further research.

## Acknowledgements

This paper was written with the support of the grant agency IGA, number: IGA/FHS/2016/001.

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