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Teacher Education for the Schools of Tomorrow

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Teacher education for the schools of today?

The above title is almost provocatively incorrect. In the period of turbulent social change the teachers' task is to meet *future* needs of *current learners* which can only be carried out through reflection of the ongoing change as well as through anticipation of future development and searching for optimal ways to meet its demands.

At the same time, however, it is crucial to realise that individual professional careers of our teacher trainees will go far beyond the reality of today's schools, that their *life stories* will be rooted, as Hargreaves (1999, in Goodson, Numan, 2002, p 272) has argued, in 'the big pictures or grand narratives of educational and social change that are taking place 'out there' beyond their classroom walls' (cf. Glatthorn, 1995, pp 43-44; Biddle, 1995, pp 61-66; Hargreaves, 1995, pp 83-86, etc.). Regarding that, it should be noted that in a number of futurological studies *scenarios of future development* have been written. These include both the optimistic, so called re-scholarising ones (summary e.g. Švec, 1999, p 19), and the de-scholarising ones, which would be catastrophic for educational institutions and would bring about qualitatively different demands on teachers. It is a major challenge and a crucial task for teacher education to prepare teachers-to-be for various possible scenarios and equip them with skills, knowledge, and attitudes so that in relatively very distant horizons they would be able to meet new demands of the profession.

Processes of professional learning

Firstly, it should be emphasised that professional learning is - in the light of the above discussion – considered to be a life-long process. In the search for the response to the question of how teachers actually learn to teach the dominant schools of thought at the moment are constructivist and humanistic / personalistic ones. Let us only briefly summarise their basic ideas here: knowledge is constructed by the learner him/herself; interpretation of new knowledge is guided by previous comprehension – preconceptions (schemata or mental representations); mental representations are of both rational and affective kind; learning processes are contextualised and mediated by language.

One of the most influential models up till now which built on these principles is Shulman's *Model of Pedagogical Reasoning and Action* (1987, pp 12-19). He claimed that the processes of professional learning include:

- *comprehension* of purposes, subject matter structures, ideas within and outside the discipline;
- *transformation* which is a combination of a number of processes (preparation, representation, selection, adaptation and tailoring to learner characteristics);

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- *instruction,* i.e. a specific situated pedagogical performance, an inseparable part of which is *evaluation* based on formal and informal feedback related to the content, learners and teaching / learning processes;
- *reflection* – i.e. ´looking back´, when the teacher reviews, reconstructs, re-enacts and critically analyses events, emotions and achieved results;
- *new comprehensions* of purposes, subject matter, students, teaching, and self.

Reflection in the processes of professional learning

In Shulman's model of professional learning *reflection* is the key phase necessary for new comprehension to occur. The concept of reflection is by no means a new one in educational sciences. It has been used within a range of different paradigms including even the positivist, empirical-analytical one in theory as well as in research (Zeichner, 1992, 1994; Valli, 1992, 1993, etc.). This fact may stand for a possible explanation why the attempts to define reflection often fail. Most educationalists (e.g. in the Czech Republic Nezvalová, 2000, pp 6-8; Svatoš, 2000, p 67; Švec, 1998, pp 47-50; 1999, pp 71-72 and many others) would probably agree with Calgren (1996, p. 28) who noted that:

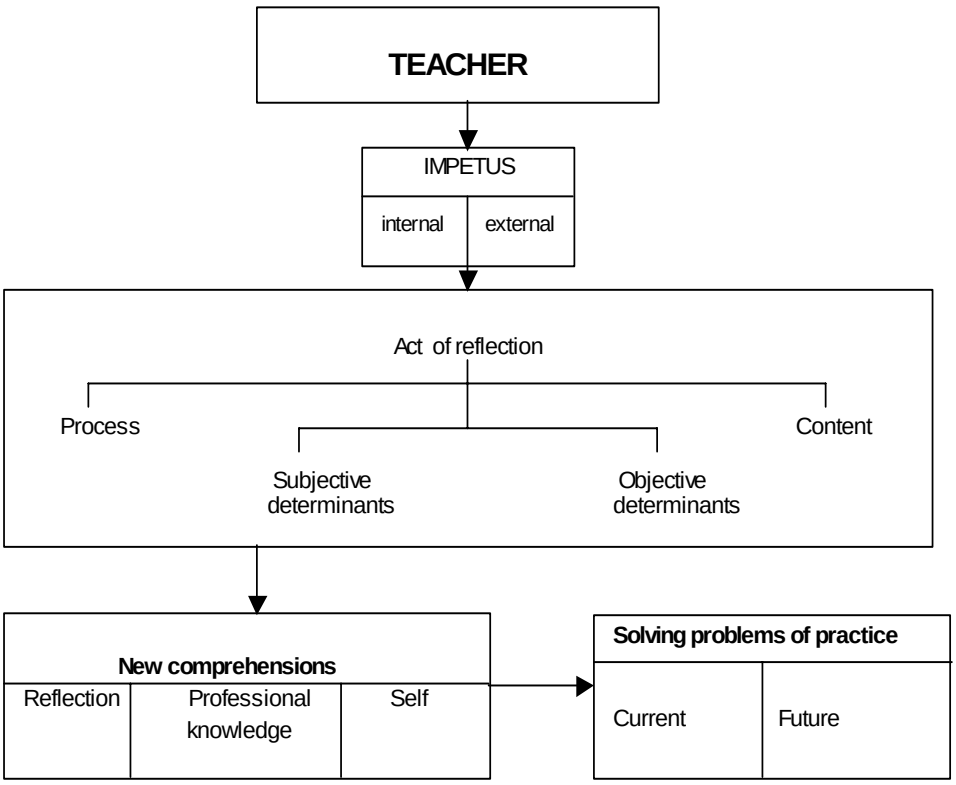
> it is not easy to talk about reflection since it is such an overused concept … It is interesting how concepts become fashion and how the meaning of the concepts thereby are extended to incorporate everyone's favourite ideas. Reflection has come to mean everything that is good – it means everything and therefore nothing.

As it is virtually impossible to find a single universally accepted definition of reflection that would embrace features potentially relevant to teacher education it is necessary for the purpose of our further discussion to clearly, albeit briefly, state how we understand the concept (for more detailed discussion see Píšová, 2005, pp 62-71). We found inspiration in *the conceptual framework* formulated by LaBoskey (1993, pp. 23-38). Reflection is perceived by LaBoskey as a complex multidimensional concept within which the following dimensions may be distinguished: the aim of reflection, content of reflection, process / phases of reflection, and context / conditions of reflection (Figure 1).

Aim of reflection

Most sources (e.g. MacLeod, Cowieson, 2001, p 244; Knowles, 1993, p 82; LaBoskey, 1993, p 26; McIntyre, 1993, p 43, and others) agree with Shulman (1987) that the outcome of the acts of reflection engaged in by student teachers may be change, *new comprehensions* about a certain educational topic, teaching / learning processes, self, and – last but not least – about the process of reflection itself.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework for reflection (adapted from LaBoskey, 1993,p. 28)



Content of reflection

One possible way for analysing the content of reflection may be to use Tom's (1985, e.g. in Valli, 1993, p 13) notion of the arenas of the problematic. Tom specified four arenas of the teaching situation, which can be subject to doubt, investigation and reflection. Arranged by the degree of comprehensiveness (moving from small to large) these arenas include teaching / learning process, subject matter knowledge, political and ethical principles underlying teaching, and educational institutions within a broader social context.

Zeichner and Liston (1987, p 24) pinpointed close similarity of the above Tom's concept with a frequently quoted (mainly, but not exclusively in the U.S.A.) theory of three levels of reflection formulated by Van Manen (1977). Building on critical philosophy, predominantly on Habermas´s ideas, Van Manen defined the following levels of reflection: empirical / analytical, hermeneutic / phenomenological, and critical. Each of them implied a certain focus. Van Manen´s theory was criticised for the

hierarchical organisation of his model (LaBoskey, 1993, p 26 and others), which devalues the practical.

Our standpoint here corresponds to the views formulated by the criticism: in our opinion all Van Manen´s categories (or Tom´s arenas) are always present in the act of reflection, though probably each of them only to a certain degree according to the specific focus of the act. It follows that they represent *specific domains of the content* of reflection rather than its levels.

Process / phases of reflection

The process / processes of reflection may be analysed according to different criteria. The most widely accepted approach currently is provided by cognitive psychology, which specifies the phases of reflection according to the ongoing mental operations. A wide range of classifications have been designed: e.g. Bartlett (1990, in Richards, 1998, p 162) described five phases of reflection, Tann (1993, pp 61-62) proposed a three-phase model, in the Czech literature further classifications were offered by Švec (1997, pp 47-48, 1999, p 75), Slavík and Čapková (1994, pp 380-381), Kalhous, Obst et al. (2002, p 108) and others. It was the Smyth's model designed in 1989 that represented a starting point for the discussion of the process of reflection – and is considered up till now probably the most influential model (cited e.g. in Villar, 1995, p 181; Williams, Burden, 1997, p 55; Švec, 1999, p 73, etc.). Smyth distinguished the following phases of reflection:

1. Descriptive phase
2. Explanatory (informative) phase
3. Phase of confrontation
4. Phase of reconstruction.

It should be noted that the analysis of the process of reflection is closely linked to the evaluation of *the quality of reflection* and of its results (LaBoskey, 1993, p 35). It is obvious that the analysis of the process of reflection is important not only as a theoretical concept; it is a crucial piece of information for modelling the path of teacher professional development in various parts of their professional careers.

Conditions of reflection – objective and subjective determinants

Quality of reflection to a great extent depends on the conditions of reflection of both external and internal character. As regards *subjective determinants*, it is important to emphasise that individuals differ in their dispositions for reflection (cognitive, affective dispositions, attitudes, etc.). Korthagen (1988, p 42) presented a dichotomic classification: he distinguished the so-called internally and externally oriented teacher trainees. Those who possess external orientation prefer to learn from the authorities, whether a mentor / supervisor or the literature, through external directives, while internally oriented individuals are capable and give preference to reflection of individual experience. For the externally oriented individuals a 'strategy of gradualness' (ibid., p 48) is recommended by the author. Similar dichotomy, though using different

terminology (common-sense thinkers vs. alert novices), was proposed by LaBoskey (1993) in her conceptual framework for reflection.

Dichotomic classifications, however, can only represent two poles of a certain continuum (Shulman, 1988, in Knowles, 1993, p 85). King and Kitchener (1994, in White, 2000, p 280) offer a more detailed picture of this continuum. They have developed and validated a *seven-stage model of reflective judgment* predicated on Dewey's writing about reflective judgment. The bases of their model are beliefs about the certainty of knowledge, and the nature and use of evidence deployed to justify the stance individuals take on specific problems. Lower levels of reflective judgement occur at the end of the continuum where knowledge is considered certain (or only temporarily uncertain) and comes from authorities. Problems are viewed as simple and as having one correct solution; in case of temporary uncertainty it is important to wait for the authorities to derive it. Until then, the correct answer is a matter of speculation. These individuals, called *absolutists*, tend to accept without any question the culture they live in, they are in a comfortable position of being unaware that things could be different from how they are. At the other end of the continuum are *reflective people* who perceive knowledge as uncertain, tentative and subject to change. They understand that knowledge is situated in particular perspectives, in specific culture. They are capable of identifying multiple possible solutions in problems or ill-defined situations; the solutions can be judged as more or less good for the desired outcome based on reasoning with the information available. The reflective individual also knows that the knowledge available at the time may change with the advent of additional information. In between these extremes there are the so-called *relativists* who also believe that knowledge is uncertain, but who do not yet integrate reasoning across perspectives. They are unable (and unwilling) to analyse available information, or tend to accept information suitable for the preferred solution and ignore other. Their typical saying would be: ´People are different and each person must decide for himself / herself what path to take.´ According to Kuhn (1991, ibid.) there are approximately 50% of absolutists and 28-41% of relativists in adult population, i.e. only 9-22% adults (and about 15% of college students) belong to the reflective group.

For the purpose of our discussion, however, accent should be put on the fact proved by King and Kitchener (1994, ibid.) in their investigation, that maturity, age and experience play a very important role: for instance during university studies a move from the absolutist to the relativist group is typically observed. In other words, in addition to the fact that individuals differ in their reflective dispositions a conclusion of importance for teacher education may be formulated, that it is possible for individuals to develop these dispositions, to ´learn to reflect´ (cf. Berliner, 1988, in Valli, 1992, p 215 and others).

Research of teacher professional development proved that *objective determinants* of professional learning – i.e. also external conditions of reflection – include time as a vital factor. Furthermore, social context of professional learning plays a vital role, namely social support of reflective processes, availability of multiple sources of support and effective choice and application of specific interventions into these processes.

Reflective projects in pre-graduate teacher education

When projecting, piloting and modifying a new format of a pre-graduate teacher education programme at the University of Pardubice, Czech Republic, the above theoretical foundations were considered. They are reflected predominantly in the professional development module and its central component – a year-long assistantship at schools, the so-called Clinical Year (for more details see Píšová, Černá, 2000a, 2000b, 2002; Píšová, 2005). The model was conceived in order to optimalise objective determinants of professional learning processes in students and represents a unique effort in the Czech Republic in terms of its time frame as well as content and its organisation. The immediate aim of the Clinical Year is to facilitate the development of reflective potential in teachers-to-be while respecting their individual differences already in the pre-graduate phase of their career. In addition to that, a long-term aim is taken into account: to give students the opportunity to experience and ´test out´ specific reflective strategies and techniques and, thus, to provide them with a necessary ´equipment for their further professional development.

Detailed discussion of reflective strategies and techniques can be found in a number of monographs or their parts (e.g. Freeman, 1998; Richards, Lockhart, 1994 – for language teachers; in the Czech context Nezvalová, 2000, 2002 and others). This text does not aspire to add to them; we would like to introduce a series of reflective projects students conduct during the Clinical Year as a possible model for incorporating them into pre-graduate teacher education. Further in the text we will attempt to show how the projects are spread in time, and present their content and specific focus which should help students concentrate on – in the given time of their professional development – problem areas.

Project 1 – Reflective Journal

The first reflective project consists of two phases. While preparing for the Clinical Year, before entry to schools, students work on their *portfolios* broadly defined as ´Introducing myself to my mentor´. Generally speaking, a portfolio is a collection of any representative documents related to students' professional actions; in our case it may include any materials according to students' own choice, documents of his / her professional learning or rather of the achieved level of professional competence. Creating a portfolio is definitely a means of promoting reflection; according to Švec (1999, p 115) it combines two main aspects, process and product, and serves diagnostic, evaluative and developmental purposes (Woodward, 1998, pp 417-419).

Further reflective technique developed in the second phase of the first project is *clinical writing*. Students are required to keep a journal for the first four weeks they spend at the school of their destination in the Clinical year. In the journals they focus on the school as institution, on its culture, climate and on themselves getting acquainted with it. Written records of their experience, events, important incidents, etc., make it possible to deal with different topics (emotional reactions to events, problems, descriptions of actions and questions arising in relation with them, action points, etc.). Students are free to choose format according to their preference (from a narrative to short notes), but they are recommended to stick to regular record keeping and to periodical analyses of their

records. Journals facilitate the development of reflection by the writing process itself (raising awareness of one's own professional ´habitus´, its verbalisation in a written form requiring logical sequencing and clarity of thought), further on, by the backward analyses of records. While the students in their feedback appreciate this, they also comment on the disadvantages of journaling, such as the time-consuming character of this technique and lack of social support (absence of immediate feedback).

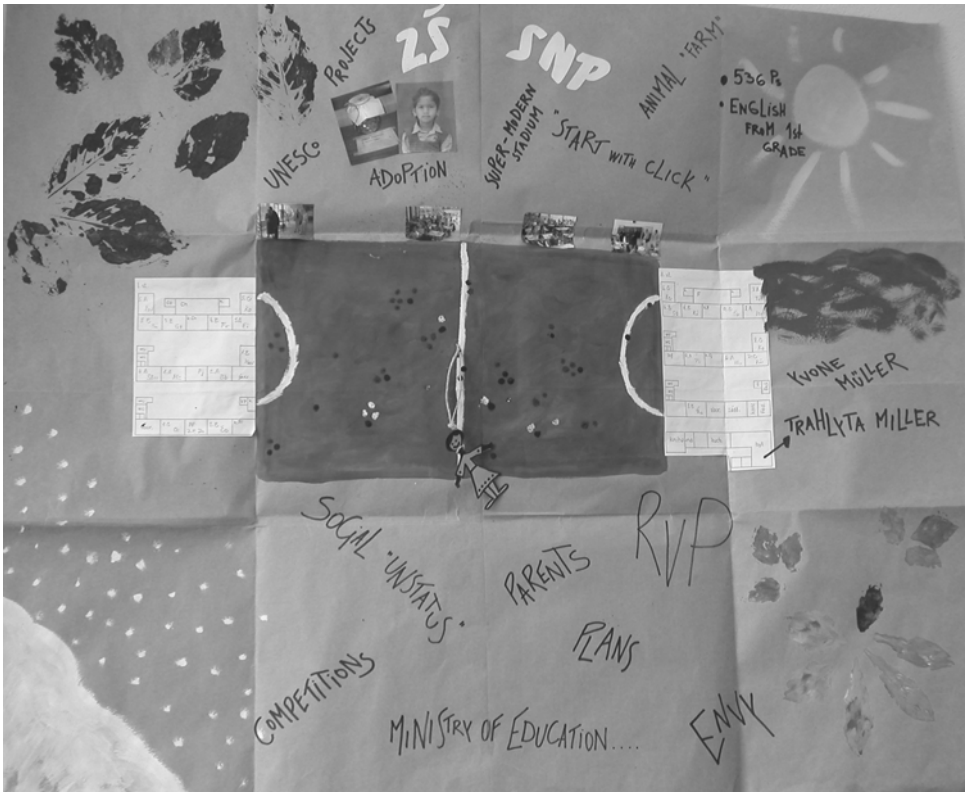
The literature on reflective journaling quite extensively discusses audio-journals (e.g. Krejčová, 2002; Švec, 1997; Freeman, 1998; Woodward, 1998; Zeichner, Liston, 1987, etc.). In our experience in the Clinical Year students opt for them very rarely, they prefer a standard written format.

***Project 2* – MY PROFESSIONAL ´SELF´**

The second project aims at raising self-awareness and developing self-management skills in students. The content of the project includes personal characteristics, time-management (time audit), stress prevention strategies, etc. Interviews and questionnaires proved to be useful reflective instruments for this purpose (cf. Freeman, 1998; Gavora, 2000).

A joint outcome of Projects 1 and 2 is a *cultural collage*: My school and Myself. Students are asked to design and present a poster or any other graphical expression of their subjective perception of the social environment in their school and of their own position within it (a sample collage is shown in Picture 1). The format fosters creativity and analytical thinking in students, makes them realise what is really important for them and distinguish it from minor issues, and provides inspiration for the use of metaphors. The effect is further strengthened through verbal presentation of the collage and subsequent group discussion with peers.

The investigation of the outcomes of Projects 1 and 2 including cultural collages resulted in interesting findings concerning the climate of educational institution in the perceptions of novices in the profession and in school (Píšová, 2004, pp 128-151). The identified problem areas according to the respondents were: leadership style, school management (limited access to information and lack of autonomy), staff – collegial relationships (cliques and rivalry), ´staffroom communication´ (so-called deceptive discourse; Eraut, 2002, p 373), and school ecology.



Picture 1. Cultural collage

Project 3 – Teacher Professional Competence I

In the third project students finally ´enter the classroom´ – precise formulation of its content may read as: selected aspects of *teacher's performance* in which his / her *professional competence* is manifested. It is based on the use of two standard reflective techniques, i.e. observation and analysis of a video- or audio-recorded sequence of a lesson.

The first task for the students is evaluation of the experience gained by *observing* their mentors or other expert teachers during the first months of the Clinical Year. This evaluation is carried out through analysis of the observation sheets students managed to gather; these instruments were either selected from the brochure *For Assistants* (Černá, Píšová, 2002) or other sources, later on designed by the students themselves (each of them was obliged to design and pilot at least four observation sheets).

Students´ feedback, however, clearly indicates that the use of *video- or audio-recording of their own teaching performance* is the most valued reflective technique. Video- or audio-recording is, as a matter of fact, a certain variation of observations but it multiplies its effect as it is possible to analyse the recording as many times as one finds it useful

focusing on different aspects of the teaching performance. It may also be used for an individual analysis or an interactive one – in collaboration with peers, mentor, tutor, or even significant others. Obviously, some constraints may be observed, such as a technologically demanding character of the exercise, or the fact that the presence of camera may affect classroom processes. Some students perceive the first encounters with a camera as slightly stressful. Also the analysis of the recording is a time-consuming process; it is often necessary before a serious analysis to ´sacrifice´ the first or even the second observation because of the impressions of a personal and – sometimes – even emotional kind.

The outcomes of this phase of the third project, written analysis of recordings, served as a research material in an investigation aimed at evaluation of the development of ´professional thinking´ in teacher trainees. Mental operations documented in their analyses (i.e. description, analysis, evaluation, generalisation, alternatives, meta-cognition) were interpreted in order to assess the achieved quality of reflection. Similar investigation was carried out later, at the end of the Clinical Year, in Project 6, which replicates the use of the same reflective technique. Comparison of the findings in both investigations proved a significant growth in the level of reflection, i.e. in the students´ mental operations documented in their materials (for more detailed discussion see Píšová, 2005). We consider this conclusion important in terms of the aims of the Clinical Year (see above)

Project 4 – Teacher Professional Competence II

In Project 4 students engage in *action research* as a technique supporting their professional development. Action research, a small-scale research project aiming at change in the classroom, logically builds on the results of the previous project in which problematic issues were identified. It means that the content in this project is highly individualised. The procedure consists of standard phases (problem identification, hypothesis, intervention plan, implementation, evaluation of the results) but allows for individual decisions concerning strategies and pace.

Conducting action research goes far beyond the horizon of one lesson (in our case the allocated time is almost two months) – therefore it is hardly possible to use it in traditional short time teaching practice (in the Czech Republic standard TP time in pre-graduate programmes ranges from two to four weeks). For entrants to the profession it is a qualitatively new experience: within the complexity of classroom processes, often overwhelming for them, they learn to focus on one problem at a time and address it in order to achieve change.

Action research has received much attention in teacher education recently (e.g. Švec, Musil, 2000, 2003; Day, Hadfield, 1996 etc.). In our programme we also attempted to explore its use and results in a minor investigation dealing with specific ELT methodology issues (such as role of mother tongue vs. target language in teaching / learning processes; Černá, Píšová, 2004).

Project 5 – Resources & Teaching Aids

In Project 5 *resources* in a broader sense of the word are dealt with. Special attention is paid to the use of ICT in ELT (English Language Education) and to intercultural didactics. A tangible outcome of this project is a databank of teaching materials and aids; as a matter of course these include activities in on-line environment (e.g. Hot Potatoes) and activities focusing on intercultural education (role-plays, communicative / social interaction activities). It is a long-term project; students are instructed to collect materials from the very beginning of the Clinical Year. For successful completion of Project 5 requirements they must analyse, evaluate and select the activities they wish to display and share with their peers in a swop-shop.

Project 6 – Teacher Professional Competence III

The last project in the Clinical Year reflects current radical changes in the Czech educational system, specifically a massive move towards curricular innovation within the framework of the so-called Framework Educational Programme. Therefore the content of this project is linked to *curriculum development / syllabus design*, in terms of teacher professional competence on *long-term planning*. In addition to reflection of social needs this focus corresponds to one of the deficits identified in novice teachers in our previous research (Píšová, 1999).

It is again a long-term project which incorporates analysis of educational programmes operated in individual schools, study of curricular documents, and finally a proposal of ELT curriculum based on clearly formulated principles (more details in Brebera, 2004, 2005).

An inseparable part of the final phase of the Clinical Year is individual evaluation of professional development in student teachers (including their reflective thinking). As mentioned above, it is based on video-recordings of their teaching performance, further on, on complex evaluation of clinical experience (questionnaires and time- audit: range and types of experience) and on final interviews.

All reflective projects during the Clinical Year are supported by on-line communication provided by the so-called MAT Forum system (the acronym MAT stands for the first letters of three groups of participants in the Clinical Year: mentor – assistant – tutor). It is a web application (http://matforum.upce.cz), which utilises asynchronous communication, i.e. time and place independent, and is accessible exclusively to authorised users. It consists of a few basic modules: Forum (for communication of individuals as well as groups), Library (resources, materials, student's contributions) Conference (e-conferencing is widely used mainly in the above reflective projects), P.O.Box (for sending in and storing the products by students) and a Video-library (still the most problematic module due to technical problems outside the university net).

> MAT Forum … was tailored to the specific needs of the Clinical Year … aiming at facilitating professional learning by student teachers by providing: 1. extended opportunities for professional and personal interaction and collaboration …; 2. individualised access to tutor, peer and mentor support; 3. individualised access to

learning materials and resources; 4. experience with e-learning as a new way of learning. (Černá, 2005, p 89).

The above monograph by Černá offers a more detailed picture of the research into the use of MAT Forum and evaluation of its effectiveness in the Clinical Year.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this paper we commented on the fact that the results of teacher education today reach far beyond the horizon of contemporary schools. The main task and challenge for teacher education is to prepare teachers for life-long professional learning in the context of the changing world, to initiate their professional learning processes and provide them with useful tools for their further professional development. Undoubtedly, there are many ways how to achieve this goal. This text attempted to present one possible path towards making teacher education more effective.

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