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## COLLOQUIA

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**Wanda Dróżka**

*Uniwersytet Jana Kochanowskiego w Kielcach*

**Joanna Madalińska-Michalak**

*Uniwersytet Warszawski*

### **Prospective teachers' motivations for choosing teaching as a career**

#### **Streszczenie**

#### **MOTYWACJE PRZYSZŁYCH NAUCZYCIELI DO WYBORU KARIERY W ZAWODZIE NAUCZYCIELA**

Artykuł poświęcony jest problematyce wyboru zawodu nauczyciela, a zwłaszcza jego motywom wyboru tego zawodu. Prezentowane w artykule badania zostały podjęte w sytuacji, gdy widoczny jest niedostatek jakościowych, autobiograficznych analiz i interpretacji doświadczeń oraz refleksji przyszłych nauczycieli na ich drodze do tego zawodu. Celem badań było zdobycie wiedzy na temat motywacji wyboru zawodu u kandydatów na nauczycieli oraz ukazanie szerszego kontekstu biograficznego i społeczno-kulturowego (ekonomicznego) jej kształtowania się i rozwoju. Przedstawione w artykule badania mają istotny walor poznawczy, gdyż motywacja wyboru zawodu stanowi ważny składnik tożsamości oraz identyfikacji zawodowej nauczycieli – jej poznanie może przyczynić się do wzbogacenia wiedzy o zawodzie nauczyciela oraz o rozwoju zawodowym nauczycieli we współczesnych uwarunkowaniach. Omawiane w niniejszym tekście badania mają też znaczenie praktyczne, bowiem wnioski, jakie z nich wypływają, mogą być pomocne w doskonaleniu jakości kształcenia wstępnego kandydatów na nauczycieli, a także opracowywania programów wspierania ich w dalszym rozwoju zawodowym, na kolejnych etapach kariery. Podstawowym źródłem danych na temat motywów wyboru zawodu nauczyciela oraz ich uwarunkowań były badania jakościowe. Zostały one przeprowadzone na przełomie 2013/14 r. na Uniwersytecie Jana Kochanowskiego w Kielcach, na Wydziale Pedagogicznym i Artystycznym. Objęto nimi kandydatów na nauczycieli, wszystkich studentów ostatniego – V roku magisterskich studiów pedagogicznych o specjalności edukacja wczesnoszkolna i przedszkolna z nauczaniem języka angielskiego – łącznie 65 osób. W badaniach zastosowano metodę swobodnej wypowiedzi autobiograficznej „Moja droga do zawodu nauczycielskiego. Kontekst autobiograficzny i społeczno-kulturowy”, w wyniku której otrzymano 65 tekstów o objętości od kilku (5–6) do kilkunastu (11–15) znormalizowanych stron

komputerowych. Zebrane dane zostały poddane jakościowej analizie tematycznej. Uzyskane rezultaty badań zostały zestawione z dostępnymi w literaturze przedmiotu wynikami nad motywacją wyboru zawodu nauczyciela. Badania pokazują, że choć w Polsce w ciągu ostatnich 25 lat zmienił się kontekst pracy nauczyciela, to kluczowe motywy wyboru zawodu nauczyciela pozostają wciąż te same. Nadal dominują motywy o charakterze wewnętrznym, jak zamiłowanie do pracy z dziećmi, powołanie, zainteresowanie pracą w szkole. Na dalszych miejscach, lecz nie mniej ważne, są motywy związane z tradycją rodzinną oraz wpływem pozytywnych wzorców osobowych nauczycieli i wychowawców z wcześniejszej edukacji, a także chęć pracy w zawodzie prestiżowym o wysokiej randze społecznej. Obecnie przy wyborze zawodu brane są częściej pod uwagę takie jego atrybuty, jak możliwość samorealizacji, ciągłego rozwoju intelektualnego, autokreacji, kreatywności. Wciąż utrzymuje się ponadto, co nie jest korzystne, poleganie przez przyszłych nauczycieli na potocznych wyobrażeniach zawodu jako łatwego, z licznymi przywilejami oraz pewnością pracy i zatrudnienia, co w dzisiejszych realiach prowadzi do znacznych rozczarowań. Swoistym *novum* w obecnych badaniach jest spora liczba motywów pragmatycznych, związanych z walorami studiów (np. z potrójną specjalnością oraz dążenie do zakładania własnych placówek edukacyjnych lub opiekuńczo-wychowawczych).

**Słowa kluczowe:** motywacje, kariera w zawodzie nauczyciela, kandydaci do zawodu nauczyciela, badania biograficzne, edukacja nauczycieli.

The presented research is focused on the motivation of prospective teachers for choosing teaching as a career. It was conducted in response to those tendencies that require educating and developing high quality teaching staff, equipped with advanced value system and their own beliefs, a wider social and cultural consciousness that encompasses also the context of their own occupation, staff that is aware of the necessity to learn, to refine, and to develop throughout their entire career (Caena 2011). The research is also the response to a visible deficiency in qualitative and autobiographical analyses and interpretations of experiences of prospective teachers, as well as of reflections of prospective teachers on their paths to teaching as a career.

The main aim of the presented research has been to gain knowledge about motivation of prospective teachers for choosing teaching as a career and to critically consider a broader biographical and socio-cultural-economic context of their formation and development. This endeavour to provide insights into prospective teachers' experiences and those factors which influence them can be very important in enriching the knowledge pertaining to teaching profession and professional development of teachers who become teachers in the contemporary conditions. The research discussed in this paper has also a practical meaning, because conclusions drawn from it can help refine the quality of initial training for teacher candidates and improve development

of programs pertaining to support of teachers in their further professional development on consecutive career stages.

## Theoretical Framework

According to the OECD report *Teachers matter* (OECD 2005), which is about school teachers – their preparation, recruitment, work and careers, all countries are seeking to improve their schools in order to respond better to higher social and economic expectations. As the most significant and costly resource in schools, teachers are seen as a priority for public policy, and likely to become even more so in future years. Improving the quality of schools mainly depends on ensuring that competent people want to work as teachers and their teaching is of high quality.

Motivation for choosing teaching as a career is considered an essential premise for motivation and enthusiasm in the teaching profession. Considering motivation for choosing teaching as a career by prospective teachers, one can state that this kind of motivation is an especially important factor not only in admission to, progression in and graduation from a teacher education programs (Blömeke et al. 2012), but also in explaining why teacher education graduates do not enter the profession or drop out after a short period of time (Rots et al. 2010; Thomson, Turner, Nietfeld 2012; Watt, Richardson 2008).

In the contemporary conditions of teaching, especially in Europe (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2013), this issue has gained importance because one can observe that it is becoming increasingly difficult to motivate young people for teaching profession as well as keeping trained workforce in the profession (Watt, Richardson 2007; Taylor 2006; Moran et al. 2001; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2013). Students' personal beliefs, preconceptions and reasons for choosing teaching as a career shape – as Watt et al. (2007: 155) rightly pointed out – their “aspirations for professional engagement and the trajectory of their career development”.

In the Polish context, studies on teacher career motivations have also gained momentum over the last two decades. Several studies have been conducted to understand the profiles of Polish prospective teachers and their career motivation (Dróźka 1997, 2008; Kwiatkowski 2012; Michalak 2007; Walczak 2012; Wilkomirska 2002). These studies on career motivation in teaching usually present similar results. The studies report that prospective

teachers are primarily motivated by altruistic reasons and extrinsic motives such as getting a secure job and a steady monthly income in their career choice. Research studies on choosing teaching as a career in Poland are mainly quantitative ones. They usually lack theoretically defined constructs allowing the development of rigorous measurement instruments to be applied in large-scale studies with representative samples.

### **Research methodology and methods**

The presented research is based on the assumption that qualitative studies can be important in recognizing and interpreting the autobiographical experiences of prospective teachers on their way to the profession. It is assumed that the process of becoming a teacher is immersed in the whole teacher career. An important role in this process is played by experiences gained by teachers from different fields and in different periods of their lives (childhood, schooling, initial teacher education), and teachers' views on themselves, as well as their relationships with others, workplace, students and teaching situations (Dróžka 1997, 2008; Michalak 2007). The research can be placed in the area of theories concerning continuous professional development of teachers (Day 1999) and theories of motivation in an attempt to identify the basis in a career selection process, especially expectancy-value theory that suggests that expectations of success and a subjective value of a task are major determinants of motivation for academic choices as well as career choices (Wigfield, Eccles 2000; Richardson, Watt 2005). The nature of teacher development is dynamic and situated.

In the broader research project from which this paper draws, research data were mainly collected through a number of autobiographical stories written by a sample of prospective teachers during academic year 2013/14 at Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce, Poland, at the Faculty of Education and Arts. The participants were selected on a voluntary basis from among post-graduate students who were just before graduating from their studies. The research participants studied the following specialization: early-school and pre-school education with English language teaching.

The total of 65 prospective teachers took part in the study. The study participants were mainly women born in the years 1989–1990, so shortly after the political system transformation in Poland. Their childhood and schooling

took place in the period when Poland as a country tried to build conditions for a new socio-political system – a neoliberal, democratic system. It certainly had an impact on the personal and professional identities of the participants, their lives and the conditions of their education and work. They enrolled in high schools in 2004: the year of Polish accession to the European Union.

The research employed the method of free autobiographical statement: the research participants were asked to reflect on their experiences and write the story on the following theme “My way to a teaching profession: an autobiographical and socio-cultural context”. As a result, a volume of 65 texts from several standardized pages (5–6) up to a dozen pages (11–15) has been collected.

The thematic analysis of motivation for choosing teaching as a career was accompanied by the analysis of significant experiences of prospective teachers along their paths of professional development.

## **Findings**

The analysis of the research results showed that it is difficult to determine unambiguously individual motives that prompted the prospective teachers to choose teaching as a career. The motives for selecting the profession often appear in clusters. A great majority of the researched prospective teachers do not give a single reason but rather an entire sets of motives, among which one or two seem to be dominant. Below some of the recognized motives will be presented. A special attention will be paid only to these motives that were common for all researched teachers. Among the identified motives, the following ones repeated: (i) impact of family members and role models; (ii) notions of teacher's work; (iii) desire to work in a creative profession which gives an opportunity to develop a teacher's own as well as their pupils' creativity; (iv) need for self-fulfilment and intellectual development, as well as for pursuing their own passions and interests; (v) job features and benefits.

### **Impact of family members and role models**

On the basis of the analysis of the researched students' statements, certain observations can be made pertaining to the nature of their childhood.

To some extent they support regularities known from everyday observations, such as: young children like to play doctors and nurses, boys like to play firemen and policemen, girls like to play shop and school. To be a teacher was a dream of all the researched students. Frequently, those motives and aspirations were significantly reinforced by family traditions, and also by role models of teachers or homeroom teachers from their school years. In their recollections about favourite teachers and homeroom teachers, whom they admired and respected, who set an example for them, and whom they perceived as authorities, they most often mention such personality features, attitudes and behaviours as empathy, openness, sense of humour, being a good listener, patience, selflessness, fairness, impeccable manners, extensive knowledge, a way with children, gentleness, calmness, composure, etc. Here are presented some characteristic citations:

I imagined myself in a classroom full of children and I was their teacher. I kept class registers, pretended that I write on a blackboard, I gave tests and I graded them. I felt really well in that role. That is why I have always thought about the teaching profession. It was the most desired profession for me since childhood (...).

I chose teaching as a profession, because I love children and working with them. When I was still a child I had an opportunity to play with and to look after younger children. I have always been good with children. I always knew how to organize plays for them that they really enjoyed. (...) In my family the teaching profession is also quite popular.

Especially fondly I recall my homeroom teacher from my secondary school. (...) who in case of trouble always helped us, we were eager to turn to him, he was very understanding. It was plain that he cared about his wards. (...). Even though we finished the secondary school long ago, till this day we try to visit him and stay in touch with him. He always had good advice to offer and was willing to help.

### **Notions of teacher's work**

An exceptionally important motive for many of the researched future teachers was their notion of teacher's work from childhood supported by an image of a teacher or a homeroom teacher which was inculcated in them by parents and grandparents – who often were teachers, educators – which encompassed those values and attitudes that the researched students would like to meet. Values, attitudes, and character features such as perseverance, ambition, richness of personality, vocation, activity, involvement, interests, passions, but also social prestige and respect, trust, sense of being needed are precious aspects of the profession which express its nature and uniqueness.

They were inculcated in the young students as an image of a socially respected profession which ensures a meaningful position in the society. But so often, already influenced by their studies and professional practice, they turned out not to be consistent with the reality, which over the recent years underwent a radical transformation resulting from changing global and local conditions.

In many of the collected statements, especially in the parts describing and explaining the reasons for which the researched students decided to pursue educational studies and embark on a teaching career, there also appears a reflection on a social notion of this profession which now is present in the society. That notion started to take shape under the influence of market mentality and growing life hardships among many of the social strata. It shows the teaching profession as easy, not requiring higher education (effortless studies), simple, not taking up much time, encompassing the so-called frequent breaks and long vacations. Many entitlements that a teacher has are subject to critical social comments, which hold that in the market days these privileges are too extended and undue. Here are the examples of such statements:

When we hear about the teaching work we think: a stress-free work for a few hours a day, two months of vacations, endless holidays. Over 50 days off during winter break and summer vacations, health leave, various allowances and a few hours of work – that is what a teacher's situation looks like, as many people imagine.

Because of the privileges mentioned, this profession is constantly in the centre of attention and it is used as an example of undue entitlements. And what the real situation is like? I think that it is not all that easy. Often you have to work with rebellious students, you correct tests at night, and prepare yourself for the classes putting a lot of effort in it. The real thing is completely different after all.

When comparing these remarks with the motivation for selection of studies and a choice of profession, it can be noticed that some of the researched future teachers, brought up in such a social attitude and atmosphere, succumbed to these stereotypes and decided to become teachers as if unconsciously. This can be proved by frequent statements that mention significant discrepancies, if not diametric differences, between the notions from before the studies and the knowledge about the nature of this profession that was acquired during the studies and their professional practice.

The belief that the teaching profession is easy and pleasant had to make place for the conviction – which grew stronger with knowledge gained during the studies and with professional practice – that this is a tough profession:

demanding, requiring responsibility, stressful because of students' and their parents' bad behaviour, and sometimes due to the behaviour manifested by various groups that do not always show respect for teachers or endow this profession with prestige.

Here is a story that illustrates these tensions and contradictions in the way this profession is perceived:

(...) Before I started studying I thought that working as a teacher is easy and very interesting. I thought that the teaching profession inspires a lot of respect both in children and their parents. (...)

My notions on this subject changed when I was already studying (...). First of all, I understood how extremely responsible is teacher's work with young children. (...) Nowadays, there are more and more aggressive students that teachers have a hard time dealing with. Contacts with child's parents sometimes also turn out to be difficult. (...) Today I am convinced that teaching work is quite stressful. (...) It requires time and exceptional patience.

And another statement of a similar character, the one like many others collected. Its author emphasizes that earlier she saw only good sides of the teaching profession: a lot of free time, breaks, vacations and all the holidays. Later, she started to notice also these less attractive sides of the profession, such as low social esteem, low teacher's remuneration, which is inadequate when necessity of constant learning and growing demands are taken into consideration:

First of all, I think here about the financial issue. Nowadays, the teaching profession is not so well paid. When you consider the enormous dedication and involvement on the part of teachers, they do not receive adequate remuneration. Especially fresh teachers earn very little money and have to work for their promotions, which is not an easy task. There are not many workplaces, you can hear about teachers being dismissed all the time, because there is no money for them. I even encountered situations where some people work for an hour or two in a kindergarten without payment, because there is no money for a teacher of English for children. (...) I think that my parents' opinion also in a way influenced my choice. In my parents' eyes the teaching profession is tied to prestige, a well-educated person who is an authority for others.

### **The desire to work in a creative profession, which gives the opportunity to develop a person's own as well as the children's creativity**

The researched teachers are aware that the profession they have chosen is exceptional in its nature. It is, as they write, "a fascinating challenge"; it requires from people practicing it such things as an authentic involvement



and passion, many outstanding personality features, character and attitude; charisma, empathy, communication skills and creativity are crucial. And here is another statement:

The last aspect that I would like to mention in this part of my paper is my amazement with the fact how very creative a teacher must be. Sometimes literally out of nothing he/she needs to create something wonderful, and at the same time interesting for children. It is often the case that he/she prepares for the classes at home, spending long hours creating interesting teaching aids in the form of boards, games, posters, dolls, hand puppets, and great many other things. This requires from a teacher to be fully willing, open, and ready to invest enormous reserves of energy or ideas. (...)

He/she must be creative and patient. Other classes on the other hand require conscientiousness, accuracy and precision. Low remuneration requires humbleness. Teaching is a tough profession that requires from the person practicing it a lot of sacrifices and dedication. I appreciate and respect people who work as teachers, because without them the society would be uneducated and development on any given plane of life would not be possible.

Another prospective teacher wrote as follows:

From the very beginning of my affair with school, what impressed me in the teaching profession was its full creativity, i.e. building from start to end the educational world enclosed in one or several classrooms.

The researched people unanimously emphasize that not every person can work as a teacher, not everyone can be a teacher. This profession, as an exceptional occupation that influences the attitude to life, defines their life style, a kind of ethos – requires people gifted with vocation, passion, dedication and involvement; otherwise this would be a disaster for everyone, especially for the children.

### **The need for self-fulfilment and intellectual development, as well as for pursuing one's own passions and interests**

Another no less important motive for choosing educational studies and teacher profession is the belief that this occupation presents wide opportunities for self-fulfilment and intellectual development throughout an entire career, as well as for realizing one's own passions and hobbies over their entire life. The meaning of the teaching profession as something that ensures opportunities to those young people, who want to develop, learn – is proved

by a whole range of statements. This motivation is described by the students in the following way:

Another important issue, in my opinion, is the lifelong learning that is required of the contemporary teachers. The world is changing at a rapid pace and things that are new and fresh today tomorrow can become history. For this reason permanent broadening and updating of knowledge is necessary. (...) Such self-education though is not only connected with things that a teacher presents to children, but also with didactic means and with new technologies that he/she uses.

Once upon a time, films were played to kids with the use of a video player and VHS tapes. The students today do not even know what those are, they never heard of them, because they live in a computer age, the age of new generation cell phones and tablets.

When choosing my specialization I took into consideration also the opportunity of further development. This profession requires a comprehensive and updated knowledge, (...) And in the end, the argument that decided about my selecting the pedagogical studies was the idea of work with children itself. Many people told me that I have in me something that makes me perfect for work with kids. (...) Of course, the later professional practice and work in a kindergarten somewhat verified my take on the teaching profession.

### **Job feature and benefits**

The prospective teachers indicated that part of the reasons for which they chose to teach is that teaching is a decent, stable profession with a rather low number of working hours (in Poland usually teachers teach for 18 hours per week) and long winter and summer vacations. The teachers seem to be fully aware that having such a job can give them some benefits like time for taking care of their own family. For example, one of the prospective teachers mentioned this in the following way.

I think about being a teacher mainly because teaching in Poland is so stable. It gives me a chance of having more time for my own children. I will be able to be fully concentrated on them. My husband is busy most of the time. For sure, teaching would be good for me.

I have a son and if I work as a teacher I will have more time for him, for example work at the office would have never given me such a chance. The school is a good choice.

I think teaching is a right profession for me. Even though the salary is not high I can appreciate some job benefits. Mainly, I am looking for the vacations and short working hours.

### **Biographical ordeals and dilemmas on the way to selecting a major and teaching profession, and building professional and social awareness**

The analysis of collected materials not only revealed the motives of choosing teaching as a career, but at the same time allowed critical examination of the context in which the decisions crucial for the researched teachers were made. The interpretation of the context influences the process of becoming a teacher and making decisions about the profession results in the emergence of several common themes for all the collected stories.

Among them are the following: (i) the clash of childhood and adolescence notions pertaining to the teaching occupation with the contemporary situation; (ii) a striking change in the general image of teachers and in their professional attitudes; (iii) mental clash caused by diminishing importance of higher education; (iv) shock resulting from confrontation with a job market; (v) the necessary change in notions pertaining to the selected profession, and the lack of acceptance of its common perception by the society; (vi) the notion of the profession inculcated in the students by their teacher families and its unjust, false social image; (vii) Bologna process as a difficult ordeal on the path to acquiring the profession. The length of this paper is very limited, therefore these themes will be presented only very briefly.

Regarding the context of making a decision for being a teacher, an important observation should be mentioned: motives of the prospective teachers in many cases are of fluid nature, rarely they are *constans*; they are corrected depending on a changing external situation which influences capabilities and opportunities of individual people. Certainly, this can be connected to the ongoing processes of social and political transformations in Poland, the impact of shifting market rules, and to some extent to the characteristics of the contemporary culture such as changeability, uncertainty, impermanence, etc.

#### **The clash of childhood and adolescence notions pertaining to the teaching occupation with the contemporary situation**

The statements of the prospective teachers lead to the conclusion that the devaluation of the teaching profession as compared to their notions of that occupation from childhood and adolescence in the early 1990s, when teacher was still perceived in traditional categories of social and cultural role and this profession was still endowed with high prestige and respect, was a nasty

experience for those researched prospective teachers. Later on, especially during the studies, they could critically observe the significant diminishing of social and cultural importance of this profession. The teaching occupation more and more started to be perceived in the categories of professional identity, narrow specialization, the so-called expertise without any strong social or cultural references, and the schools, education started to be seen in market and services categories. Such a situation was complemented by simultaneous incommensurate raise in professional demands, complexity degree, and the responsibility of the occupation, as well as the necessity to take part in in-service trainings without adequate financial bonuses and concurrent drop in social prestige and trust. Here is an example of such a reflection:

Third phenomenon, unfortunately not necessarily a pleasant one, is a shift in the social status of the teaching profession. In the past a person teaching at school was someone important, respected, held in esteem by others. Students felt respect for them and it would be unthinkable to speak to such a person in an uncivil manner, or to act in a rude way towards them. Today this situation is completely different.

### **A striking change in the general image of teachers and in their professional attitudes**

Some important observations also pertain to another kind of transition apart from the one described in the statement. They concern the way how, during their education, the general image of teachers changed, their attitudes to the profession brought about by the social transformations and the reform of education. When they were still in a primary school, at the beginning of and up until the middle of the 1990s, their teachers and homeroom teachers were very devoted to their profession, their students and parents; they were involved in truly humanistic, person-oriented education that understood and supported comprehensive development of students. As years went by and future teachers were already in a lower or upper secondary school, their attitude and the way they approached their profession was more and more subjective and impersonal, often even cynical in their relations with students; they were no longer so empathic, rather they were *bureaucratic* and *depersonalized*. Here is a characteristic statement:

I remember my homeroom teacher from my primary school. She used to do her job with passion. Well-being of a child was her priority, above anything else. You could go with any issue to her and she would always do her best to help, she strove to be like a mother to all of us: fair,

caring, smiling and responsible for each and every one of us. That was the image of a teacher that I had. But with each level of education it was more and more difficult to encounter such an ideal teacher. Every successive one was different, had different priorities, had different principles and methods. It is sad but teachers like the one from primary school are more and more rare. (...) Most of them simply performed the teaching profession sticking to certain procedures and models imposed by those higher up.

### **Mental clash caused by diminishing importance of higher education**

In the statements of the prospective teachers cited here a kind of mental clash is also visible; it reveals the snowballing increase in the number of university students in their generation (the 1990s) in Poland (also in private and non-public higher education institutions). This increase was especially noticeable at pedagogical and teaching studies, which were selected by persons who were not necessarily interested in the profession or studies themselves, but followed a *fashion* or the notion that it is right to study, or who needed higher education institution diplomas for numerous occupations, for which it was not required before Poland's accession into the EU. Here is an example of such a reflection:

This is very sad, because it shows that practically anyone can obtain higher education without much effort, and that the part of society, which is called the elite or the nation's intelligentsia, is not it at all... Also the truth is that today any person can attend university and almost anyone can graduate from it. In the past, universities were attended only by brilliant people and only people like that graduated from them. And when I went to study, there was a hundred people in the first year, and with the exception of two or three they all graduated, because those three people resigned or changed their major. It is no wonder then that so many young teachers cannot find a job, if the whole multitude of people is accepted and practically none of them 'fails'.

### **Shock resulting from confrontation with a job market**

Another ordeal, clash on the path of the future teachers to their professional identity, concerns the period of studies and search for a job in the acquired profession. They started to study in 2009, a year after the world financial crisis, which today in a particularly bitter way leaves a trace on this group – the graduates of higher education institutions – among others on teacher candidates. They find themselves on the brink of confrontation with a job market in an especially unfavourable situation – there is a high unemployment rate and demographic low, teachers are fired and schools are

being closed. They are also shocked by the situation they are witnesses to, in which, on the one hand, they graduate from their desired major that is their passion, on the other hand, they observe nepotism and difficulties connected to finding a job, employment encompassing remuneration in low hourly rates in private schools or kindergartens, or home schooling.

**The necessary change in notions pertaining to the selected profession;  
the lack of acceptance of its common perception by the society**

Other clashes, ordeals are no less interesting, e.g. from naive, idealistic, romantic, adolescent ideas about the profession as an easy one (*teacher has a fine job*), through the perception of this occupation as a synonym of “power” over pupils (*an omnipotent guru*), as having *so much knowledge* about the world, to the discovery during professional practice of difficulties connected to this profession, intensified by the reality of education itself and its environment. The researched students, however, do not accept the stereotypical, common perception of this profession prevailing in the society, according to which this is a light, devoid of fatigue occupation acquired through easy, undemanding studies, ensuring nothing but privileges, and inspiring distrust in parents. Meanwhile, this is a profession, which in the opinion of the researched students is exceptionally tough and demanding, both in relation to high requirements pertaining to personality traits, predispositions, and to professional competences that constitute a serious challenge for the candidates for this occupation, which necessitates self-improvement and self-development.

**The notion of the profession inculcated in the students by their teacher  
families and its unjust, false social image**

In the life stories recorded by the researched students an interesting theme emerges: the impact that the fact of growing up in teacher families of long and rich pedagogical vocation traditions had on their awareness and the arising tensions and ordeals. The researched people emphasized the striking disproportions between the perception of this occupation in the society as easy and pleasant, or even as of little use, which to the students was false and unjust, and the image that they absorbed at home when being raised by a teacher family. The family in which, because of professional demands, difficulties, degree of social responsibility there was always not enough time

for family and own children since work at school and other extracurricular activities connected to it took up all the private free time, required long preparation for classes, staying up at night to correct the tests, etc., lifelong learning, devoting all the weekends to vocational trainings and conferences, financing further post-graduate studies, constant coping with the growing demanding attitude and excessive ambitions of parents, results of inadequate upbringing of children in families, attacks on teachers often perceived as the main culprit for all the failures. One of the researched students describes it in the following way in her statement:

Teaching profession is very popular in my family. The range of topics my family teaches is very wide, starting from early-school education, through Polish language, to vocational teaching. So, my selection of studies, and at the same time of a profession, was dictated by family traditions. From the earliest childhood I was surrounded by topics pertaining to school, professional development studies, endless number of tests or students' notebooks. My mother specializes in early-school education. She has worked for many years in one of smaller village schools.

### **Bologna process as a difficult ordeal on the path to acquiring the profession**

For the researched students a kind of ordeal is experiencing the so-called Bologna process on their path to the teaching profession, which is criticized by them in a particularly bitter manner. In their educational and professional biographies that system caused them to take entrance exams for a particular major, namely: early-school and kindergarten education with English language, from which they graduated with a bachelor's degree. Next, they started post-graduate studies with educational sciences as the major (all the previous specializations were combined into a single major – educational sciences), and after a year, on their final year of MA studies – they had to choose a specialization. Such method of teacher education for them, and for the academic teachers, is inexplicable. It often causes the students' motivation to be shaken or weakened, or it even leads to the syndrome of the so-called professional burnout. Here is what one of the students has to say about it:

When we started our supplementary MA studies, we were the first year that had to cope with the change in the system consisting in the fact that first year of BA and of MA studies was a general knowledge year. So, for three years of BA studies we were learning our major, and on the first year of MA studies all the specializations were combined into one – into educational sciences. This was not a good solution, because even though we did not have a lot of classes and we had quite a lot of free time, we did not have any methodology classes, no professional

practice, and no English language in the first semester – and I was studying a major with that language. Such teaching system made us lazy and caused much of the knowledge acquired earlier to disappear somewhere. But the saddest fact is that we had nothing to do with the language that I have on my BA diploma in my specialization.

## Conclusions and implications for teacher education

The comparison of the findings presented in this paper with the research results on motives on choosing teaching as a career that are presented in the literature in Poland show that the motives for profession selection generally have not changed in the last 25 years in Poland (Rotkiewicz 1991; Dróżka 1997; Kwiecińska 2000; Michalak 2007; Wiłkomirska 2002; Dróżka et al. 2012; Walczak 2012). Still the most dominant are the motives of internal nature, such as passion for work with children, vocation, interest in work at school. On further positions, but no less important, are motives connected to family traditions and the influence of the positive role models of teachers and home-room teachers from earlier education, as well as the desire to work in a prestigious profession of high social importance. It should be noted that today when selecting an occupation its attributes are taken into account such as the opportunity for self-fulfilment, for constant intellectual development, auto-creation, creativity. This is perhaps connected to the emphasis put on the teacher's quality and his/her creativity, on lifelong learning in the European Commission's documentation. Prospective teachers still rely on common notions of this profession as an easy one, endowed with many privileges and ensuring work and employment – it is not favourable and in current situation it leads to many substantial disappointments.

A peculiar *novum* in this research is quite a large number of pragmatic motives connected to the studies' values, e.g. a pursuit for possible establishment of own educational or care and education institutions. Predominantly, these are the students' own motives; in the collected statements there were no motives connected to "coercion" – pressure on the part of the parents or of the economic and social situation, there was no context of social advancement through profession and higher education mentioned, which had occurred in previous generations. Today, studying is something obvious. However, some changes can be noticed in the researched statements: there is a different view of studying present – it is not only perceived as a path to employment, but first of all as a way to enrich a their personality and as a peculiar cultural



enhancement, in one word: education is appreciated as such. However, studies at university are often criticized for being too isolated from practical side of the profession, for predominance of traditional, inadequate in the context of contemporary challenges teaching methods, where emphasis is put on lectures and classes, and modern, active, and creative methods are neglected. Many critical remarks were also directed at the so called Bologna process – the opinions were that dividing pedagogical studies into BA studies and two-year MA studies in this profession is very unfavourable, mainly because of disrupted proportions between theory and practice (to the disadvantage of practice) and other inconveniences, e.g. additional discontinuity on the path to building a professional identity of a teacher.

From a higher education institution they expect to gain more practical and professional learning outcomes in the form of competences they could use in their teaching profession, e.g. how to control negative emotions, how to solve particular problems, etc. Some of the students think about starting their own business, e.g. about establishing a private kindergarten. Many teacher candidates think about further post-graduate studies or another major, to postpone the time when they will be forced to find a job. All this causes strong complications in shaping a professional identity and identification in current teacher candidates, the graduates of 2014, starting their activity on a educational job market.

In general, despite the observed cases of emotional dilemmas, lack of resolve concerning one's own professional path, struggle with reality and idealism, it can be said that the significant majority of the researched students presents pragmatic, professional and reflective orientation. In their statements, they clearly mention pursuit of high level of professionalism where teaching is concerned, the mastery of the field of their activity, and aspirations for a higher professional level of occupational awareness, a deeper critical sense of own identity, and a wider understanding of their social and educational roles in the contemporary conditions. They have quite high awareness of being forced to live and act professionally in the reality that creates tension between opportunity and risk, where a person needs to control external factors and contexts of his/her motives, intentions, decisions and actions. This is where their striving for lifelong learning, self-fulfilment in alternative forms, not only at school or in a kindergarten, stems from, where their appreciation for the creation of a habit of a constant professional development, and for making decisions that has a deeper meaning and gives a sense of satisfaction takes its source.

Conducted analyses also lead to certain practical conclusions. Here are the more crucial ones:

- Already in a high school, some kind of dependable, expert knowledge about the teacher and educator profession, about the culture of these occupations, their ethos and practice of these professions should be introduced in a specific form of professional pre-orientation;
- During the studies, already at the first year, an introduction into the reality of teaching as a profession should be done, which should be expanded on consecutive levels of studies: the master's degree and the doctoral degree.
- The studies' programme should include more content representing economics and culture of the social and political transformations, and cultural period that we live in today. This would help the prospective teachers to deepen their awareness of the times and the world in which they live and work as teachers and as homeroom teachers. Thoughtfulness demanded today assumes critical knowledge of a person's self, his/her motives and desires in permanent confrontation with variable external, local, and global conditions.

The findings can be important in supporting the professional development of prospective and in-service teachers at all levels. The study can contribute to European educational research by researching the broader biographical and socio-cultural-economic context of Polish teachers' formation and development.

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