

# How school influences future sports teachers' conceptions on teacher profession: An invisible message

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose of the study:** The object of this paper is to study the preconceptions first year initial teacher training program students have about their future profession. Based on the literature review, the article assumes that these reconstructions seriously affect the further nature of teacher professional activity. **Methodology:** To understand how these preconceptions are formed and how they are transformed in the process of obtaining professional pedagogical education, the authors conducted 34 in-depth interviews with pre-service first-year teachers. Based on semantic analysis of interview transcripts results, the main semantic blocks of preconceptions and their basic characteristics were determined. **Results:** The categories obtained during interviews were matched to certain modules of the teachers training program to make sure pedagogical theories experiences are applied properly, tackling individual cognitive patterns and school experience to avoid theoretical material misperception. **Applications of this study:** In the study, the authors proposed purposeful transformation of these preconceptions during the initial teacher training program implementation. **Novelty/Originality of this study:** The authors introduce the "invisible message" category as a body of values and attitudes that characterizes what it means to be a teacher. This invisible message is implicitly transmitted while future teachers were taught at school and it serves as a basis for preconceptions formation.

**Keywords:** Sports teachers; Beliefs; Preconception; Schoolteacher; Education process; Competence; Training program.

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## INTRODUCTION

The common ideas about teachers and teaching as a professional activity are widely spread in the society. There is a trend to believe the one has to be born to be a good teacher and this stereotype is vigorously promoted in mass culture. We are brought up on images of Mary Poppins, charming, slightly stern, but caring woman, who uses self-control to take care of children. She is "practically perfect in every way" young woman, with an air of grace and elegance about her.

These stereotypes and attitudes towards teaching and teachers influence greatly the decisions school leavers make when the time comes to choose the path for professional development (Gimaliev et al., 2020). The idealistic picture about teaching profession and lack of understanding what stands behind the glossy picture might later on result in quick professional burnout and influence the decision to drop out.

Pre-service teachers form their beliefs about teaching throughout their school life. They also communicate the qualities needed to be a good teacher with parents or senior relatives while choosing what path for professional development they might follow. These ideas are deeply rooted, strong and difficult to alter unless designers of Teachers Training Program understand the beliefs can prevent shaping single semantic structure among all graduates in relation to their professional activity. The objective of the educators to shape the program that deliberately challenges these preconceptions.

To meet this goal the authors designed the study:

- to identify what beliefs first year students of the Teachers Training Program have about teaching and,
- to categorize these beliefs to make them explicit to avoid further discrepancy in articulating teaching conceptions required by professional standards.

### **Review of literature**

Pre-service teachers join training program with certain understanding what it means to be a good teacher, what they need to be successful in the profession (Leong, 2013). Teacher education programs are designed to prepare teachers for a motivated career, to mitigate attrition, and to improve teacher quality (Loucks-Horsley et al., 2010). To apply all the best practices acquired while being a student, novice teachers must have a solid perception of the teachers' role that is consistent with their core beliefs, values, self-perceptions, self-definitions, and goals (Chernyavskaya et al., 2016; Makarova et al., 2019; Bayanova et al., 2019; Khairullina et al., 2020). To obtain this objective, teacher education programs must address not only content and pedagogy but also the complex processes that promote the professional role identity development that drives teachers to learn, develop, and sustain strong commitments to new practices and to the profession (Kaplan, Garner & Semo, 2015).

There are two dimensions for future teachers' epistemological beliefs analysis: how teachers either conceptualize their work and which concepts based on their personal experience or on the theoretical knowledge form their perception of the profession (Çam, 2015; Sadi & Dagyar, 2015; Gvarliani, Vidishcheva, & Rassolov, 2015; Viholainen, Asikainen, & Hirvonen, 2014; Kvon et al., 2018; Prokofieva et al., 2018; Avdeev et al., 2019; Orekhovskaya et al., 2019; Piralova et al., 2020; Reddy, 2020). C. M. Clark and P.L. Peterson (1986) suggest that "the most resilient or core teachers' beliefs are formed on the basis of teachers own schooling". C. S. Weinstein (1989) states future teacher join educational program with well-formed teacher identity based on memories of their own experience of being at school, memories of previous teachers and childhood events. N.A. Crow (1987) suggests pre-service teachers conceptualized teacher role

identity model refines topics and experiences in the education program to be either assimilated or rejected. Students may anticipate their predisposition for being a good teacher based on their childhood situations when they coped with younger relatives or had positive experience with peers at school.

If we assume that future teachers come to the University with already well-formed ideas about their future profession, it is important to understand how these preconceptions are constructed in school, what their content is. In this study, we use the invisible message metaphor to determine these preconceptions formation mechanism. By this term, we mean a generalized implicit knowledge of what it means to be a teacher that is passed on to the student. This transfer rarely happens intentionally, but rather occurs as a side effect of school routine. The teacher and the student participate daily in multiple pursuits by interacting with each other and by observing each other's activities. All these actions mold certain expectations of typical behavior and ideas about what it means to be an exemplary student and a teacher.

The invisible message educators might neglect while designing the training program that to become a professional one needs to integrate external realization and personal conceptualization. Professional development is an ongoing process of interpretation that consists of sub-identities resulting from the how teachers made sense of themselves as teachers as they develop professionally (Chong, Low & Goh, 2011).

According to K.W. Chan and R.G. Elliot (2010) epistemological beliefs and conceptions about teaching and learning models pursuit by students construct the way they conduct teaching process. Belief systems rely heavily on evaluative and emotional components. They typically have large categories of concepts defined in one way or another as "good" or "bad" or as leading to good or bad (Abelson, 1979). The six structural features of beliefs model developed by J. Nespor (1987) – existential presumptions, alternativity, affective and evaluative aspects, episodic storage, non-consensuality and unboundedness – suggests we must pay more attention to the goals that lead teachers to the way they organize classroom activities. These goals are subjective interpretations of classroom processes that in fact are their beliefs about teaching maintained over time.

Despite the fact that a number of studies indicate that the particular teacher education program had little effect on students' beliefs and conceptions (Richardson, 1996), we consider the upmost objective of the teaching training to help students become more reflective and to develop a constructivist learning theory. To engage students in reflecting on their beliefs may facilitate the meaningful change in both beliefs and practice. When program goal is not to introduce a specific method or curriculum to be implemented by the teachers but to facilitate conversations that allow the participants to understand their own beliefs and practices and consider alternatives, the beliefs might change.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The authors applied the following methodology during the research: in-depth interviews based on the guide scheme to interpret the results, the semantic interviews transcript analysis and coding the seo-analysis results.

The authors approached the research in two stages. The initial stage was to conduct in-depth interviews among first year students of the primary school teachers' training program. The aim of the survey was to obtain a detailed narrative interview, which would include the main semantic blocks characterizing the views and beliefs pre-service teachers have about teaching, teaching profession, features of students and school. While conducting interviews, it was necessary to determine their schooling experience or some childhood

memories that might form their image of being a teacher and what effective teaching is. Each interview lasted for at least 20 minutes and the main objective of the interviewer was to facilitate the interviewee to produce meaningful description of his or her memories from schooling or childhood that might then be translated into certain belief that form their idea of teacher and teaching.

The authors interviewed 34 first year students of the primary school teachers' training program. Out of them 21 students were from Kazan Federal University, Institute of Psychology and Education and 13 students were from University of Education of Lower Austria. We conducted the interviews in the native language of interviewees (Russian/German) anonymously to encourage candid conversation and to foster sincere answers.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The authors transcribed and scanned the interviews through semantic analysis search engine to evaluate collocations, to obtain the keyword density, the percentage of key phrases and frequency of certain words. The obtained key phrases were translated into English. We grouped these collocations into twelve categories and backed each category by description taken from the interview narrative (See Table 1).

Table 1. Category description.

Category	Description	Interview examples
Appearance	Good looking, neat, dressed properly	<i>"I imagine my first day at school... I will wear a light blouse and a nice skirt"</i>  <i>"The teacher is an example to the pupils by the way she dresses up..."</i>
Attitude to children	Loves children, gets along with children, communicates well with them	<i>"You can't be a good teacher if you do not love kids..."</i>  <i>"You always know how to speak their language..."</i>
Caring	Kind, understanding, friendly, concerned	<i>"If you see that something is bothering a child you will come up to him or her and find out what is going on..."</i>  <i>"The teacher is always empathic to the pupils..."</i>
Commitment	Love the job, ready to sacrifice private life, works long hours	<i>"You are ready to work long hours..."</i>  <i>"I know that I will have to stay late at night getting ready for the classes and I am ready for that."</i>
Discipline	Keeps order in the classroom, authoritarian but friendly	<i>"I will monitor the discipline..."</i>  <i>"You can't let them do what they want..."</i>  <i>"It's important to be strict, but friendly..."</i>
Fairness	Fair, does not have favorites, unbiased, grades fairly	<i>"Good teacher has no favorites..."</i>  <i>"I will be fair to all my pupils ..."</i>

		<i>"I will grade my pupils for their results, not for their behavior..."</i>
Intelligence Interaction	Educated, intelligent Stimulates pupils to think, encourages expressing opinions, promotes active involvement	<i>"He (teacher) is a source of knowledge for his pupils..."</i> <i>"I will never discourage pupils from expressing their opinion..."</i> <i>"It's important to let them say..."</i> <i>"I will listen what they say ..."</i>
Knowledge of subject	Educated, knows the subject	<i>"A good teacher has a good knowledge of the subject..."</i>
Meeting needs	Understands pupils needs, ready to discuss	<i>"I will always help if I see that something is bothering the child..."</i> <i>"I know that all the kids are different...and I will treat them differently..."</i>
Motivating	Creates friendly and stimulating environment	<i>"A good teacher creates the atmosphere where kids feel happy..."</i> <i>"I will try to be not only their teacher, but also a friend..."</i>
Understanding of children	Has knowledge about children needs and concerns, knows how to deal with these needs	<i>"I should know something about how they are growing..."</i> <i>"I need to understand how to help..."</i>

To provide a coherent and comprehensive curriculum, teacher education institution must ensure that professional competences are developed in all their dimensions. The combination of teaching practice, pedagogical didactics, academic subjects, educational science subjects, child development studies and research skills development courses allows students to make appropriate professional judgments and decisions, and deliver effective instruction. To ensure this coherent system leads to successful outcome, the categorized beliefs should be analyzed by educators and certain adjustments to the curriculum are necessary.

After we analyzed the categories obtained during interviews and matched them to certain modules of the teachers training program (See Table 2) it became obvious what modules modifications we should undertake to be sure that pedagogical theories experiences are treated and applied properly by all students, tackling individual cognitive patterns and school experience to avoid theoretical material misperception.

The authors approached the problem of preconceptions as a complex issue that has a significant effect on the results teaching training program intends to obtain. This research is the continuation of the previously started one devoted to preconceptions. The preceding study was about the preconceptions of pre-service teachers at their final year at the University where we analyzed how the training program influenced future teachers' epistemological beliefs. We investigated not only the assumptions students have about being a teacher, but also identified some transformative, stressful situations that altered these preconceptions and stimulated students' critical thinking about "old" and "new" beliefs.

Table 2. Training program modules.

<b>Module</b>	<b>Category</b>
Teaching Praxis	Appearance Meeting needs Motivating Commitment Discipline Fairness
Pedagogical Didactics	Interaction Meeting needs Motivating Commitment Discipline Fairness
Academic Subjects	Knowledge of subject Intelligence
Educational Science Subjects	Knowledge of subject Intelligence
Child Development Studies	Attitude to children Understanding children Interaction Meeting needs Motivating
Research Skills Development	Knowledge of subject Intelligence Commitment

As part of the study, the conclusions were made about the eclecticism of students' ideas. We associate this phenomenon with the significant influence that students' professional discourse development during the educational program has on the formation of the narrative. The description of interaction with the teacher students experienced at school was adjusted through the prism of the current understanding of "right" or "wrong" in educational practice – what effective behavior of the teacher means and what is unacceptable practice.

Conducting interviews with first-year students allowed us to get a much less eclectic and more monolithic narrative, which can be defined as a mundane theory of what it means to be a teacher. This narrative has not been affected by professional discourse and has not been modified yet. Thus, it makes it possible to use its analysis to form recommendations to teachers' educators.

One of the problems of teacher training program is that at the initial stage, when certain disciplines are introduced, students have to master theoretical material that they cannot embed in their personal experience. At this point, their existing personal experience remains unused in the learning process. It is obvious that the use of students individual representations formed at school can have a positive impact on the training program effectiveness.

As a result of our research, the main enlarged thematic headings were identified, which are actually structural elements of a typical student's view on the teaching profession. These categories can and should be used at

various stages during teachers training program implementation. They should be discussed; in addition, the theoretical material should be linked to these categories.

## **CONCLUSION**

The formation of a unified system for monitoring the effectiveness of teacher education, based on an analysis of graduates' success is the part of the government program to improve quality of future teachers (Valeeva & Gafurov, 2017). Based on that attempt, the result of the study serves as a plan of action for educators on how to change the structure of the programs and their pedagogical design to form a holistic view on future professional activities.

The teacher's professional knowledge incorporates content and pedagogical didactics as well as motivational competences. It also suggests decision-making skills and professional judgment that allow teachers to analyze and evaluate specific contexts or learning episodes and, drawing on their knowledge and competences, make decisions about teaching approaches and instruction (OECD, 2019). These approaches will deal with curriculum and lesson planning, selecting and applying sets of teaching methods, ways of classroom management and pupils' assessment. The importance of preconceptions study here is not to let them interfere with the formal education obtained, but to guarantee proper implementation of these approaches in the classroom.

If we examine professional educational standards that require certain competences to be formed with graduates, it will be obvious they are designed to strike the balance between breadth and depth of pedagogical content knowledge, professional competence and cultural awareness. For instance, general cultural competences imply effective interpersonal and intercultural interaction being tolerant towards social, cultural and personal differences and knowledge on how to be self-organized and continue self-education. General professional competences refer to supporting and developing students in accordance with their social, age, psychophysical and individual characteristics as well as their special educational needs. As for professional and cultural competences, they focus on applying state-of-art educational methods, technologies and assessment practices; organizing pupils' cooperation, to support their proactivity, initiative and autonomy, to help them develop their creativity.

In case the original preconceptions were not communicated, analyzed and reflected during the training program, they might hinder comprehension of these standards or their formalized perception will never proceed to the classroom. Thus, the educators must take time and efforts to provoke the reflection of pre-service teachers' school experience to let them take a different look at what they might consider the right classroom behavior and true teacher values.

The combination of well-designed training program and pre-service teachers understanding of teachers' role in society will ensure both teachers' expectations and society demands are aligned and teachers' retention at schools will be tackled before novice teachers join the work force. This comparative study is the part of the discussion on the importance of professional activity concepts transformation among graduates who study pedagogics. The result of the study should outline the set of recommendations on how to make necessary alterations to the structure of the teachers training program to ensure both competence and confidence of the graduate in the classroom.

### Limitations

The authors limited their research to students who are trained to be primary school teachers. While this research can be applied to future subject teachers to get more general results.

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