

A MODEL OF AN EXEMPLARY CLASSROOM TEACHER IN RUSSIA

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Abstract

Modernization of Russian education puts forward new goals, the solution of which can be provided by the introduction of innovative and flexible education curricula aimed at strengthening the educational process at Universities. The article throws some light on the current approaches to educating classroom teachers in Russia. Building up a model of an exemplary classroom teacher, the researchers put forward and make an attempt to answer the following questions:

- What makes the teacher “Teacher”?

- How does the exemplary teacher differ from anyone else?
- How to become an exemplary teacher?
- Who decides that the teacher is exemplary?

A cyclical paradigm of teacher education which combines three components of teacher training curriculum: teaching theory at University, research activities and compulsory teaching practice in schools, is aimed at solving two research questions: What key competences, attitudes, dispositions and knowledge are required of an exemplary teacher? How to form and develop key professional skills of pre-service teachers so that to have them become professionally strong classroom teachers? The authors assert that teacher education balanced by classical university education can shape an exemplary classroom teacher.

Key words: educational curriculum, exemplary classroom teacher, key professional skills, paradigm of teacher education, pre-service teachers, university-level education.

INTRODUCTION

The present day teacher-training education in Russia faces up to the emerging issues whose decision do have and will have an impact on the today and tomorrow Russian society. Among others, there is searching for novel ways of forming key professional competences which should shape an exemplary classroom teacher. To meet these challenges significant changes have been introduced into the system of Russian higher education recently:

- the emergence of a new type of university: a university of a federal status which is supposed to meet the regional markets' interests; at the present time there are 10 universities of this type in Russia;
- the diversification of syllabi and courses with the increase of the humanitarian component in the curricula.

The research was conducted at the university located in the Volga Federal District in Russia, where in 2011 there was developed an original teacher training system which combined the advantages of both classical (science-oriented) and

pedagogical (methodology-oriented) universities: classical university education ensures the fundamentality of teacher education by fostering strong subject knowledge. Thanks to this system, the researchers were authorized to start their study with the aim in view to define key competences, attitudes, dispositions and knowledge that are required of an exemplary teacher, and to seek the novel ways of forming and developing key professional skills of pre-service teachers.

Drawing on scientific and methodical literature, multicultural studies as well as personal international teaching and learning experience, the authors created a cyclical paradigm of teacher education with three components of the teacher training curriculum, namely, theory learning at University, research activities, and compulsory teaching practice in schools, which provides for forming an exemplary classroom teacher.

The paper discusses issues and practices of the studied model and offers general recommendations for university faculty.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Renewed Russian society claims that a classroom teacher should be equipped with well-founded theoretical and practical knowledge and teaching skills. In this paper, a new angle on educating classroom teachers in Russia is presented. The authors have designed a cyclical paradigm of teacher education which suggests combining three components of the teacher training program:

Theory learning at University

Research activities

Compulsory teaching practice in schools.

‘Theory learning at University’ component

‘Theory learning at University’ component comprises classical and interactive lectures and workshops on Pedagogy, Psychology, Didactics. Why do pre-service teachers need to learn theory?

Theory explains:

- concepts and relationships between concepts;

- a great number of facts and observations within a single model or framework (Morgan 2019).

Theory is a tool that enables pre-service teachers:

- to understand how school students learn and a way to explain, describe, analyze and predict learning;
- to identify a problem and to plan a means for altering the pedagogical situation;
- to make more informed decisions around the design, development and delivery of learning.

Most of theoretical courses are compulsory, but some are optional.

‘Research activities’ component

‘Research activities’ component includes studying educational and instructional materials and designing experiment stages for teaching technique/ techniques and/ or technology/ technologies approbation by students.

The importance of scientific research for forming and developing key professional skills of pre-service teachers is recognized by a number of Russian scholars (Taubaeva 2000, Khutorskoy 2003, Bishtova 2008, Lokhonova 2010, Sinitchenko 2013, Fahrutdinova *et al.* 2014, Pimenova *et al.* 2017, Vasileva *et al.* 2017) who assert that conducting research work at university allows pre-service teachers to learn how:

- to critically observe the pedagogical process in a particular situation and as a whole;
- to solve pedagogical problems by making use of theoretical knowledge from Pedagogy, Psychology, Didactics and other academic disciplines;
- to conduct a pedagogical experiment;
- to develop the capacity for creativity and self-realization in learning environments.

‘Research activities’ component offers a short optional course ‘Academic Communication’ which helps pre-service teachers develop their communicative competency.

‘Compulsory teaching practice in schools’ component

Compulsory teaching practice in schools' component is aimed at the approbation of teaching technique/ techniques and/ or technology/ technologies by students which shows value of professional experience as the core of teacher training curriculum, i.e. teaching practice allows students to model, develop and demonstrate their skills in the classroom, and relate their theoretical knowledge to practice (Milovanova 2007).

Compulsory school teaching practice has been the subject of a special study of Russian scholars (Kodzhaspirova et al. 2000, Tchurkova 2000, Khutorskoy 2001, Rozhkov 2001, Slastenin 2002, 2008, Halskova 2003, Chepikov 2004, Polonsky 2004, Andreev *et al.* 2006, Tchukin 2006, Kyrkunova and Kostyleva 2011, Fahrutdinova *et al.* 2014, Auhadeeva *et al.* 2015, Kozlova and Buslaeva 2015, Abdrafikova and Pimenova 2015) advocate the idea that compulsory school teaching practice:

- forms personal-motivational components of pre-service teachers' professional competencies
- focuses pre-service teachers' attention on new requirements to planning and conducting classes
- gives pre-service teachers an opportunity to observe the interaction of teachers, tutors and school students
- facilitates the development of pre-service teachers' individual style of teaching
- helps pre-service teachers picture a whole system of school education to develop their competitiveness
- encourages pre-service teachers to use modern technologies and effective teaching methods
- becomes an experimental platform for pre-service teachers to approbate teaching technique/ techniques and/ or technology/ technologies, collect data and design didactic materials
- makes a positive impact on pre-service teachers in terms of successful gender socialization, self-actualization, and self-identity.

During compulsory teaching practice in schools, students reveal the role of the supervising teacher who works out individualized instruction strategies and provides feedback to students based on evidence (assessment); the supervising teacher also equips students with proper learning settings for their acquiring teaching experience and creating a personal style of teaching (Zhirkova 2012). In accordance with the university program, compulsory school teaching practice of pre-service teachers is based on the collaboration of the following participants: a university professor who is responsible for organizing and monitoring teaching practice, in-service teachers (supervising teachers) who supervise pre-service teachers, and pre-service teachers. This scheme provides methodological guidance, systematic control and results in the efficient development of key professional skills of pre-service teachers.

Thus, the authors of this study consider the presented cyclical paradigm of teacher education to be an instrument for forming and developing key professional skills of pre-service teachers.

RESULTS

As an intermediate result of this study, a paradigm of teacher education, which constitutes the multi-staged cyclical process of organizing classroom teachers training, was designed (Figure 1).

‘Theory Learning at University’ Stage

At this stage different theoretical courses on Pedagogy, Psychology, Didactics are taught in three languages: in two national languages (Russian and Tatar) and English. University students – pre-service teachers – choose the language of instruction the moment they are enrolled in university. At the first stage, students are allowed to take the basics of theoretical courses. At the second stage, students may take theoretical courses at the advanced level.

‘Research Activity at University’ Stage

At stage I, there is organized students’ study of educational and instructional materials. The following topics are studied:

What is science and scientific research?

What are the methods in scientific research?

How to do a literature review? Etc.

At stage II, students are taught to answer such questions as:

How to formulate a hypothesis?

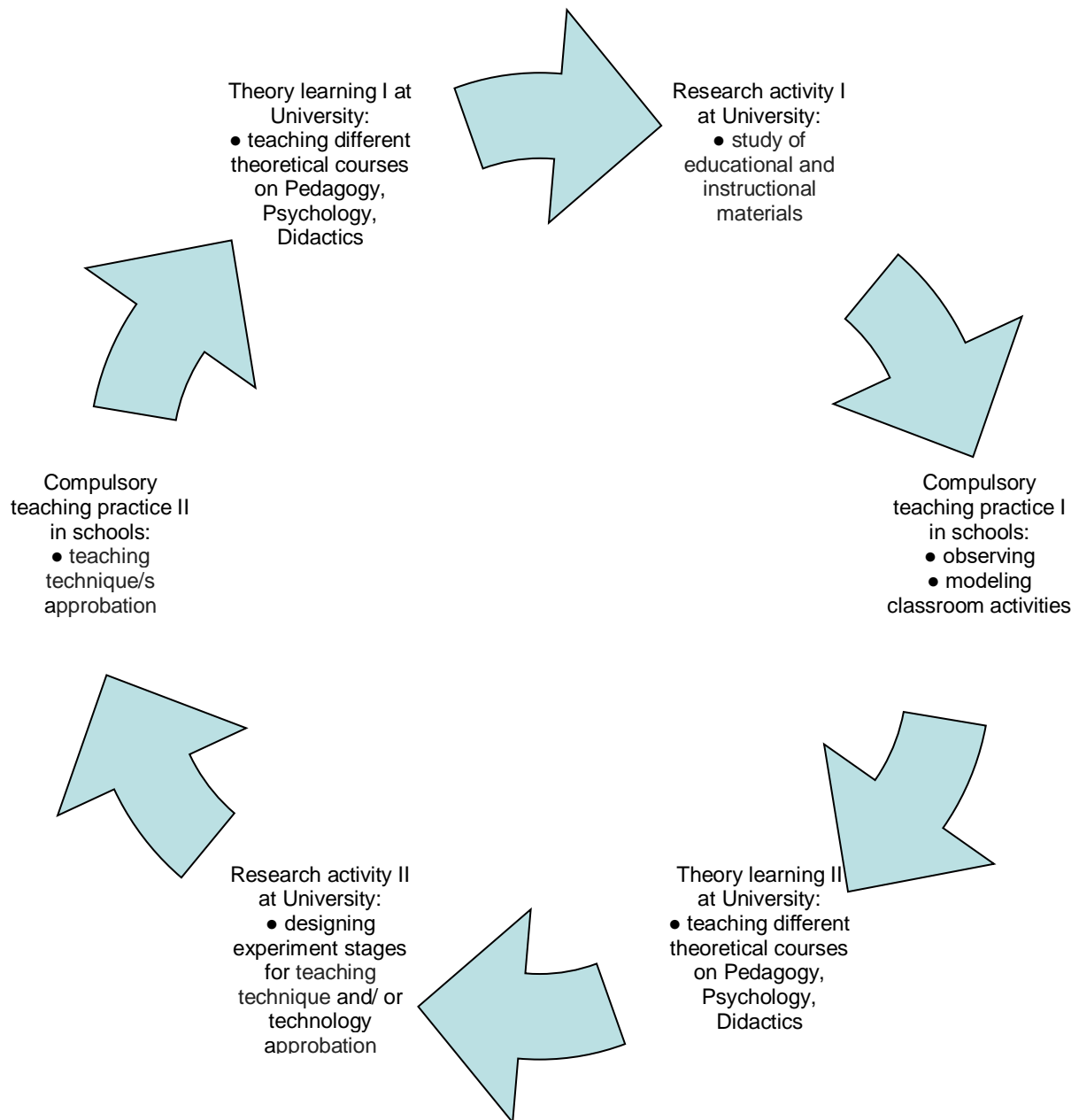


Fig. 1. The process of organizing classroom teachers training.

How to collect data?

How to plan and conduct an experiment?

What makes a scientific study valid?

How to present findings? Etc.

Training exercises, manuals and e-resources have been designed to help future teachers to answer the above questions.

‘Compulsory teaching practice in schools’ stage

This stage implies students’ observing classes and model classroom activities under in-service teachers’ supervision.

At the next stage pre-service teachers are to appropiate teaching technique/s that they have investigated while doing their research. The following proficiency skills of pre-service teachers are developed at this stage:

- choosing appropriate research methodology
- application of teaching technique/s
- implementation of classroom management.

At both stages, pre-service teachers are encouraged to keep a report for recording their professional development and reflections on their teaching so that they can analyze how their teaching impacts on their school students’ learning. During compulsory teaching practice in schools pre-service teachers search for a good answer to the question ‘What is an exemplary teacher like?’

DISCUSSION

According to the official statistics, Russia has always been given the highest attainment of university-level education in the world. These figures and facts are a good evidence of that:

◆ By a 2016 OECD estimate, 54% of Russia’s adults has attained a tertiary education, giving Russia the 2-nd highest attainment of college-level education in the world (OECD 2016).

◆ In 2016 the US company Bloomberg rated Russia’s higher education as the 3-d best in the world, measuring the percentage of high-school graduates who go on to attend college (Bloomberg 2016).

◆ One of the good things Russia inherited from the Soviet era is a high level of education, especially in technical areas so important for the New Economy (Stiglitz 2002).

However, lately the Russian teacher-training education system has been experiencing serious challenges. Number one challenge is the rapidly changing world which can't but influence teacher education in Russia. Another challenge is the shifting of values and priorities, possibly caused by the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the 1990-es. Migration processes make it a new challenge for Russian education. A classroom teacher has to be able to work in multi-cultural environments. The traditional gap between school and university is one more challenge the present-day Russian system of higher education has to deal with. This study may meet these challenges for it gives some answers to the key question: How to form and develop professional skills of pre-service teachers so that to have them become exemplary classroom teachers?

No doubt, quality teachers matter for quality teaching in classrooms, and quality teachers depend, to a great extent, on the quality of teacher education at the university (Flores 2016). Extending Flores's viewpoint, the authors of this study assert that the quality of education depends on both the teacher's professionalism and dedication to teaching.

SUMMARY

In this paper, there are outlined teacher education problems and approaches to solving them. The research was conducted in the large university in Tatarstan (Russian Federation) with a unique teacher training system which combines the classical and pedagogical university patterns thanks to which researchers worked out and approbated a cyclical paradigm of teacher education. The paradigm includes three components: theory learning at University, research activities, and compulsory teaching practice in schools. All the three aim at developing key professional skills of pre-service teachers which meet the challenges in the modern system of Russian teacher education.

CONCLUSION

This paper highlights approaches to educating pre-service teachers in Russia. A cyclical paradigm offered by the researchers comprises three components of

teacher training curriculum which combine theory and practice. The cyclical teacher education process can contribute to shaping an exemplary classroom teacher. Some general guidelines for university faculty are presented.

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