

POSSIBLE WAYS OF INNOVATION IN VOCATIONAL TEACHER TRAINING IN HUNGARY

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The best way during an ecological crisis towards solution is innovation. That is the only way not only for Europe, but for the Hungarian vocational education and training (VET) too. Since 2000 many European Union documents have emerged regarding Lifelong and Lifewide Learning, which have been forcing vocational training schools, teachers, trainers and VET teacher education and training at universities to act in new ways. Is it possible to learn and teach the innovation? What are the ways of innovation for vocational schools and VET teacher education and training? Opening vocational schools towards adult education and preparing pre-service VET teachers for facilitating innovative learning both of the staff at their future workplace in educational (school) context and of their adult students, can cause a breakthrough in vocational education and training. The essay will focus on the innovation of vocational teacher training as a specific field in the frame of initial and continuous professional development. Proposals for that innovation and research findings underpinning them will be discussed in this paper.

Keywords: vocational education and training (VET), adult education, VET teacher education and training, innovation, learning organisation, resilient organisation

The European context

In spite of progress in many fields in Europe, the population of adult non-learners is still 50 million, more than it was 10 years ago, and the employments rates (69% on average for those aged 20-64) are lower than in other parts of the world. The European Commission has elaborated a strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth as an output from global ecological crisis (European Commission, 2010a). According to the document, there are three possible scenarios for Europe by 2020 (see Fig. 1). Sustainable recovery is the most optimistic option. Sustainability and inclusive education are not new in educational terminology. Smart growth means developing the economy based on knowledge and innovation.

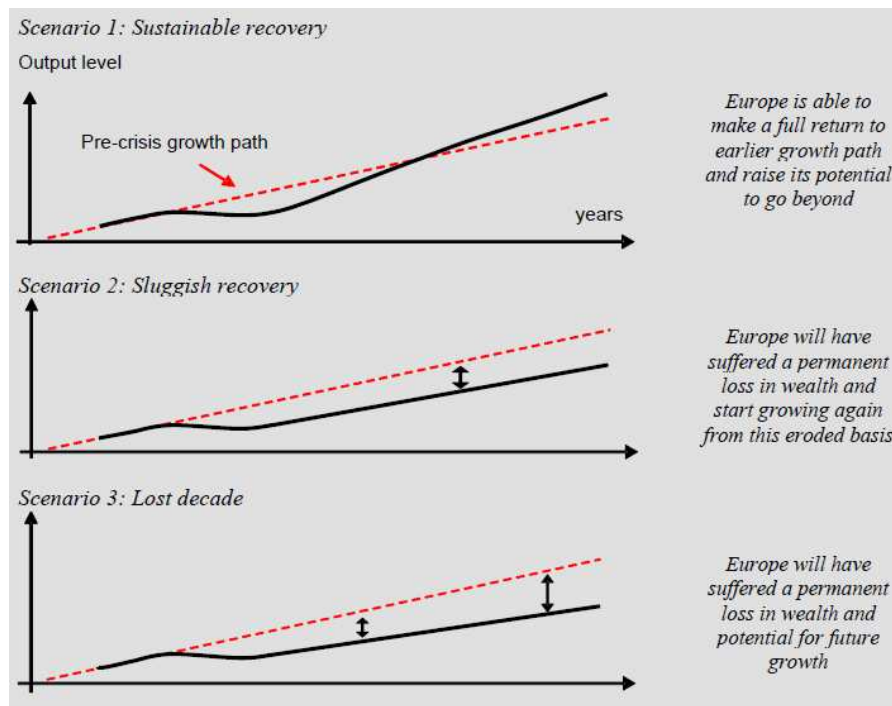
Lifelong and life wide learning (both general and vocational) could be reactions to the economical processes on the one hand, and missions of serving the lifelong development and socialisation of personality on the other hand. The so-called 'Copenhagen process' from 2002 in the history of vocational education and training has been increasing chances for mobility

in the European Union, which serves lifelong and lifewide learning too. Increasing European mobility needs the consideration of principles of quality, transparency and acknowledgement (validation) of prior experiential learning (Education and Culture DG, Cedefop 2008).

Some relevant specific aspects of another EU document, namely the Education and Training 2020 (ET 2020) reinforce that teachers' initial and continuous training has a crucial role in the improvement of the quality and efficiency of education (European Commission, 2010b). Increase of the attractiveness and relevance of VET became a guideline of the Hungarian VET policy as well. Among others the European Qualification Framework can serve as a basis for the development of the Hungarian vocational education and training. The implementation of the common objectives of the member states (e.g. transparency, recognition and quality of competences and qualifications) were outlined in the frame of the peer learning activities and studies related to the topic of VET teachers and trainers with taking the national characteristics into consideration. The outcomes of the Hungarian part of that cooperation – regarding teacher education and training - were summarized by Falus and Kotschy (2008).

Future objectives of the European Union (among others increasing the number of participants in adult education) reinforces the importance of adult education, which needs increasing number of *competent adult educators* especially in vocational education and training in the context of lifelong learning. Fulfilling that objective requires high quality education and training of adult educators, who possess special competences. What are the opportunities for the Hungarian vocational teacher training to contribute to those European processes and benefit for our country?

Figure 1 Three scenarios for Europe by 2020



(Source: EC, 2010:9)

The Hungarian situation

After issuing the European Memorandum on Lifelong Learning in 2000, it has been accepted and given a great consideration by each government in Hungary too. But most of the vocational schools have been facing massive and continual difficulties because of the global crisis of economy and reduced sources (though some successful projects have been supported by EU and national sources). Many of the schools have already been accredited as institutions of adult education as well. That can make us optimistic, but it urges solving of *the problem of educating and training adult educators for vocational education*.

Considering the European models of the current governmental VET policy, the new Hungarian type of institutions of vocational education, named the Regional Integrated Centres of VET (TISZK) represents the Dutch model of development of vocational education and training as a good practice in Europe. Their advantage is that they can ensure the transparency of the system of vocational education and training. These multifunctional institutions were established by fusion of former VET schools some years ago in Hungary, and they offer a diversity of VET programmes for adults as well. Therefore *they urgently need VET teachers and trainers, who are competent in adult education*.

The other preferred model of the current national VET policy is the German, practice-oriented dual system, which enhances the tight relation between the work places and the institutions of VET. The labour-centrality is the basis of the new up-to-date Hungarian VET policy trends such as the VET aspects of the Hungarian Reform Program, or the New Széchenyi Plan. The VET reforms are planned in accordance with the renewing of the national public education and higher education systems and aim to compose the basis of the “national teacher career model system”. The follow-up of the professional development and career-orientation are among their priorities as well (Czomba, 2011; Parragh, 2011; Juhászné, 2011).

Challenges like global economical crisis, increasing chances for European mobility and unemployment (sometimes also among career starters) make teachers and trainers work out safe survival strategies in creative ways in our present society. Some of them make corrections in their careers or turn toward new roles of teachers and trainers. One of those new roles could be *the role of adult educator*. The roles of the pedagogue and adult educator have to be clearly distinguished in teacher education and training, and the adult educator’s role must not mean only the imparter of knowledge, but rather the innovative facilitator of learning.

With analyzing curriculums of many Hungarian teacher education and training institutes Laszlo Zrinszky prognosticated in 2003 that adult education could be one of the most promising content of teacher education (Zrinszky, 2003). One of the latest identifications of characteristics of adult learning were summarised by Anna Sz. Molnár (2009)

Traditional curricula of VET teacher education and training in Hungary did not include knowledge about adult education, but global and EU trends for lifelong learning inspired the teacher training institutes of some universities to have accredited a new curriculum including adult and continuing education both at bachelor and mastery level as new subjects for pre-service VET teachers and trainers recently. Students may register for the subject only after finishing basic courses in pedagogy.

Theoretical framework of innovation of VET teacher education and training

Can theory help the practice-oriented vocational education and training survive in the context of global (and local) crises and changes? Do we need (also) *the Theory* (of facilitating adult learning in VET) in the age of searching for *Best Practices*?

Ekkehard Nuisl would answer, that the theoretical reflection of practice has to be reinforced (Nuisl, 1999) on the one hand, and according to the philosophy of *constructivism*, theories as constructs help to understand and may orient the practice on the other hand. That means, if one has good theories about facilitating innovative adult learning, it may orient his or her practice. Adult learning theory is considered constructivist in nature. The essence of constructivism as epistemology is that one's brain does not mirror the reality as it really exists, but the brain builds up (or in other words constructs) its own reality or ideas about the world, learning, innovation and everything. That process is based on life experience. Social constructivist position postulates that reality is socially constructed. The primary criterion for constructing individual ideas is not the objectivity or truth of an idea, but its *viability*, namely its fitting into the person's previous ideas (constructs), into the story of his/her life (Siebert, 2006). The aim of facilitating adult learning in a constructivist way is to widen the repertory of ways of thinking and acting. Learning is not determined mainly by teaching, but rather by cognitional structures of the learner's mind. These structures are in connection with biographical experiences and preconceptions. Helping adults learn is offering the opportunity for them to make connections (toward compatibility) between different constructs on the subject of learning, thus offering the opportunity for them to build more structured, more complex and better informed „mind maps” than they had before the learning activity. That is why those correspondent pre-service VET teachers, who had more experience in learning with adults, were more open towards adult education, than the younger full-time students (Feketéné Szakos, 2007).

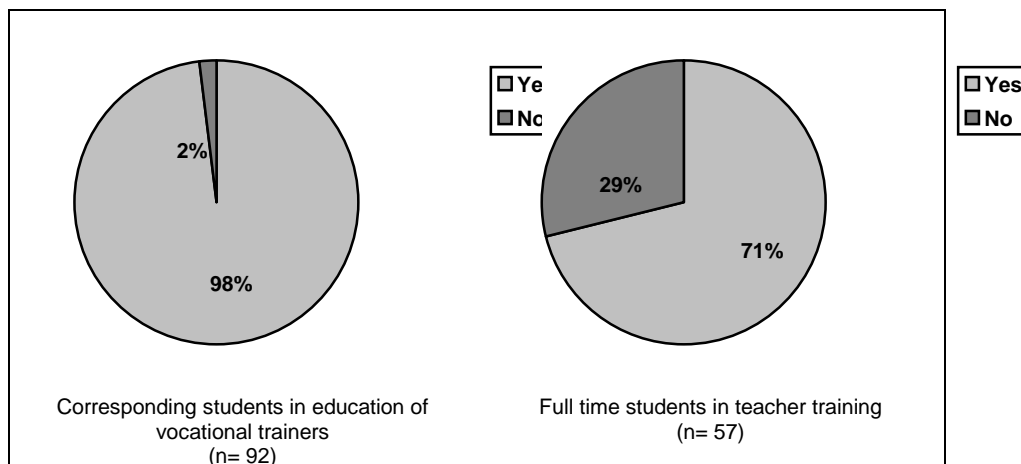
Putting theory into practice –efforts for the innovation of the Hungarian VET teacher education and training

Considering the above discussed European context, the guidelines of the EU, the priorities of the current VET policy of Hungary and the up-to-date theories of adult learning, new practical and theoretical initiatives could be elaborated for the Hungarian VET teacher education and training. Two possible ways of renewing of the vocational teacher training in Hungary will be discussed in this chapter. One of them is an implemented effort for introduction adult education as a new subject into the VET teachers' training, and the other one could be the introduction of a new topic titled “The theory and practice of innovation” into the curriculum of adult education or as a separate subject into the VET teacher training.

Designing the curriculum of the subject *Adult and continuing education* has been started with charting pre-service VET teachers' prior knowledge, views, attitudes and needs towards serving as an adult educator in vocational education and training and test courses were performed at Szent István University at the Institute of Career Planning and Teacher Training. Attitudes of full-time and part-time (correspondent) students in vocational teacher training towards adult education and serving as an adult educator were investigated by questionnaires, and feedback from the participants of

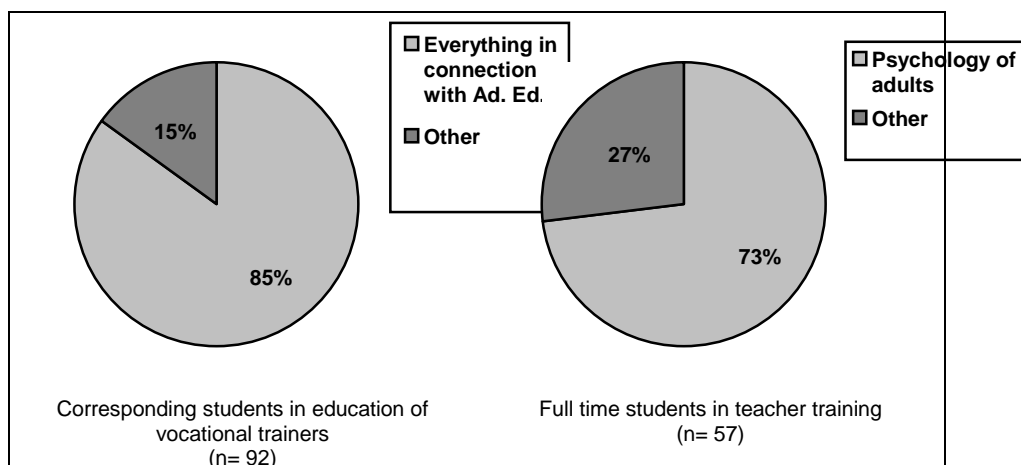
the test courses was gained by interviewing them (see Fig. 2, 3). As one can see from the figures, students in vocational teacher training are highly motivated to serve as adult educators and to study about adult education. Methodological details of the investigation are discussed in other publications (Feketéné Szakos, 2007), the present study pays attention especially to the innovative aspect of the initiative.

Figure 2 Would you say Yes, if you were asked to fill the part of an adult educator after getting your degree?



(Source. Feketéné Szakos, 2007)

Figure 3 Would you like to have study of adult education integrated into your studies?



(Source. Feketéné Szakos, 2007)

Results of the investigation have confirmed the necessity of integration of Adult and continuing education into the curriculum for training of agriculture teachers and of vocational trainers. Considering the interviews with participants of the pre-service VET program, students welcome more attention to lifelong learning and adult education. This is consistent with trends in the European Union and other locations, as prognosis of EU predicts 5-7 changes or modifications of an ordinary career. Students reported, they could gain knowledge and a discovery experience about their own learning as adults. They experienced reflective learning, and admitted, how learning (creative and innovative learning) can serve as a coping strategy during periods of crises or in decision making, and consequently how it can indirectly improve the quality of their life.

As introducing adult education at vocational schools is an innovation, and VET schools need to perform innovations to progress or at least to survive, *theory and practice of innovation* and international research findings about innovation in adult educational context were studied as well (Feketéné Szakos, 2010).

Innovation means an intentional, planned renewing process with the aim of increasing competitiveness. Besides the market, industrial and commercial innovation, innovation is defined by OECD as a novel approach of social service (OECD, 2002), which could be relevant for vocational schools intending to offer courses for adults as well. *Innovation-determinant factors* can be the *requirements of the future*, which are explored by researches of the future and trends, the *financial opportunities*, characteristics of *the institution* and *the work of adult educators and their behaviour*. The necessity of innovation in the educational institution may be present continuously, as an inner demand, because for instance, the head of the institution is an innovative person. *Problems* may call the process of innovation into action in other cases.

Successfully implemented innovations of adult education institutions were studied in a research project in Germany, and it was found, that innovations of adult education institutions are concentrated around 4 focuses significantly. Those are:

1. New structures
2. New target groups
3. New topics
4. New methods,

which can be identified as *indicators of innovation* (Barz, 2006). Let us see some possible applications of the above classification for vocational education and training:

- New structures: Regional Integrated Centres of VET
- Focused target groups: pre-service VET teachers, unemployed, lower-educated, aging people, minorities
- New topics: crisis-management, career-correction, competence-based 'bridging programmes' for lower educated people (Vedovatti, 2011)
- New methods: authentic learning (Burke, 2005), cooperative learning (Rakaczkiné Tóth, 2009; Emőkey, 2010), moderation techniques (Garaj, 2009).

Learning and innovation of the staff of a school are strongly interrelated. If the leadership of a staff is fostering innovation in the organisation of the school, it has to become a *learning organisation*. Learning organisations are labelled as adaptive, resilient or innovative organisations as well. Action learning can be effectively used for problem solving at workplace (O'Neil & Marsick, 2007). If tasks to be solved in the real life (in the world of work) are in the front, action learning seems to be beneficial.

Formal and informal learning (the latter is appreciated increasingly in European context, /see Erdei, 2011/) at workplace (also in vocational educational context) could be facilitated by a prepared, competent adult educator.

Recommendations

Based on meta-analysis of theoretical works and empirical research findings on adult learning and education, VET teacher education and training and innovation in adult and continuing education, these are some innovative *recommendations* for VET teacher education and training in Hungary:

- Innovation of vocational education and training needs innovation of VET teacher education and training towards adult education in new ways.
- Elaboration of theoretical framework of adult learning for VET practice is needed to better understanding of the nature and praxis of adult learning.
- Systematic research of theory and praxis of innovation regarding adult vocational education and training and VET teacher training is recommended.
- The relatively new type of vocational education and training 'Regional Integrated Centres of VET' could become the place of innovation.
- The way of becoming an adaptive and resilient learning organisation seems beneficial both for VET schools and for individuals.

Being prepared for filling the part of an adult educator and of a learning facilitator and fostering innovation has an urgent relevancy in Hungarian vocational education in our present, pluralistic times, full of changes, unsolved problems, global economical crises and new challenges.

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