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**QUALITY OF EDUCATION:
GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT GOALS
AND LOCAL STRATEGIES**

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DIDACTIC ASPECTS OF THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM – CASE STUDY OF THE PROGRAM FOR IMPROVEMENT OF UNIVERSITY TEACHERS’ COMPETENCIES¹

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Abstract

Article presents an analysis of the didactic aspects of the professional development program created for university teachers from faculties in healthcare field. The program was created and implemented in 2018 as an integral part of the Erasmus+ project ReFEEHS. In this article we provide an evaluative review from the perspective of its creators and implementers, whereas classroom-level factors developed within the Dynamic model of educational effectiveness were used as a framework for the analysis. The aims of this analysis was to identify characteristics of the program for university teachers according to this model, to offer insights that could be used for development of similar educational programs, and to understand the scope and limitations of this approach to program evaluations. Results of our analysis showed that various qualities and didactical aspects of our program could be identified using Dynamic model, that numerous activities we conducted are in line with this model's recommendations while certain aspects of program could be improved, and that this approach to evaluation has strong points, but also some important limitations. Finally, implications of our findings are presented regarding teacher professional development and its importance for improvement the quality of education.

Keywords: teachers’ professional development, university teachers, higher education didactics, program evaluation, Dynamic model of educational effectiveness.

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Introduction

University teachers were for a long time respected mostly for expertise in their scientific discipline, whereas focus on their competencies for teaching and, consequently, trainings for improvement of such competencies, has recently become a trend in many European countries and wider (European Commission, 2011; Postareff, Lindblom-Ylänne, & Nevgi, 2007). As McLean & Bullard (2000) point out, changes in higher education in the past few decades, such as expansion in number of institutions and number of enrolled students, diversification of educational offer, introduction of quality assurance mechanisms in university teaching and research etc., also led to redefining the identity of university teachers. This redefinition was followed by a greater focus on education, training and accreditation of university academics as *teachers*.

Starting from the real world need to raise quality of higher education and pedagogical trend to make education more student-centred, new demands were being placed on university teachers regarding their activities in teaching (Biggs, 1999; Prosser & Trigwell, 1998; Ramsden, 2003). Concurrently, programs for training university teachers for their teaching roles began to be developed, given that professional development of university staff is seen a fundamental part of building quality culture in higher education institutions (Hénard, 2010). Along with comprehensive system of evaluation, support to professional development of university teachers and institutional policies that foster quality in teaching are recognized as core mechanisms of quality assurance and sustainability in higher education (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017, 2018; European University Association, 2018; Hénard, 2010). In different countries pedagogical training programs for university teachers vary in many of their features: *obligingness*² (compulsory pedagogical trainings or voluntary programs), *duration* (in terms of months-years and work hours), *format* (extended modules and courses, intensive short programs, seminars and workshops, part-time courses etc.), *target groups*, *certification requirements*, *aims*, *contents*, *methodology* (Chalmers & Gardiner, 2015; European University Association, 2018; Kreber & Brook, 2001).

Along with the development of various programs for higher education teachers' education, there is also a significant number of evaluation studies dealing with the quality of these programs. In overall, studies show that trainings had a positive impact on some of the *student-centred aspects of teaching*, both in terms of teacher self-reports and as perceived by their students (Cof-

2 Some authors, such as Baume (2006), described such situation as absurd since teachers at elementary and high schools do have to get certified for their competence to teach, which is seen as a way to establish teaching as a profession. Thus, university teachers really might be the last non-profession among teachers, as things are slowly changing towards putting systems of their professional development in place.

fey & Gibbs, 2000; Gibbs & Coffey, 2004; Hanbury, Prosser, & Rickinson, 2008; Ho, Watkins, & Kelly, 2001; Postareff, Lindblom-Ylänne, & Nevgi, 2007, 2008; Postareff & Nevgi, 2015; Stewart, 2014; Trigwell, Caballero Rodriguez, & Han, 2012; Van den Bos & Brouwer, 2014; Weurlander & Stenfors-Hayes, 2008). Also, teachers report that the trainings helped them increase their *confidence in teaching* and in their role as teachers (Hanbury, Prosser, & Rickinson, 2008; Ödalen et al., 2019; Stewart, 2014; Van den Bos & Brouwer, 2014; Weurlander & Stenfors-Hayes, 2008), made them more aware of their approach to teaching, which resulted in increased *sense of self-efficacy* (Postareff, Lindblom-Ylänne, & Nevgi, 2007, 2008).

As pedagogues, we recognize the importance of programs for the university teachers and the potential they have for improving the quality of the education overall. However, being the experts in the field of didactics, we were especially interested in examining didactical aspects of these programs. Hence, in this paper we used our first-hand experience as co-creators and implementors of one program for university teachers, which was realized in Serbia in 2018, in order to explore its didactic foundation. We conducted evaluation based on a contemporary theoretical model, wanting to find the implications for developing, implementing and evaluating similar educational programs, but also to recognize the importance of these programs for improving the quality of education. Before we present the results of this evaluation we will provide a brief description of the program.

About the Program

Within the Erasmus+ project ReFEEHS³ (Reinforcement of the Framework for Experiential Education in Healthcare in Serbia) multidisciplinary team of teachers from the field of pedagogy and andragogy, medicine and pharmacy developed the *Program for improving teacher and mentoring competencies for the education of health professionals* (hereinafter: the program). Overall aims of the program were to: improve teaching and mentoring competencies of staff at faculties from the healthcare domain and mentors who are working with students in clinical practice; improve quality of study programs in healthcare education; foster inter-professional cooperation in healthcare education. It was accredited as a program of continuing education at the University of Belgrade in 2018 and its first pilot implementation started in March 2018. Pilot included 40 teachers from faculties in healthcare domain (medicine, dentistry, pharmacy) from four state universities in Serbia (Belgrade, Novi Sad, Niš, and Kragujevac). Program was implemented through direct instruction (face-to-face workshops) and online learning (on Moodle platform) and it consists of five modules, each worth

3 See: <https://refeehs.com/>

30 hours of work, i.e. three ECTS. In this paper analysis is based on three modules that we will present very briefly.

The module dealing with *Teaching, learning and evaluation in healthcare education* consisted of two face-to-face workshops. One was introductory, dealing with reasons for interactive teaching and it included lectures by module trainers, but also group work and discussions among participants. The second workshop was at the end of the module (one month after the first workshop) and it was focused on participants' reflection on the process of work and learning. Between two workshops participants were required to follow weekly lectures and tasks on the Moodle platform and to participate in the forum discussions on topics initiated both by module trainers and other participants. The final assignment on the module was in a written form and required participants to provide as many ideas as possible on how to implement principles of interactive teaching.

In a way, continuation of this module were succeeding two modules *Teaching healthcare in academic context* and *Teaching and mentoring in clinical education*, which were focused on applying principles of interactive teaching in planning teaching in specific healthcare education domains, such as academic context and clinical context. These modules also included one introductory face-to-face workshop, mainly related to teaching planning, and one in the end of the modules (one month later). In the period between the workshops participants had weekly lessons and assignments, as well as forum discussion on the Moodle platform. Final assignment on these modules was to individually or in pairs plan one interactive class, implement it and write a reflection about it.

Research aims

The aim of our analysis was to explore didactical aspects of three modules of the program for university teachers, according to a theoretical model – Dynamic model of educational effectiveness (Creemers & Kyrakides, 2008). We expected that insights about didactical aspects of the program for university teachers could be used for developing and realizing various educational programs and for estimating their quality. Based on this analysis we also wanted to understand the scope and limitations of this approach to program evaluation.

Method

Our research approach to this evaluative study was based on introspection and collaborative reflection about our experiences as co-creators and implementers of one specific educational program.

Data collection

Since we wanted to explore very broadly defined didactical aspects of an educational program, the selection of the data was not predetermined, i.e. it was not very strict or rigid. In order to gather as much relevant data as possible we relied on written documents (anecdotal notes creators of the program recorded during the realization of the program, meeting minutes, and materials from the Moodle platform), different program products, alongside various oral contents and all recollections we found useful for our evaluation. Thus, we also relied on numerous discussions that were organized during the realization of the program and even after the program ended, when we exchanged impressions and notes, analyzed materials, and build a common understanding of the program. In these discussions all co-creators of three modules had an active role, but also most creators of other modules participated as well.

Data analysis

Gathered materials were analysed collaboratively by authors of this paper. Deductive thematic analysis was used based on *Dynamic model of educational effectiveness* as the conceptual framework. We decided to rely on this model because it allows the analysis of didactic features of education, it is sufficiently comprehensive, but also flexible to adapt to different situations of learning and teaching.

Dynamic model of educational effectiveness (hereinafter: DMEE) was created by Bert Creemers and Leonidas Kyriakides and it is based on empirical evidence in the field of educational effectiveness with the goal to understand why specific factors are associated with student achievement (Teodorović, 2016). The authors stress the generic nature of their model, so it is argued it could be used in different educational contexts.

The model recognizes education effectiveness factors at four different levels: context-level factors, school-level factors, classroom-level factors, and student-level factors. In this paper, we will focus on the factors that are recognized at the *classroom-level*, since we want to analyze the quality of *didactic aspects* of the university teachers' program. At classroom level, the authors identified eight factors that influence the quality of education, which are viewed as interconnected and interdependent (Creemers & Kyriakides, 2008). Here we will point out only the most significant characteristics of these factors as they are defined in the DMEE.

Management of time refers to the time spent on cognitive engagement in relevant teaching activities for most of the students. With the recognition that keeping all students fully engaged during the whole class is unattainable request, this factor is aimed at preventing unnecessary waste of time on secondary or irrelevant activities.

Classroom as a learning environment implies the positive climate in the classroom that will support students learning. This factor includes five components: student-teacher interaction, student-student interaction, students' treatment by the teacher, positive aspects of the competitive atmosphere, and classroom disorder.

Structuring can be defined as organizing the content of teaching in order to help students understand curricular topics. Therefore, this factor does not only concern the structuring of teaching work, but refers to all activities aimed at strengthening students mental structuring. In this sense, it is advocated that before teaching new topic there should be a reminder about what has been done on previous class; that it is important to announce next activities, to highlight key ideas and concepts, as well as to summarize what was done.

Orientation is a factor that deals with the purpose and importance of teaching contents and teaching activities. This factor involves not only looking at the value of certain teaching areas or lessons for a subject, science field or general education, but also the immediate benefit that students can recognize in acquired knowledge and skills, as well as linking teaching content with students' everyday life.

Application implies the immediate and direct application of acquired knowledge in the activities of solving problems and tasks. Impairment of practicing and application stems from the insight that this prevents the forgetting of learned contents, overcomes the problem of teaching contents being too abstract and decontextualized, but also encourages higher mental processes.

Questioning refers to the frequency and quality of the questions that are being asked in the class. This factor includes not only teachers' and students' questions, but also manner in which these questions are addressed. Teaching should include questions of different levels of complexity, of a different type and form, as well as to envisage enough time for students to think before they answer, and that teachers should react and respond to students' answers in a supportive way, etc.

Teaching-modelling implies mainly the help that teachers provide to students in terms of developing and using different strategies of learning, understanding of topics and problem solving. Although this factor also includes the use of different teaching materials and aids to explain the content, the focus is on encouraging students' thinking and their holistic development.

Assessment is a factor that covers the situations of summative and formative evaluation. Although the importance of grading is not neglected, the emphasis is placed on monitoring students' progress, giving students appropriate feedback, opening up directions for further development. Within this factor, the importance of teacher including students in planning of the forms, criteria and ways of evaluating work in the class, as well as empowering students to develop self-evaluation competences, is recognized.

Research findings and discussions

In the text that follows it will be presented how we, as creators and implementers of the program, perceive certain factors of the DMEE model in the modules of this program dealing with didactic problems.

1) *Management of time.* The issue of time planning and engagement of the participants was very complex, since it demanded a search for a balance between having a respect for significant burden of the participants in regular activities at their workplaces (which in the case of health professionals includes obligations at faculties and in health institutions), and the extent of the contents which are planned for these modules. The combination of face-to-face workshops and online training was introduced as an attempt to address this problem. Even though workshops were seen as necessary for the success of the module, we have decided to have only two per module, especially given that many participants were not from Belgrade. One of the main challenges with preparing the contents and activities of the module was to harmonize the level of workload on the face-to-face workshops and on the Moodle platform. This meant, first of all, to identify activities that would have to be done through face-to-face workshops, and to reconsider meaningfulness of certain activities on the Moodle platform, but also to find meaningful link between what is being done in these two modes of training. We have tried to avoid overloading of participants with materials on the Moodle platform, but at the same time, Moodle platform included sections that contained additional information and literature for those who were motivated to learn more about specific topics. With such an approach, we have tried to take into account the real context and the needs of participants, but also to show flexibility – by providing the opportunity for participants to do their tasks when they are able to and, depending on their needs and interests, to study more or less literature.

2) Bearing in mind the spatial limitation of this work, as well as the differences in the realization of our module compared to the work in the regular teaching, we will focus on only a few of the most prominent aspects of the stimulating *learning environment* factor. In the realization of the workshops we have used different methods of social organisation: frontal work with the whole group of participants, group work and work in pairs, individual work. These methods of work required different types of communication between the trainers and program participants, as well as among the participants. Interaction of trainers with individual participants was foreseen for the Moodle platform, through participation in forums (starting topics for discussion, participating in discussion that were initiated by participants) and by providing feedback for their assignments. There were fewer situations in which participants directly addressed trainers at the Moodle platform and a few discussions that were not mediated by module content, except related to technical problems with the platform.

In order to ensure the interaction between the participants in the group activities and work in pairs during the workshops, in the first activities of this type, participants could choose persons with whom they will cooperate. However, in the later phases of the training there were more frequent situations in which the module trainers formed groups so that the participants could get to know each other better and so that, by leaving their comfort zone, they could develop not only social skills, but also enrich the repertoire of possible approaches to the problem. The interaction among the participants was also supported by creation of forums on the Moodle platform, and the participants were obliged to make at least three posts during the module's implementation. Although it can be noticed that a significant number of participants were engaged in the forum discussions, the question of the justification of the "external" conditionality and the effects it has produced remains.

3) *Structuring* within the module we have realized can be identified in the efforts to organize the thematic units prepared for face-to-face workshops in a logical order, to find a balance between lecture activities and participants' activities. Additionally, we have tried to first get familiar with personal and professional experiences of the participants regarding a certain topic, and then offer insights from the field of pedagogy and didactics, and to find the ways to connect these two. In addition, through the emphasis of the module trainers, as well as through the activities of the participants, connections between the face-to-face workshops' content and those intended for work on the Moodle platform were made, but also between the activities within the related modules. Thus, the activities on the Moodle were typically a follow-up to the face-to-face workshops' content, and were conceptualised so as to allow participants to broaden and deepen the understanding of learned contents by reading new materials, to discuss with other participants and module trainers on forums, and to apply that content in a real context in which they work and to connect it with their experiences.

When it comes to fostering content structuring on mental level, the main challenge was the relatively wide variety in the professional experiences of participants who teach at various healthcare faculties, which differ in terms of years of work experience, titles, professional duties, etc. In addition, there were certainly differences in the level of participants' knowledge related to the field of pedagogy and didactics, since some of them had already attended various programs and trainings of this type, but there were also participants with very few or no such experience. We have tried to solve this problem by inviting participants to explicitly share their experience, views and starting points.

The second problem was to highlight key ideas and messages. Namely, the task to present the basics of interactive teaching within a one-month module for us, whose main field is the didactics, required a very careful selection of the most important topics and contents when planning this module. An additional problem was the respect of the principle of distinguishing the most important

concepts presented in the module, which should enable participants to identify key ideas. Although we did this partly during the workshops, we decided to use primarily the Moodle platform to fulfill this task. At the same time, the Moodle platform was a place where we performed a kind of summary of the work done, since, besides the new lessons, we also provided participants with a summary of the previously processed content during the workshops.

4) The representation of the *orientation* was based on the intentions we had in terms of empowering the insight into the importance of professional development of university teachers (general level), encouraging the recognition of the application of content and activities during the program (practical level), and in some cases in the inclusion of personal experiences and perspectives of individual participants (individual level). When focusing on orientation at the general level, the incentives we planned relied on the strong initial motivation of the participants (which was demonstrated during their application for this program, in their motivational letters). However, even in such situations, it is important to provide additional support and strengthen positive beliefs that already existed.

A distinctive challenge was to devise the orientation activities for the module, through which participants would become familiar with the theoretical and conceptual framework for teaching improvement. Knowing that it is very difficult to follow abstract content without concrete examples, but also without visible use value, we tried to find examples of the manifestation of the foreseen topics in teaching practice for each content area (medicine, pharmacy, dentistry). Often, participants were invited to provide examples or to disclose specific situations from their own practice. Since they were eager to respond to these calls and offered interesting and relevant examples, we gained the impression that the orientation at this level was manifested through exchange, and not through the declarative instruction of the possible application. We are convinced that this was the right approach, through which a higher quality of orientation was achieved.

Orientation at the individual level, however, within this module was only partially met. Namely, the time constraint and the relatively large number of participants, as well as number of the core topics that we were trying to cover, prevented more direct involvement of the individual needs and interests of the individual participants. This has been particularly pronounced during workshops. Given that we expected this to be a limitation in our work, we anticipated that the exchange that trainers had with the participants on the Moodle platform was a way of compensating for this shortcoming. However, we had an impression that within the initial month of the program's implementation this interaction could not reach its maximum, so that the individual interests of the participants in these circumstances were not fully addressed.

5) During the design of the training, we anticipated different situations in which the participants will think about the planned topics through the activities

of exercising and the *application* of previous experiences and new knowledge. For this purpose, various materials were prepared (printed work materials, posters, blank papers for recording experiences, etc.), and exercise activities were implemented through various forms of social organization. The difficulty of the tasks varied depending on the topic and the phase of the work, so that in the initial activities of acquaintance there were less demanding activities, primarily based on the previous experience of the participants, while the tasks were more complicated with the course of the program. At the same time, the nature of the tasks was varied, since some activities involved relatively easy recognition of similarities and differences, while other tasks required analysis and synthesis, and occasionally divergent thinking. Certain solutions to activate participants during workshops can also be characterized as “pre-lecture exercise”, based on the efforts to take into account the participants’ previous knowledge and experiences, but also to make the connection with the contents that are planned for later presentation.

When it comes to applications that were featured on the Moodle platform, the participants had tasks ranging from demonstrating basic knowledge of key concepts and ideas to linking what was learned with their professional experience. Also, final assignments on the modules required the application of knowledge in a real context. Since attaining the main goal – achieving a basic knowledge of contemporary didactic approaches at university level teaching – implied the need to adjust the workload, we took into account the number of tasks offered and the level of commitment attributed to individual activities on the Moodle platform. It was necessary to find a balance between what has been estimated that all participants should master and what might be incentive for those who were particularly interested in certain topics.

6) When preparing particularly important segments of the module, we used to formulate *questions* that were in the function of encouraging the involvement of participants in further exchange and sharing personal and professional experiences. However, many of the questions we asked during workshops were also spontaneous, arising from the interaction, with the aim of deepening the understanding of a particular topic, reconsideration of certain points of view and participants’ utterances. During the implementation of the module, we have tried to forward participants’ questions addressed to us to the other participants, and thus encourage the discussion that we will monitor and in which we will take part as equal participants. By doing so, we purposefully reduced our position as “teacher expert” and demonstrated that knowledge is created in a joint work, through co-construction of meaning.

In addition, a special space for participants’ questions was provided on forums created on the Moodle platform. In order to start the exchange and to model an approach to this segment of work we, as module trainers, set the first few topics on a forum in the form of questions. The initial responses of par-

ticipants to our questions were supported by additional posts and calls for other participants to express their views. The success of this idea was recognized in the situations that followed, and which emerged in the initiation of new topics based on the questions posed by the participants themselves. Our level of engagement in these discussions was decreasing and shifting from the role of facilitator and moderator to the role of equal participant in the discussion.

7) One of the forms of *modeling* could be identified in the way we prepared and realized modules based on the team work. Thus, during the workshops, all module trainers were present and were engaged in the work. Although there were segments for which certain trainer was in charge, the other team members followed the presentation, asked questions and offered additional comments, which contributed to the dynamics of the work, but also served as a model that could be used by the participants in their teaching. At the same time, taking on the role of trainers, we tried not to position ourselves as experts who “deliver didactic knowledge”, but as university teachers who continue to question their professional beliefs and re-think the decisions they make. This type of modeling is not directly focused on developing concrete learning styles, but it contains elements of developing thinking strategies and, as an immediate example, it models the stance towards teacher profession.

During the workshops, a variety of working materials were presented, as well as teaching methods and techniques, ways of organizing learning activities, which could be considered as an incentive for participants to reflect on their own teaching practice, compare it with the approach they could experience within these modules, and it can also be seen as an enrichment of their methodical repertory. Additionally, the program content itself also contributed to the goal since, besides learning about basic didactic concepts, it included concrete solutions that can be used in teaching. In this way, the connection between content and teaching methods during workshops was further enhanced, as well as the connection between theoretical knowledge and teaching practice.

Finally, the mere application of the Moodle platform as a supplement to face-to-face workshops could be understood as another way of expressing the diversity of approaches to teaching. Additionally, participating in the work on the Moodle, participants were able to understand the scope and limitations of this approach. This experience also helped them to examine the positive and negative aspects of the contents on the platform, the way they are displayed, etc. This experience could therefore be understood as the basis for the design and development of “technical” solutions that they could apply in their teaching.

8) During the face-to-face workshops, *evaluation* activities could only be recognized at the “micro level” in cases where the results of individual work or group of participants were acknowledged, in attempts to recognize what is worth, but also to indicate possible steps for further improvement. Activities on

the Moodle platform provided more space for getting to know the individual participants by reading and commenting on their forum posts. Although the final assignment of the participants received a numerical grade, emphasis was put on individual written feedback where positive aspects of the work done and suggestions for improvement were pointed out.

Bearing in mind that it was planned that the entire program, as well as the attendance of individual modules, result in obtaining the certificate, the assessment of final assignments could be considered as a summative evaluation of the participants' work. In order to ensure respect for the dedicated work of all participants, expectations were set, i.e. the "indicators" that the participants were supposed to meet in order to gain confirmation that they had successfully completed all the tasks. The assumption is that these predefined expectations have positively influenced some of the participants, providing external motivation, producing the impression of monitoring and evaluating their work. Therefore, although the application for the program was on a voluntary basis, the quality of the participants' engagement was ensured partially through these expectations.

It should also be noted that some issues related to the accomplishment of the final assignment were decided together with the participants and that part of the program in this way became somewhat flexible: the participants decided whether they will work individually or in pairs, what would be the role of each member of the pair, in which classes they will realize the activity, and they were also consulted about the deadlines for certain tasks.

Conclusions and implications

In this part of the paper, we will provide a reflection on the lessons we have learned through the analysis that we have performed. Firstly, we will discuss on desired qualities of programs for pedagogical training of university teachers. Subsequently, we will provide a critical overview of the performed analysis of didactical aspects of our program, for which we used classroom level factors of the DMEE. Finally, we will offer some implications that could be drawn about the improvement of the quality of education based on development of the university teachers' teaching competencies.

Qualities of the programs for pedagogical training of university teachers. Based on the analysis that we have performed three modules we focused on in this paper allowed us to identify various qualities and didactical aspects. In another words, we have recognized numerous situations where activities could be seen in line with the basic recommendations derived from classroom-level factors DMEE. At the same time, we identified some situations that could be improved according to DMEE. The insights we gained on important didactical aspects of programs for pedagogical training of university teachers we will briefly discuss

in order to point out possible suggestions for designing and implementing similar programs in the future. Even though these are not novel findings (similar ideas are found in findings about programs for teacher professional development and in didactics in general), it is important to mention that our analysis showed that it is possible to make use these features in programs for training of university teachers too.

Firstly, combining face-to-face workshops and online learning through Moodle platform, showed to be a good solution for implementation of this kind of program since it provides a *flexibility* to a certain extent – participants can perform learning tasks when it suits their time and at their own pace. However, our analysis also assured us that face-to-face interaction in teacher education and training cannot be completely replaced with online activities. A good feature of our program was also flexibility related to the extent of learning content, which was achieved by providing reading materials for those who are eager to learn more. Flexible approach was also present in terms of communication modes and forms. We have learned that it is also important to find a *balance* between lecture activities and participants' activities, as well as between different contents – theoretical knowledge, practical examples, and practical activities of participants themselves.

So as to ensure that participants recognize program's contents as *relevant*, it is useful to practice *interdisciplinary and team approach* when choosing topics and finding examples. For that matter, it is also useful to organize activities which serve for participants' orientation in the program and for pointing out to meaning and applicability of what is being learned in the context in which participants work. Tasks that participants perform should be *challenging and diverse*, and should include various channels for sharing experiences and ideas among the participants and between participants and trainers. It is important to note that role of the trainers should shift from expert to a more partner role, thus fostering partner role of the participants too. When it comes to programs for development of teacher competences, such approach should be demonstrated throughout the program, as an approach that we would like to *model* for our participants to practice in their own classes and with their own students. In line with that, it is important to plan *evaluation* of the process and results, which would have both formative and summative functions.

Based on our experience from implementation of the program, and analysis presented in this paper, we could also raise questions regarding some hardships and challenges, which require further reflection about the ways to address them, some of them being: how to create safe environment in which teachers would feel free to participate in discussion; how to provide support to different participants so as to ensure chances for their experimenting with new knowledge and skills, reconsideration of those experiences and reflection about them with their colleagues. These challenges are typical for short training programs and call for a search for qualitatively different forms of professional development.

Furthermore, we can argue that it was not enough that we, as creators and implementers of the program, were aware of the importance of different didactical aspects of the program and had active stance towards adjusting the program to the needs of our participants. For example, our awareness that participants are already too busy with their regular work led us to plan face-to-face workshops at times that we assumed will fit their schedule and to allow participants to choose by themselves when they will perform tasks on Moodle platform. However, decisions related to time management could be made together with participants. Similarly, when it comes to the factor related to characteristic of the learning environment, it would mean that we should consult and rely more on what is incentive for the participants themselves, rather than solely on our knowledge from didactics. In terms of assessment, such approach would include participants in decision making regarding obligatory assignments, means for performing them etc. In overall, *teachers' participation in decision making on important aspect of the program* is particularly important for programs of teacher education and training, given that it models an approach to education that we would like the participants to use in their own practice.

Overview of the limits and scope of the performed evaluation of the program. First of all, we should acknowledge that for the evaluation of the program it is not enough to present solely the perspectives of its creators and implementers and that it should include the *perspective of its participants*. Also, we were focused on the features of the program design itself and process of its implementation, while *results of the program*, primarily in terms of its contribution to participants learning and changes in their understandings and approaches to teaching and learning, were not included, although they could be useful for accomplishing a more comprehensive evaluation and perspective on qualities of the program. In addition, the evaluation of the program could be conceived within *different research approaches*, e.g. data could be collected by external researchers through systematic observation, video and/or audio recording, monitoring of the process, as in ethnographic studies. In our evaluation, we have wittingly chosen to use one perspective – the one of program implementers. By doing so, not only we provided one important perspective on the program, but we have tried to be self-critical about our own practice. Starting from the postulates of qualitative methodology, defying positivistic notions on “objective knowledge” about the reality which is achieved through researcher’s distance from what is being researched, in this paper we aimed to provide a sort of self-evaluation of one program in whose creation and implementation we actively participated. Hence, by the paradigm we have chosen we did not seek for comprehensive evaluation so as to reach an objective knowledge about the qualities of that program. Our aim was not to perform evaluation of such kind, but to enquire into possibilities to analyze didactical aspects of the program, by using one specific theoretical model.

Trainings for university teachers and improvement of quality of education – could there be a link? The connection between improvement of university teach-

ers' competencies and quality of education as a whole surely is not a direct one, especially not causal. It seems more reasonable to perceive these competencies as an integral part of overall quality of education, alongside with many other very important factors. However, we think of the university teachers as specifically important actors who have great influence on other levels of educational system, but also on pedagogically relevant notions, values, ethos etc. That is why we believe that investing in development of their pedagogical competencies should be one of the pivotal areas of educational efforts.

In order to strengthen university teachers' pedagogical, i.e. teaching competencies it is crucial to enable them to experience during the training the practice we want them to adopt and develop. One of the key facets of progressive educational approach is to emphasize the importance of participation and ownership of the educational process. Learners' participation in decision making regarding various aspects of the program, and program's flexibility and openness, could be used as distinct factors of quality, especially when it comes to programs for teacher education and training. The ways to include perspectives of different actors about the program should be found, but also to include participants in the final evaluation of the program's effects, in the process of program development etc. If we allow teachers to experience all the benefits of this approach, we are increasing the probability they will practice that with their students. In that way, relatively small change we make at the beginig could end in massive change, as a snowball effect.

Clearly, participation is not the only aspect of quality teaching, or quality education; we use it in this paper just as an example for the effect university teachers' professional development could have in educational sphere. Also, we want to stress that improving teaching competencies of university teachers should not be seen just as a particular change in education, since programs of this kind have a great potential to change teaching practice in a long run. If their competencies are truly developed, university teachers will continue to reflect on and improve their teaching, even after program ends. However, if we want to make substantial and sustainable educational changes, wider activities have to be initiated and coordinated on all levels, in different segments.

Finally, we believe the insights we offer in this paper could go beyond the context of our program and serve as an impetus for creation, realization and evaluation of the vast number of educational programs. However, this does not mean our findings could be seen as universally applicable for all types of education programs. On the contrary, we advocate that local context and all the specific condition have to be acknowledged when educational program is developed or implemented. But shared experiences – like the one we offer in this paper – could help to reconsider whether some similarities can be found, or some solutions could be used, adopt or modify in order to achieve certain educational goal.

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