

## THE CONCEPT OF ANDRAGOGICAL VOCATIONAL CONSULTANCY FOR MARGINALIZED TEACHERS

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**Abstract:** The article describes a proposal for the concept of andragogical vocational consultancy for teachers at schools with a high number of pupils from socially disadvantaged environments. The teachers themselves show almost no interest in supporting a solution for complex pedagogical-educational problems. The concept of andragogical vocational consultancy complements other educational services through highly individualized and personalized support reflecting the specific needs of these marginalized teachers directly in school conditions.

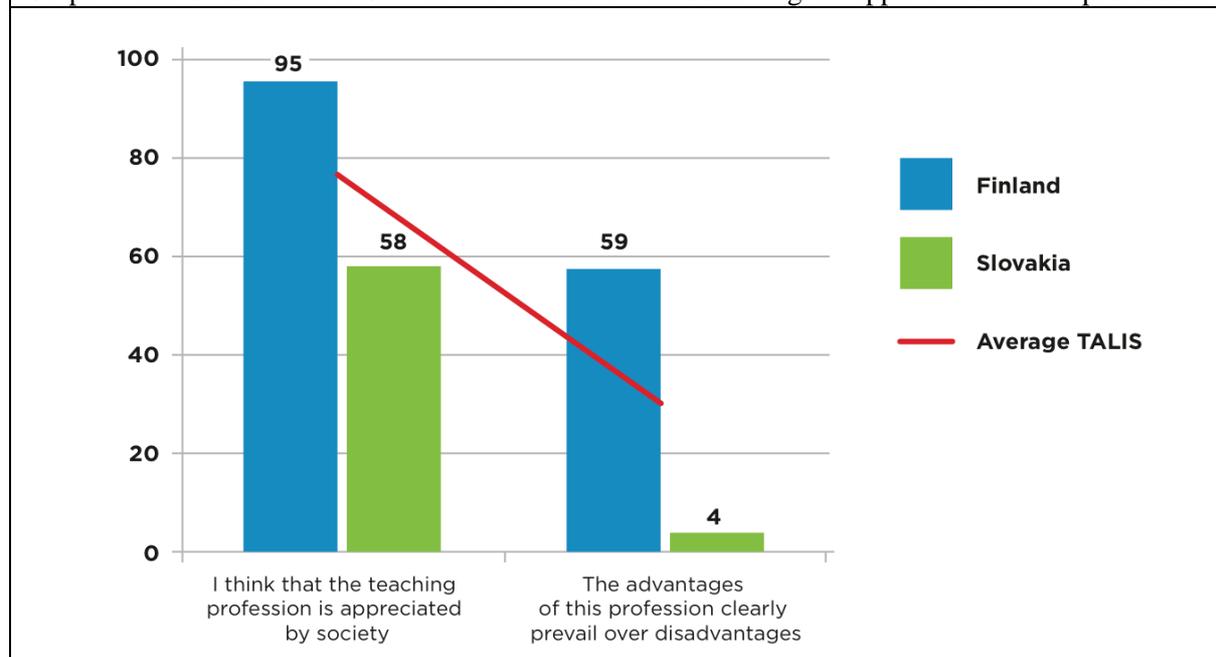
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### Introduction

Nowadays, the teaching profession has to face many challenges (EÚ, 2014, 2015). The expectation of providing quality services in the sphere of education is accompanied with the discussion of de-professionalisation of the teaching profession and long-lasting low appreciation of its social status. In regard to social interests, teaching is a marginalized profession. Although it has gained declarative political support, the actual and effective steps of professional support when practising this profession (including remuneration<sup>3</sup>) are absent. This can be seen with comparing teachers from Slovakia to those in Finland. Job satisfaction is not perceived equally by Finnish and Slovak teachers. While almost all Finnish teachers believe there are more advantages than disadvantages related to this profession, only a little more than half of the teachers asked in Slovakia have the same opinion. Only 4% of teachers in Slovakia believe that the teaching profession is appreciated by society, but in Finland as many as 59% of teachers feel appreciated (Graph 1).

Graph 1: The satisfaction of Slovak and Finnish teachers showing the appreciation of the profession



Source: OECD, 2014 Database, Table 7.2

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<sup>3</sup> Salaries of Slovak teachers are the lowest of all developed countries (Rehúš, 2015) and it has a strong negative impact on the attractiveness of this profession. Therefore, it is not surprising that the majority of the lower secondary school teachers in Slovakia are more than 40 years old and the number of teachers over 50 is three times higher than those under the age of 30 (OECD, 2014).

The deteriorating status of the teaching profession in Slovakia has become evident in the results of pedagogical activities as well. According to the PISA study 2015, which monitors pupils' performance in the area of scientific skills, reading literacy and numeracy during the last year of compulsory education, Slovak pupils have ranked near the bottom and deeply below the OECD average. Similarly, the results are unsatisfactory in the area of teamwork in didactic problem solving (NÚCEM, 2015, 2017). Research into our teachers' pedagogical knowledge, which is the prerequisite for quality teaching, has shown significant deficiencies in their education and in the teaching process itself (Guerriero, 2017, Tomengová et al., 2017).

Social marginalization of the teaching profession (its decreasing position within social interest and actual support) has been experienced by all teachers in the particular conditions and school environment where they work. Based on observations during the last few years and our experience in the support of professional development, we have put together some manifestations of the teachers' resignation (Pavlov, 2017, p. 25 - 26), which might culminate in the following concept of marginalization<sup>4</sup>:

- Acquiescence from expertness ("to be an expert within a particular field") manifested as distrust and criticism of the theoretical knowledge that serves as a base for decision-making and acting in the profession.
- Resignation from excellence ("to be the best") which is related to the lower cognitive demands for the study in the field of education, better accessibility and chances to obtain teaching qualification and the fact that they are not ready to "sacrifice" something for the sake of their career success or professional performance in their field.
- Resignation from research in educational sciences ("to be a professional") which is manifested not only from a lack of knowledge and ignorance of research results but also in the absence of pedagogical experiments and their own research activities in pedagogical practice.
- Resignation from being confident about their professional status ("trust in their abilities") manifested in insecurity in their pedagogical knowledge and decision-making as well as in their own abilities (one's self-conception).
- Resignation from cooperation and collaboration ("conviction of being self-sufficient") manifested in an incapability for collaboration and teamwork in finding solutions to pedagogical questions and lack of any potential for innovative changes.
- Resignation from autonomy and responsibility ("you decide and make arrangements for it") when instructions, regulations and supervision are expected by teachers who prefer directive and centralist methods to independence and autonomy when dealing with issues within their profession.

Apart from the social dimension, marginalization appears in its individual dimension that has different impacts on different aspects of teaching. Those who work at schools located e.g. near Roma settlements with pupils from a socially disadvantaged environment<sup>5</sup> (ŠPÚ, 2017), might be the most probable targets of marginalization. Despite the fact that this environment requires higher demands on teaching, it might serve as a perfect workplace for the less competent teachers who are not able to fully develop the potential of each pupil. Besides, teachers working at such schools might resign after being under the pressure of high demands on their teaching competence. If we want to increase pupils' performance, it is necessary to improve the performance of poor teachers (when compared to others). In order to achieve this, identification of weak points and clear determination of the expectations of a school and parents are essential. Poor teaching activity is indicated by the results achieved by pupils,

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<sup>4</sup>Marginalized teacher: a person that does not fulfil the requirements for the professional performance of pedagogical activity accepted by society (or the school) temporarily or for a long period of time. They are not able to manage the different reasons for marginalization (e.g. insufficient professional competence, specific needs within a particular school or group of pupils which do not correspond to their actual pedagogical abilities, etc.) by themselves. Therefore, specific measures are required to support them (e.g. vocational consultancy).

<sup>5</sup> Environment that does not encourage the development of mental, professional and emotional qualities of an individual with respect to the social and language conditions. It does not support effective socialization and does not provide sufficient impulses for the development of one's personality. Regarding the educational aspects, it causes sociocultural deprivation and has a negative impact on the intellectual, moral and emotional development of an individual.

parents' and teachers' complaints, pupils' offences, etc. To improve the teachers' performance, it is necessary to search for the causes (in the sphere of the organization, the management, as well as the team or individual area) and to provide direct professional support.

Slovakia lags behind other countries of the 2013 TALIS study in terms of participation in further education (qualification programmes, workshops, training courses, conferences, etc.) and the duration of such education. According to the TALIS study, on average almost 90% of teachers from countries included in the research have participated in some kind of additional education comparing it to the situation in Slovakia where the percentage was significantly lower and represents only 75% of teachers. One of the reasons for the lack of the interest may be the fact that the number of teachers who are aged more than 50 is three times higher than those under the age of 30. The research has shown that willingness to take part in additional education decreases with increasing age. According to the TALIS study, the main barrier has been the lack of appropriate programmes for further education. Slovak teachers are mainly interested in teaching pupils with special educational needs, education focused on problems with discipline and pupils' behaviour, as well as expanding their knowledge within the core subject of teaching qualification. Teachers also feel the need to improve their IKT skills and to broaden their horizons by acquiring new teaching methods (NÚCEM, 2015).

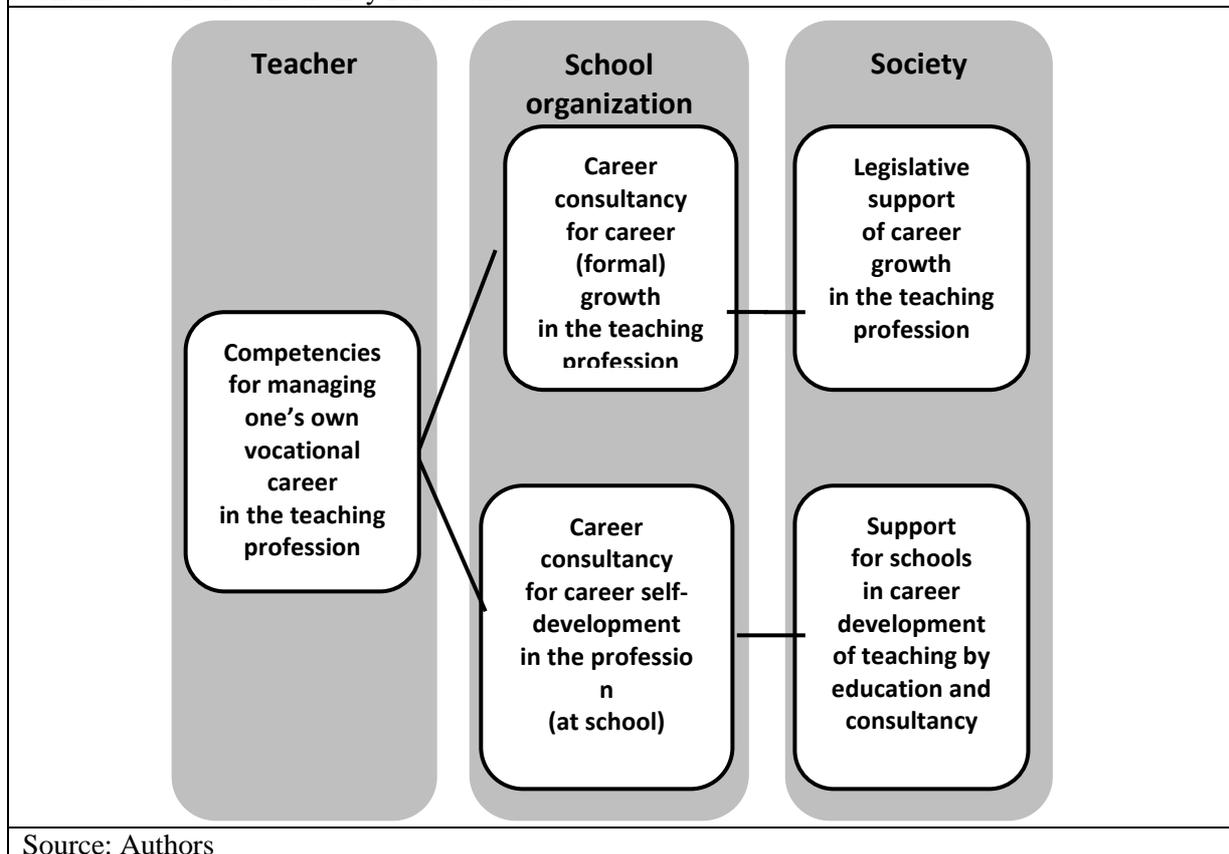
Based on the aforementioned, we suppose that the "proven educational activities" that comprise teaching participants of those activities are not satisfactory. It refers to the aspect of directness in particular, respecting specific educational needs and the degree of marginalization of teachers. Apparently, it is necessary to search for and use the tools of individualized support such as andragogical vocational consultancy. Prusáková (2005, p. 32) defines consultancy as a specific type of assistance to adults who find themselves in a new and difficult situation and who cannot decide how to improve in their profession and achieve career growth (target and content aspects of the consultancy). An adult needs some advice when it comes to methodical questions as well (How to learn? How to deal with the external conditions and education requirements?), but also the internal ones (type of memory, learning dispositions, concentration on a specific target, learning pace, etc.). The concept of andragogical consultancy is derived not only from the international documents (EÚ, 2008), and labour market needs, but also from the component logic of lifelong consultancy from the point of view of the 'biodromal' concept. This concept is based on the interdisciplinary approach of the investigation of assistance and support for working age adults when performing a profession (and also once finished). The subject of andragogical consultancy has two dimensions: a physical object – an adult as an object of interest of various disciplines (anthropology, psychology, sociology, ethics, etc.) and a formal object – the standpoint which determines the sphere of activity (learning and self-learning stimulation – the concept of docility), and from which the physical object is investigated. Beneš (2014) offers an apt description of the role of andragogy (including consultancy) as a transformation of the problems of the life of an individual and society to problems which may be solved by learning. It does not refer to all problems because many of them could be solved by delegation (economically, legally, by power, by technology or by medicine) but it is not possible to learn in place of someone else. Therefore, the role of andragogy is to search for methods and forms which enable and encourage the learning of an adult (their learning ability). Docility (from Latin *docilitas*, which means to be a fast learner or able to learn) originates from the autoregulative psychological processes of one's personality; in the broadest sense it is an ability to regulate one's own behaviour and actions (learning included). Every person possesses a certain degree of self-regulatory ability of self-learning which is given by neurological dispositions, the environment, education and appropriate educational interventions. Docility is one's diagnosed potential for learning and self-learning; it is possible to improve, develop and train it and also to support it by andragogical intervention. A certain level of one's docility may be considered as an andragogical criterion of adulthood (disrupted, temporarily or for a long time reduced ability of docility – indocility – may prevent adults from achieving their goals). Docility (in the sense of a learning ability) is nowadays a key competence for getting a job and being prepared by learning to adapt to new requirements and situations. However, we do not perceive the ability to learning only in relation with some new knowledge and skills, but also with one's conscious self-education (values, character, and morality). Docility as an andragogical phenomenon may be scientifically explored and generally supported in these dimensions:

- can – different degree of potential (complex of dispositions for learning, including life experience and the results of school education);
- want – different degree of motivation (preparedness, willingness to learn and accept that we do not know everything but we may improve ourselves by learning together with the help of other people);
- know – various strategies to maintain and develop the ability to learning during the whole life.

Andragogical career consultancy encompasses the diagnostic, research and intervention (in the sense of educational intervention) potential in relation to an individual and an organization. Pavlov – (Pavlov, Bontová & Schubert 2017, s. 170) summarized the possibilities of andragogical vocational consultancy:

- to evaluate and develop the professional competencies of an individual;
- to diagnose and examine the causes of professionally inadequate behaviour in organizations (relationship individual – organization);
- to solve individual vocational problems through individual learning;
- to diagnose teaching organizational environments (current situation) and to create opportunities for the development of organization (organizational learning);
- to study the effects of education and learning in organization (short-term and long-term);
- andragogical research, e.g. to obtain data on vocational learning of specific vocational group.

Scheme 1: Career consultancy for teachers



Source: Authors

The limits of andragogical vocational consultancy are on an individual level where the psychophysical state of an individual is the determining factor (andragogical consultancy has educational not therapeutic aims), as well as on a team level (groups of teachers) where intervention is limited by voluntariness, transparency and the time limitation of the contract accepted by both sides to solve a problem if the consent of all participants is given. The important factor is also the degree of acceptance of a school consultant and the support of the given intervention by (school) management. Apart from providing basic consulting services for teachers, andragogical career consultancy has other specific functions:

- to enable teachers to better understand the broader context of their role in the world of labour and the dynamics of social and economic changes;
- to develop their own self-efficacy;
- to form their professional identity and integration;
- to motivate, encourage and reinforce the potential of docility;
- to assume responsibility for their growth, career, education (self-regulated learning) as an independent and responsible decision about the subject of learning, monitoring the learning process, regulation, control and the evaluation of achieved results as well as the impact of these results on their professionalism.

### Conclusion

Career consultancy for teachers is based on reinforcing and developing competencies that are essential for managing one's own vocational career (on the level of teacher, school and organization). A vocational career may be understood not only as a formal procedure within a profession (attestation), but also as the self-development of individuals in which they can use their own potential (Scheme 1). The concept of a vocational career in the teaching profession will enable us to better understand and support marginalized teachers. Career consultancy for teachers establishes other questions and problems that need to be solved so that we will be able to support teachers in their profession.

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