APPLICATION OF CONCEPTS OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGY AT SLOVAK UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract - Concepts of university education are created from theoretical and research background of individual teaching conceptions, society´s requirements, cultural habits of a nation and its historical development. Their theoretical processing depends on the progress of university pedagogy. The establishment of university pedagogy in Slovakia began in the second half of the 20th century. University pedagogy was developing until 1989 when due to radical political changes it fell into stagnation. Now we can see that university pedagogy is again going through a phase of development as a result of the need to change the approach to educational process at universities and its realization in connection with creating an inclusive environment for all students. The article introduces the concept of "Efficient Learning Environment" which is currently the most common concept being realized at Slovak universities and adapts it to the needs of an inclusive environment. It also submits the results of a pilot survey of university student´s opinions of activating lectures realized within the new concept of university education. The article also presents a short interpretation of the results of a pilot study. The article was funded by the Cultural and Educational Grant Agency of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic KEGA under grants 020UCM-4/2021 "Education in theory and practice" andKEGA004UCM-4/2022 „Promoting Health and Well Being through inclusive education in Higher Education".

Keywords - Activating Educational Activity, Inclusive Pedagogy, University Education, University Student, University Teacher

I. INTRODUCTION

University teaching is a complicated process which is realized under mutual connection of several components. Although this standard statement is true, today university teaching is viewed more as an environment creating optimal conditions for students´ learning. Inclusive pedagogy presumes the environment will be optimal for all students, even those with specific educational needs. In this context university education is, according to Cowan, an important part of a chain cycle of student´s learning and the activities realized during university teaching require not only active participation of a teacher, but the students´ as well [3]. An inclusive university mitigates the creation of simple processes that support all students.

II. THEORETICAL PREREQUISITIES

A complex view of university education can also be found in the work of Vašutová. She characterises it as paradigms, didactic models or concepts reflecting theories, methodologies, pedagogical trends and educational connections starting from macro-level like educational policy or educational system all the way to micro-level represented by, for example, teaching conditions in a study group [10]. Light and Cox deal with the paradigms of university teaching and study in the context of the second half of the 20th century [5].

The first paradigm they call "ad hoc" and they place its existence into the horizon of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s and connect it with the phasing-out elite systems of students´ participation in university education. The teaching and the studying depends on each and every teacher and student. It is based on individual and informal collecting and grasping of knowledge. The teaching approach depends on the teacher´s tendencies or on the trial and error in his/her pedagogical praxis.

The first paradigm was almost immediately (in 1970s) followed by the second paradigm, so called paradigm of skills. The teaching and studying are viewed as "add on" processes. It lies in a gradual accumulation of performance and communication skills, competencies and ideas. These skills are "generic" and are often mediated by teachers who have no formal experiences in their teaching discipline or in university teaching. The realization of teaching is transferred onto supporting services that create an institutional background and the teaching is separated from academic activities. The third paradigm of teaching and studying at a university which the authors present as the current one is called "professional". It concentrates on quality and professionality necessary for real professional life.
The professional paradigm and the changes of the understanding of university teaching can also be seen in current concepts of university teaching. They arrive from concepts of teaching and studying of the last century mainly from behaviourism, cognitive constructivism, social constructivism and humanism. They implement many positive elements of these concepts into university teaching. The concepts of university teaching, which are being applied in

Slovakia today, are those that reflect preferred areas of university education. They include:

1) The area of activating students in the process of education.

The area of developing the competencies of university students focused on improving their future possibilities of employment.The concept that includes both of these areas is the concept of "Efficient Learning Environment". The elements of this concept are described by Hunt, Chalmers and Macdonald [4]. The often cited Ramsden´s phrase "The target of teaching is simple: to make it possible for students to learn" is the focal idea of this concept [7]. At an inclusive university this means to allow even the students with specific educational needs to learn and to cultivate their personal and professional competencies.

The core of the concept lies in the teaching processes which support students´ learning in optimal environment with positive atmosphere. What is considered the optimal environment and positive atmosphere at an inclusive university? The optimal environment is one that enables the progress of all students, as well as the development of their competencies to the extent allowed by their knowledge, abilities, skills, diverseness or handicaps. Positive atmosphere is a creative one that is characterized by mutual trust, cooperativeness and friendship of all participants. The key elements of the concepts are:

The choice of content

When choosing the content it is important to take into account the subjects that the student´s had studied before and the ones that will follow. This will suggest the required width and depth of the content. There is a difference between the content that is "necessary to know" and "good to know". The content that is "necessary" to know must dominate in expert subjects. The students can be explicitly provided with this necessary knowledge via formal teaching and sources such as lesson notes or Internet sources by directing the students to this information through activities realized during teaching, through controlled individual study and evaluating exercises. The content of subjects leading to development of a particular competency realized via seminars or workshops should be the content which is "good to know". This creates space for controlling the content in a way that contributes to integrated learning experience through which the students learn both the content and the skills and develop their personal abilities as well.

2) Using various types of educational activities

The departure from didactic teaching, which is sometimes described as the shift from the "clever on the stage" model to the "guide on your side" model, is criticized by McWilliam who claims that the teachers should be "the mediators in the middle" [6]. These are teachers that encourage students to think and understand things in a new way. To do this, the university teachers need a whole range of activities which actively engage students into the learning process. Scott in a survey involving almost 95,000 graduates found out that there were two groups of students [8]. The first group consists of students that appreciate interactive strategies of learning in class, such as groups of creative workers, discussions, lectures and working in small groups focused on mutual learning. Students with specific educational needs could benefit from adding activities that include learning packages used at one´s own pace and Internet modules on certain themes or the whole subject. In this phase the students of the other group come into play. They say that they don´t need to be at school or with a teacher to learn efficiently. Both groups of students, however, appreciate a chance to apply what they are learning through practically based learning and learning through problems. This includes case studies and visits in the field, e.g. simulated court trials or lab work.

3) Planning of the efficient learning environment in large groups.

Lecture is the most traditional form of university education. Two lines of university pedagogy theorists currently come into the foreground. The first line presents an idea that in the context of the current departure from didactic processes of learning towards the processes that involve the students, lectures had lost their reputation as efficient ways of learning. According to Barnett "a formal lecture is a refuge for timid teachers and students. It closes communication channels, freezes up the hierarchy between the teacher and the student and relieves the student of any responsibility to react… students remain mere observers, the lecture remains the zone of comfort… disturbing of the students is kept at a safe distance" [3].

Contrary to this, the other line claims that a "brilliant" presentation of a well-organized teaching material from a teacher who is passionate about his subject is worth a large number of student´s discussions in small groups. The core of a discussion is to understand what lecture really is. Lecture can be didactic or interactive, involving the students. According to Baine "lectures of highly efficient teachers, however, almost always possess the same five characteristics of natural critical learning… They start with a question (sometimes as part of a story), continue with an attempt to help the students to understand the meaning of this question (connecting the question with bigger questions, asking the question in a provocative way, stating its consequences), encourage students to critically think about the given question, they create an argument about possible ways of answering the question (together with evidence, reasoning and conclusion) and they finish all of this with conclusions" [1].

There are, however, some exceptions. Sometime the best teachers don´t disclose their own answers while the less successful teachers often only mention a given element, an answer to a question that nobody had asked.

The concept assumes that teachers apply all the basic characteristics of good university teaching during their lessons. They prefer using the activating lectures such as a lecture with problem statement, a binary lecture, a lecture with mistakes planned in advance, a lecture using the EUR strategy, a visual lecture and others. But how do students see the above mentioned lectures? We searched for the answer to this question in a pilot survey. 289 students of teaching study programs of the Philosophical Faculty of UCM in Trnava (Slovakia) participated in the survey. The gender ration, however, wasn´t balanced as 80% of the respondents were women which is a natural phenomenon of choosing a teaching profession is Slovakia. The respondents stated their opinions in their own words via a questionnaire with open-end entries. They wrote about the positives and the negatives of activating lectures realized during the semester. Based on the positive theoretical characteristics of activating lectures that can be found in literature today, it would have been natural to expect only positive comments. However, from a simple sum of collected entries it was clear that student perceived activating lectures also in a negative way. The most common negative comment was connected to the need of preparing for the lecture. It was chosen by 11% of the respondents. Another drawback, closely connected to the need of preparing for the lecture, was also the problem of not understanding the content of the lecture or an inability to mentally participate on the teacher´s commentary (7%). The most prevalent positives of activating lectures were:

Creating space for discussion. 92% of students stated that by discussing the subject of the lecture they were able to remember more than by only listening to the teacher´s commentary.

Developing communication skills. 84% of students noticed their ability to correctly formulate a question or a problem and thanks to discussing the subject also an improvement in the overall communication, especially in the area of the expert and scientific terminology.

Increasing motivation toward further study. 89% of students stated that after the lecture they informally discussed the subject with their fellow students and searched for more information about the theme or a problem via self-study.

Improving the atmosphere during the lecture. 97% of students perceived an improvement in the atmosphere during the lecture, especially by creating a positive relationship with the teacher based on the principle of collegiality and mutual respect of personalities and opinions.

Acquiring more complex knowledge with interdependencies on other taught subjects. 75% of students appreciated mainly the fact that they acquired more complex knowledge that enabled them to understand mutual connections with other subjects [9].

Based on the above results we can state that there are many arguments in favour of using activating lectures in the university teaching process. They could also strengthen the quality and efficiency of a lecture which now depends not only on the teacher, but also on the student´s reactions. A student should be able to not only learn the facts, but also to critically confront them with his own experiences, to create his own opinions, attitudes and values and to utilize his own knowledge in favour of improving the quality of his own personal life and his future profession.

4) Planning an efficient learning environment in small groups

A common form of teaching in small groups is a seminar focused on active participation of students. A content presented at lectures or in a controlled individual study is often used in seminars. Similarly to lectures there are many commonly used forms of activating methods that contribute to the creation of efficient learning environment in seminars. As an example Hunt, Chalmers and Macdonald state the jigsaw puzzle method. This method ensures that each student can in a unique way contribute to a discussion in a small group. It is called the jigsaw puzzle because each student works only on one task that he later connects (as a jigsaw puzzle) to information the other students had created [4]. This enables students to see a complex picture of a given theme. This is not only an activating but also an efficient method of learning as students must be able to explain to other colleagues and to the teacher the choice of their answers or solutions to a given task which positively influences the quality of learning. The teacher closes up the discussion by summarizing important ideas and answering all the questions which had surfaced in small groups or by confirming the correct answers the groups had come up with.

Using the jigsaw puzzle method can help avoid a problem, common in small groups, when certain students ignore the given task and hide behind the work of other fellow students. Initial individual study and making sure that students understand the task can secure that during the final activity each group consist of well-informed participants.

Another problem of teaching in small groups is the fact that students don´t read the task and even if they read it they don´t possess sufficient analytical skills to critically analyse the text. At the beginning of a university study this is the first skill students must be taught and not be expected to acquire it themselves. Therefore it is necessary to create as many situation as possible to develop students´ critical thinking not

only in seminars but also by submitting tasks for self-study. Although the system of regular reading is not new, it is starting to be again the preferred technique in university education. It is a technique that encourages students to read systematically, to deal with problems and analyse them and thus develop their critical thinking. The system is extremely flexible and can be adjusted to suit various group sizes, for a study through the Internet and for various disciplines. The methodology is simple. Each week students receive a different coloured card where they summarize the prescribed reading of the week. Next week they discuss their notes in class. The cards are small which forces students to write only the key points. After discussing their notes in class students hand in their cards and the teacher keeps them until the exam time. The cards can be handed in only during the week following the week when the reading task was given. This encourages regular reading. On the day of the exam the teacher hands back the collected cards to their owners who can use them during the exam. This is a voluntary motivational system, but students quickly realize its advantages. Although the system of regular reading might seem trivial at first sight, students´ testimonies clearly show that many of them are very enthusiastic about it and they say that thanks to this system they started studying more. Students with specific educational needs appreciate this method due to the fact that in their home environment, they can choose their own pace and use special tools for reading and taking notes. The goal is to achieve continuous individual studying and not continuous judging of all students. There is another noteworthy method used in educational process and that is the method of model educational representation.

5) Planning of the efficient learning environment in workshops.

The traditional model of university education through lectures and seminars can be creatively amended by establishing workshops. In Slovak university education exercises and trainings are used as an analogy of workshops. The model of workshops is characterized by an open learning space, but its main attribute is the creation of an interactive experience with the curriculum. Workshops should utilize more strategies of learning. One workshop may contain a discussion about the texts for reading prescribed for the week, a jigsaw puzzle group discussion, simulating games or watching of a video and writing answers to prepared questions. The preparation for a workshop must follow the targets of a given subject and should concentrate on facilitating the development of certain traits and skills which are necessary for successful fulfilment of given tasks. The task of a teacher is to "be the intermediary in the middle" and help students to cooperate with other students and develop and widen their understanding of the subject and their skills.

6) Reinforcement of the acquired knowledge and self-reflection in efficient learning environment.

Reinforcement is a basic element of creating an efficient learning environment. Hunt, Chalmers and Macdonald say that reinforcing means not only asking students "Tell me how much you know," but "Show me an evidence of what you have learned, how well you think you have learned it and what could help you to learn it better. Tell me what areas you think you could have learned more about and how you would go about doing it" [4]. Reinforcement can be performed anytime, not just at the end of a semester. For example using regular informal small quizzes as part of lectures, seminars and workshops all the way to formal evaluations where students must present their understanding or skills can efficiently contribute to reinforcement of their understanding of the acquired knowledge and offer them a chance to think about the quality of their learning. Therefore it is necessary to make sure that students have a chance to discuss their problems with learning and be helpful in solving them. An optimal feedback on the performance during lectures, seminars or workshops is an important part of reinforcement

III. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, for the implementation of the said concept of university education at an inclusive university it is necessary to pay attention to the freshmen students in their first year of studies. It is especially important in the beginning of their studies to create an inclusive environment for the needs of different groups of students, one that eases their transition to university education and increases the probability of them successfully graduating. During the creation of an inclusive environment it is essential to pay attention mainly to these aspects:

- adaptation to an inclusive environment, diversity of curriculums while retaining the content of education – considering the fact that students have specific needs due to their societal, cultural inclusion and health condition,
- intentional integration based on the level of knowledge, abilities, skills and outlooks of students, interactive education that allows for active and cooperative learning – cooperation between the students and interaction between the teacher and the students,
- feedback – regular and formative evaluation of the work of each student, their progress and their achievements,
- evaluating and monitoring of all students in the process of learning, finding ways to prevent learning failures of the students.

Finally, we need to state that the concept is mainly about offering students the opportunity for interaction and participation and about checking and reinforcing

the acquired knowledge. The task of a teacher is through activating methods in all forms of educational process to create a positive atmosphere enabling all students to gain a positive experience not only with the educational process itself, but also with the process of their own learning.

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