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TEACHERS FOR SLOVAKIA: TENSIONS IN THE PROFESSION[1]

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Abstract

The Slovak teaching profession is in a difficult situation. There are signs that the country is facing a teaching staff shortage and that the demand for new teachers will continue to grow. The data indicate that some subjects are being taught by unqualified teachers on a fairly wide scale. Finding quick, simple solutions to these problems is a challenge because teaching is not considered an attractive profession, mainly because of teachers' low salaries and social status. We will illustrate related uncertainties and complications in the teaching profession by looking at two extremes of these trends in the teaching profession. On the one side, we have Teach for Slovakia, which has opened potential for new teaching qualification models. It is an example of inclusive education in the sense that it only works when differences among teachers are accepted and the focus is on teachers' strong points and professional characteristics. On the other side, the introduction of national testing has made teachers accountable for student educational outcomes. Our qualitative interviews reveal that, in the (sometimes critical) views of teachers, accountability is now part of professionalism in Slovakia and is producing various tensions.

Keywords

teachers in Slovakia, qualification levels, Teach for Slovakia, temporary teachers, teacher accountability for testing

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Introduction

We began work on this article towards the end of the summer holidays and the start of the 2019–2020 school year. It is the time of the year when the media tend to devote more space to the topics of school and education. This year, the media again printed information on the state of the teaching profession in Slovakia: an analysis of edujobs.sk, an online portal collecting information on education vacancies in Slovakia, showed that the number of teaching vacancies in schools had risen by 10%. The number of applicants was relatively low (6.4 applicants per job vacancy; the average is 16 applicants per vacancy advertised on profesia.sk). Compared with the data for 2016, however, the number of vacancies had risen by 121% and the number of responses to job vacancies had fallen by roughly half (profesia.sk, 2019). Most of the vacancies (56%) were in the Bratislava Region. These statistics may be a sign that Slovakia (or at least part of Slovakia) has an increasingly visible teaching staff shortage. However, it is impossible to generalize from the edujobs.sk data because it is not clear what proportion of school vacancies are published there as schools are not obliged to advertise on the website. For the same reason, it is not clear the extent to which the increase in vacancies is a true reflection of a teacher shortage. It is equally impossible to ascertain the extent to which the increase in school vacancies truly reflects a teacher shortage and how much it is caused by factors such as the increasing popularity of the website.

Data indicating that Slovakia (and other countries) may soon have a shortage of qualified teachers should certainly be taken into account, but to fully explain this trend we also need to exert caution and examine the broader context. The teaching profession is being exposed to a web of diverse influences relating to quality requirements, teacher training methods, and methods for identifying teaching outcomes. This study attempts to delve into at least some aspects of these factors.

We shall proceed by first summarizing the quantitative data pointing to a waning interest in the profession of teaching. The data was obtained from the national statistics collected by the relevant state organizations and from the Institute of Education Policy at the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic (where one of the authors of this paper works), which gathers data for its own executive purposes. We present the data and give a general explanation for the decline in interest in teaching (including poor remuneration and the associated limited appeal of the profession) and then follow up on our presentation of the situation regarding qualifications with an analysis of two of the more complex significant factors that are subtly feeding into changes in teacher identity. One such factor (the Teach for Slovakia project) is eroding the security aspect of teacher identity, which is rooted in the many years of higher education

teachers have traditionally had to undergo and raises questions about who can in fact become a successful teacher. We then go on to show how teacher identity is also being shaped from a different direction: education policy and the pressure for accountability in education through testing. Here, we rely on the partial results of our own research aimed at establishing what is happening to teacher identities under the growing pressure of the policy of accountability at Slovak schools. The article therefore takes the reader through processes taking place in education that are very different but that are nonetheless helping to shape opinions of teachers, whether these opinions are held by the teachers themselves or by those outside the teaching environment.

The argumentative structure of the study is such that multiple methodologies are employed. Rather than being a single research project with a predetermined methodology, it is topic-led. The first part of the article therefore builds on statistical resources (the state of the teaching profession in Slovakia) and a description of a project for recruiting a particular group of teachers for schools that is supported by secondary research sources (Teach for Slovakia and the effects thereof). It then draws on selected data from a separate research project (test accountability in teacher identities). Ultimately, what emerges is a more complex, all-round depiction of Slovak teachers and the contexts within which their work identities and professional status are being shaped.

"Edujobs" at risk

Falling numbers of qualified teaching staff and growing staff shortages (and turnover rates) are also found in education systems in other countries. The problem is therefore serious and reflected abroad. However, we must also recognize that it is a complex phenomenon that should be approached with care and that cannot be understood without consideration of many economic, demographic, geographic, regional, and other factors (Macdonald, 1999; Ingersoll, 2001a, 2001b; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Rozkovcová & Urbánek, 2017). At the same time, we should not ignore, or overlook, signals that we are starting to experience difficulties (and regional differences) in recruiting sufficient numbers of qualified teachers. Moreover, it is clear that the demand for new teachers will increase. It is estimated that the number of primary school teachers will rise from 36,048 in 2018 to 37,203 in 2025 (Herich, 2019). At the same time, analyses by the Slovak Ministry of Finance show that the teacher population is ageing – between 2009 and 2014 the average age of a primary school teacher in Slovakia rose from 40.9 years to 44.6 years, while across the same time span in 2011–2016 the average age of a worker in the private sector rose by less than 1 year (Ministry of Finance, 2018).

As previously noted, teacher shortages are a global phenomenon. The UNESCO Institute for Statistics estimated that 68.8 million new teachers will be required by 2030 if Sustainable Development Goal 4, which is aimed at ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all, is to be achieved. Of these, 48.6 million will be needed to replace existing teachers and 20.1 million will be needed to reduce class sizes (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2016). Teacher shortages are not just a problem for developing countries: recent detailed analyses pointing to the same problem have been undertaken in, for example, the United States (García & Weiss, 2019) and England (Sibieta, 2018).

International comparisons of the effect the shortage of qualified teachers has had on teaching quality can be found in the 2018 OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS; OECD, 2019a). That data show that in Slovakia only 8.2% of school heads considered the shortage of qualified teachers as hindering the school's capacity to provide quality instruction "quite a bit" or "a lot" (OECD, 2019a). This compares to the OECD average of 21% and the EU 23 average of 24.6% (OECD, 2019a). Countries where very few school heads faced issues with qualified teacher shortages included Norway (3.6% of heads), Finland (2.1%), and Slovenia (1.1%), while a far larger proportion of heads (within Europe) considered it a problem in Belgium (46.5% of heads), Italy (41.1%), and England (37.6%; OECD, 2019a). In Slovakia, heads thought more serious problems were presented by a shortage or inadequacy of instructional materials—for example, textbooks (44.6%)—or shortages of support personnel (30.1%) or of teachers with competence in teaching students with special needs (29.6%; OECD, 2019a).

This mosaic of (qualified) teacher shortages and the need to increase capacity would not be complete without data on the qualifications held by Slovak teachers. The most recent comprehensive data on staff qualifications date from 2014 (Rehúš & Toman, 2015) and showed that in primary schools the greatest problem was found in the compulsory subjects of information literacy (31.62% of lessons were taught by non-specialists) and English (18.44% of lessons were taught by non-specialists). At the lower-secondary level, the subjects with the highest proportions of non-specialist teachers were the world of work (48%) and civics (43%; Rehúš & Toman, 2015). Non-specialists taught 15% of English lessons, which is roughly 10 percentage points higher than the percentage of Slovak and mathematics lessons taught by non-specialists (Rehúš & Toman, 2015). The data support the partial findings of the State School Inspectorate. In the 2016–2017 school year (with a sample of 108 primary and lower-secondary schools), the primary school subjects most frequently taught by non-qualified staff were information technology, or information literacy, and the lower-secondary school subjects were ethics, music and art, information technology, civics, art, the world of work, and

technology (State School Inspectorate, 2017). Looking at the data from the past three years (in a sample of 235 combined primary schools), we see that at no less than one-fifth of schools at least one of either chemistry, geography, or physics was taught completely by a non-qualified teacher, and in one-third of schools information technology and civics were taught by a non-qualified staff member. In more than two-fifths of schools, technology (or alternatively the world of work) was taught by non-qualified staff (State School Inspectorate, 2018).

The recruitment of new teachers (and the retention of existing ones) may be hampered by the low appeal of teaching as a profession, which mainly relates to the low salaries and the low social status accorded to the teaching profession. An opinion poll by Focus found that students are put off becoming teachers by the low salaries (58%), the profession's low social status and poor image (31%), and the stressfulness of teaching (26%; Perignáthová, 2019). Although teachers' salaries have risen more quickly than the average national salary in recent years (excluding 2018), they are still low – especially when compared to the kind of salaries available to other employees with tertiary education. In 2017, lower-secondary teachers in Slovakia earned 65% of the salary of a private-sector employee with tertiary education (the OECD average was 88%; OECD, 2019b). According to calculations by the Institute of Education Policy, this should increase to 70% in 2020 (Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport, 2019), but it is still not enough. The 2018 OECD TALIS explored teachers' perceptions of their status in society. The results showed that only 4.5% of lower-secondary teachers in Slovakia thought that society valued the teaching profession, the lowest percentage in the OECD (the OECD average was 25.8%; NÚCEM, 2019).

The number of people interested in studying to become a teacher has been falling gradually. In 2010, there were 12,043 applicants to study for an education degree, and this fell to 5,956 in 2017. Over this same period, however, the total number of university applicants also fell. The proportion of all higher education applicants applying for a teacher education programme fell from 16.5% in 2010 to 15.9% in 2017 (it was 15.4% in 2018; Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport, 2019). We also have data showing how many teaching graduates take up jobs in education. According to the Institute of Education Policy, 33% of all those graduating with an education degree in 2014–2017 found jobs in education in either the 2016–2017 or 2017–2018 school year. Among those studying to be a core-subject teacher the figure was 34%, among those studying to be an art or physical education teacher it was 26.9%, and among those studying preschool and primary education it was 49.2% (Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport, 2019).

The appeal of teaching as a profession is of course influenced by many factors. In addition to those already mentioned, there are the changing

demands on the profession, problems with professional training, and uncertainty caused by changes in education policy. In this article, we identify specific events and aspects of education policy and school/teacher life in which these factors manifest themselves.

Teach for Slovakia: An insult or a challenge?

One obvious, but nonetheless good, example capturing the issues faced by the teaching profession in Slovakia is Teach for Slovakia. Since 2014, Teach for Slovakia has been part of the global Teach for All network founded in 2007 (by Wendy Kopp and Brett Wigdorts), which has expanded to around 50 organizations, including the one in Slovakia. Teach for All developed out of Teach for America (USA) and Teach First (the British version) as an alternative means of filling teacher vacancies and dealing with the shortage of qualified teachers in places where it is difficult to recruit teachers qualified in the usual way.

Slightly modified national versions of Teach for All are to be found on all continents and operate in the same way: selected participants are sent to teach in schools, usually in excluded communities, with the expectation they will later become leaders promoting educational change. The applicants and participants are graduates with good degrees in a range of subjects who then take up posts in challenging conditions for two years. Whether they have a teaching degree is of no concern. As the CEO for Teach for Slovakia Stanislav Boledovič (in Matkovská, 2015) stated:

> To become a Teach for Slovakia teacher, you have to be more than just an excellent teacher. We are unable to accept many of the graduates with teaching degrees who apply to our programme. The international criteria state that we can only accept ambitious people who have the potential to become leaders in society.

The participants should gain sufficient experience over their two years in the classroom for them to draw on in a subsequent leadership role in an influential institution or organization. They are expected to take part in attempts to change the education system. Teach for Slovakia (n.d.) defines its mission as follows:

> We are creating a community of leaders who will work together to make changes both inside and outside school. During their two years in the programme, they draw on their real-life experiences of the education system. At the same time, they undergo personal development training and work on community or school development projects. After the two years are up, they go on to work as ambassadors and, in their various positions and careers, lead the changes required to make the education system better and fairer.

Since 2014, 45 participants have completed the 2-year programme. Seventeen are now completing their second year in a school, and this year (2019) there are 19 new participants. They are teaching at 21 Slovak primary schools. In preparation for their teaching posts, they attend a six-week training programme known as Basecamp and then immediately start teaching. The first two weeks of Basecamp are devoted to community and relationship building, getting to know one other, and gaining a deeper understanding of the Teach for Slovakia vision. Apart from workshops to develop teacher and leadership skills, there are additional workshops on better understanding how children learn, the sorts of needs they have, and how to build relationships. Basecamp also includes a three-week summer school. Participants can try out their skills on students under the supervision of a mentor who attends their lessons and provides feedback. The last two weeks of Basecamp are devoted to improving team spirit and developing soft skills such as communication and negotiation skills. It also includes practical preparations for working in a school: basic administrative duties, drawing up lesson plans and class missions, and methods for testing or otherwise checking student skills and knowledge (Teach for Slovakia, 2019).

The Basecamp programme is a truly radical alternative to the standard teacher education pathway in Slovakia as teachers at all school levels (excluding preschool) attend academically oriented five-year courses at university. Basecamp differs in terms of programme length, content and type of work, methodology, and goal-orientation. It is also radically different from the traditional postgraduate courses for graduates of other subjects wishing to obtain a teaching qualification in their degree subject. Although the training represents a very different route into a teaching job and does not resemble university teacher education, the law does not prevent the participants from taking up teaching positions (Act No. 138/2019 Coll.). The law states that unqualified teaching staff who wish to become qualified have four years within which to complete their education after accepting a post. Programme participants are not required to do this as they stop teaching after two years.

Teach for Slovakia received significant backing from then President Andrej Kiska, who officially endorsed it, and from the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport. Given Kiska's (2017) backing, it is worth quoting his words in support of the programme here: "I would definitely want Teach for Slovakia participants on the team. There is probably no better stamp of approval on a CV—or recommendation—than having taken part in the Teach for Slovakia programme." The message is clear: the fact that the participants teach is not as important as the fact that Teach for Slovakia acts as a gateway to another career.

So what can Teach for Slovakia tell us that would help us gain a systematic understanding of the teaching profession within its own setting? Many

teachers, education experts, and members of the interested public may consider Teach for Slovakia to be both contradictory and dangerous. A regional councillor of a town in which Teach for Slovakia operates symbolically expressed this fear in the title of his blog post "Teach for Slovakia, or how to further degrade Slovak education" (Burkert, 2019). Burkert's attack focused on the idea that basically anyone can become a teacher with the blessing of the president and education ministry. He was highly critical of the notion that people can learn enough about education within two years for them to be capable of making systemic changes and argued that it will encourage people to think that the hundreds of ordinary teachers teaching in the same schools as the "future leaders" are not as talented and so need these teachers—or non-teachers—to show them how it should be done, but these ordinary teachers will never be offered leadership positions in an influential organization.

The point is not to defend or balance Burkert's criticisms of Teach for Slovakia by naming the potential positive effects but to highlight that the teacher model in Teach for All and Teach for Slovakia is the inverse of the traditional conception of a certified teacher trained in the traditional manner for whom teaching is a life-long vocation. An ordinary teacher is quite different to someone who has undertaken a brief training course, is full of determination, and works temporarily in a school but whose teaching is the promising start to a new career elsewhere and who has no teaching vocation. Ordinary teachers, who spend years training and studying for their chosen profession as the law requires, are also full of determination, but their determination is focused on their life-long teaching career, while their professional career growth is restricted by the school boundaries and the law. These teachers do not expect to become influential leaders outside school; their developmental framework is growth within the teaching profession in the classroom or school.

Benefits and drawbacks of inclusiveness in the profession

As elsewhere, the arrival of Teach for Slovakia has led to familiar questions about teacher qualifications. Teachers are increasingly facing greater differentiation in who can become a teacher and how. Questions are also being asked about whether training should be liberalized. The idea that people spend their whole life in one career is disappearing, while uncertain prospects and career changes are gaining legitimacy. For the teaching profession, these aspects are new (and regarded with fear). Teachers have tended to remain in the same career throughout their working lives – more so than people in other professions. Schools are becoming more open towards the community (the inclusion of everything and everyone) and therefore

more accepting of people wishing to teach for limited periods without having to take the traditional training path into the profession.

Of relevance here is an amendment to the Slovak higher education law (Act No. 131/2002 Coll.) enabling higher education institutions to employ (practical) specialists as lecturers for specified periods, despite them having no academic career and not meeting the usual criteria for being a lecturer. In some ways, this is similar to the teaching mission of Teach for Slovakia teachers. Just as the recent change in higher education law represented a break with traditional notions of the typical academic career path to becoming a university lecturer, Teach for Slovakia runs counter to the traditional route to becoming a successful teacher and legitimizes alternative ones, at least for temporary posts.

The issue here is of course the de-professionalization of teaching. There is a belief that short courses, like the one Teach for All participants take before teaching (a sort of alternative to teacher education), cannot have the professionalizing effect of standard teacher training. Despite the fact Teach for Slovakia has existed in Slovakia for a number of years, there is no research data indicating what kind of teachers the programme produces and whether they achieve comparable, or better, teaching outcomes than traditionally trained teachers. We can gain some idea from the United States (though the data cannot be applied directly to the Slovak situation), where Teach for America has been running since 1990 and where there has been heated debate about its effects, based on thorough research into the quality of teaching by teachers from the Teach for America programme.

It is important to note that quality-based comparisons between Teach for America teachers and qualified (certified) teachers have looked at student outcomes in traditional academic subjects – reading and mathematics. An extensive study of this kind was conducted in Texas, which showed that students taught by qualified teachers obtained consistently better results in these areas than students taught by the Teach for America teachers and that this finding was related to the differences in teacher training (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005). The Teach for America teachers felt less prepared for teaching and their sense of efficacy in the classroom was lower than that of traditionally qualified teachers (Darling-Hamong et al., 2002).

Looking at teachers in terms of student outcomes is important, but it is only one side of the coin. We also need to consider other factors when comparing certified teachers and alternatively trained teachers such as Teach for All teachers. Blumenreich and Gupta (2015), in their critical analysis of Teach for India, summed up some of the arguments emphasizing the positive aspects of teachers undertaking such programmes. These include being more willing to work in distant and disadvantaged settings, being more accepting of minorities, and being able to handle the programme in such a way as to encourage critical thinking about the standard teacher training

offered at universities. The fact that such teachers do not consider teaching to be their vocation, seek wider careers, and are better prepared than certified teachers for today's labour market conditions can also be seen as positives (Maier, 2012). We should not overlook this other side of the quality of temporary teachers, as it is part of the complex profile of a professional teacher. This professionalism, in addition to resulting in successful student outcomes, is part of the evolving set of demands placed on teachers.

In Slovakia, the route to alternative teacher training qualifications is now more varied than ever before. Not only have we seen the legitimization of the temporary Teach for Slovakia teachers, but the entire model of postgraduate teacher education (through which graduates from other subjects can obtain teaching qualifications) is changing. The law on qualifications has been amended so teacher training courses can be provided by organizations run directly by the education ministry – the relevant body is the Centre of Teaching Methods (Act No. 138/2019 Coll.). We will therefore be seeing even greater variation in the qualification pathways taken by teaching staff.

Criticism of traditional teacher training courses at universities is growing, often initiated by political parties when announcing education reforms, including changes to teacher training. In a way, the new ideas incorporate some of the elements of programmes such as Teach for Slovakia and how these might be introduced into university courses. The emphasis is on the practical side of teaching, with greater focus on soft skills and less on the academic side (Kascak et al., 2011)

From European ideal to everyday reality

A more detailed look at the quality assessments of Teach for All (Teach for Slovakia) teachers reveals two different aspects of teacher professionalism. One is simply concerned with quality in terms of student academic outcomes, while the second relates to areas such as social skills, being open to different communities and student diversity, and the capacity to adapt to different environments and relationships. This view of teacher professionalism is discussed in EU policy documents and analyses outlining models of teacher professionalism for the current era.

An example is the Commission Communication entitled *Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes* (European Commission, 2012b) and the accompanying document *Supporting the Teaching Professions for Better Learning Outcomes* (European Commission, 2012c), which surmise that 21st century teachers should have a broad, complex set of competences for use in teaching. They set out the competences directly relating to teaching, learning, classroom management, and the mediation of educational content,

while the entire set of competences comprises knowledge, skills, and attitudes relating to, for example, inclusion and social diversion and includes negotiation skills (social and political interactions with multiple education stakeholders, actors, and contexts), dispositions to change, flexibility, team work, collaboration, and networking.

The characteristics of an effective teacher are similarly set out in *Teachers' Professional Development: Europe in international comparison* (European Commission, 2010), in which teacher professionalism is defined via generic work skills such as commitment, confidence, and trustworthiness, with a particular emphasis on leadership via characteristics such as flexibility, accountability, and a passion for learning.

In practice and despite the rhetoric, Slovak education policy has led to narrow, specific pressures being exerted on the performance of the teaching profession and on what is expected of teachers. As we will show, the space in which the full breadth of teacher professionalism can be exerted has shrunk and is bound up with system characteristics that are pushing the new professional routines of teachers far from the ideal, complex image of a "European" teacher into a 21st century teacher.

Teachers' test identity

Efforts in Slovakia to assess the effectiveness of teaching in schools are having a marked effect on the teaching profession. Teacher responsibility for student outcomes is being increasingly emphasized and so effective teaching is primarily being associated with student performance. The chosen method for monitoring this link is national testing. Support for this approach is found in EU documents such as the Commission Communication *Improving the Quality of Teacher Education* (Commission of the European Communities, 2007), which stated that teachers' reflective practices should include the ability "to evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching strategies" (p. 13).

This shift towards linking effective teaching with education outcomes is also to be found in the Commission Communication *Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes* (European Commission, 2012b). It stated that "the power of assessment has to be harnessed by defining competences in terms of learning outcomes and broadening the scope of tests and exams to cover these" (p. 7). The accompanying Commission staff working documents are *Supporting the Teaching Professions for Better Learning Outcomes* (European Commission, 2012c) and *Assessment of Key Competences in Initial Education and Training: Policy Guidance* (European Commission, 2012a). The latter contains a separate section on education assessments and standardized testing of student competences.

In 2006, Slovakia introduced Testing 9 (T9), national testing (following verification) of lower secondary school outcomes in mathematics and the language of instruction (Slovak, Hungarian, or Ukrainian). Student results are not published, but the aggregate T9 results can be consulted online in tables with percentages for each region. Information is also provided on each school's national ranking in the tests (national percentiles are given for each school) and how the school's performance compares to the national average.

The 2009 *Report on the Process and Results of Certified Testing* stated that "primary schools across Slovakia can use the results of Testing 9 to extend their self-assessments by comparing the work of individual teachers and the school as a whole with other schools" (NÚCEM, 2009, p. 28). Testing has therefore become a means for school management teams to assess teachers and for school trustees to assess schools. Teacher accountability has consequently become a key indicator of student learning outcomes. Testing 5 (T5) was introduced in 2012. The same subjects are tested as in T9, but the tests are administered at the beginning of Year 5, the first year of lower-secondary education.

These systemic changes have had a major impact on perceptions of the teaching profession, teachers' professional routines, and teachers' professional identity in Slovakia. This was evident in the research we conducted in relation to national testing with a sample of schools selected evenly from across Slovakia, taking into account school size and trustee. That research began in November 2018. The basic goal was to determine how the national testing introduced in the preceding 10 years had manifested in teacher perspectives and how it was affecting the profession, professional routines, and ultimately the culture at Slovak schools. Various research methods were used including participant observations on national testing days, unstructured and semi-structured interviews with various categories of school staff, and case studies of schools with different trustees or teaching programmes.

For the present study, we made use of the data obtained through semi-structured interviews with teaching staff. We selected four different types of school – private, church, urban state, and rural state – in three regions of Slovakia (western, central, eastern). At each school, we conducted interviews with different groups of teaching staff: 1. primary school teachers delivering T5 content to Year 4 students, although the students were not to sit the test until November, by which time they were in Year 5; 2. lower-secondary-school maths and Slovak language teachers who were teaching students the test subjects 2.5 months prior to them sitting the test in Year 5; 3. other lower-secondary-school teachers (most of whom taught a different subject) who were test administrators; and 4. heads or other leaders who were coordinating the testing and responsible for the paperwork and organizational aspects of the testing (e.g. receiving and sending test packages, uploading student

results into the electronic system, organizing test days). At each school, the four groups of teaching staff were each appointed a person to represent them. In total, 48 interviews were conducted at 12 schools. The interviews were structured in such a way as to obtain a comprehensive picture of the testing process and impact as experienced by the informants. Members of the VEGA 1/0258/18 research team conducted the interviews a few days after T5 testing in 2018 (T5 tests were held on 21 November 2018) when the testing was still fresh in the minds of the informants so that researchers could obtain as accurate a reflection of their impressions and attitudes as possible. The content and structure of the interviews was designed to enable researchers to ascertain whether and how the activities associated with the testing affected the informants' professional routines and identities and the culture of the selected schools. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed. Each interview lasted approximately 1 hour, and the text corpus analysed comprised over 300 pages. It was then entered into Atlas.ti and structured using open-coding. The data were categorized independently by members of the VEGA 1/0258/18 research team, and then the results were compared and a consensus reached (Creswell 2007). Thematic analysis was used on the transcription (Braun & Clarke, 2006). We identified the dominant themes within the categories relating to professionalism and professional routines and so used a pre-defined analysis framework. Our approach was analyst-driven, guided by our analytic interest (Braun & Clarke, 2006), and reflected the themes and focus of this monothematic issue.

The qualitative interviews revealed that teachers viewed accountability as a (not always unproblematic) part of the profession. National testing has brought new forms of professionalism and professional routines. As one of the teacher administrators stated:

> From the administrator's point of view, it is stressful. It means I have to remember all these rules, I have to remember what to say to the students and when. What they have to write down. What resources they can use. I have to get it all in my head so I can say everything within the allocated 20 minutes. First there's the answer sheet – how they should fill it in, what not to write. Then they get the test and what they can write on the test paper. So, I'm able to answer all their questions.

During national testing, the teachers took on different positions depending on their profile, special competences, and responsibilities (administrators, coordinators, external supervisors). There are 5–21 page manuals setting out the guidelines and preparations for testing, and these responsibilities generally took them several weeks prior to the actual testing. These new roles and associated professional duties were often criticized and seen as taking up valuable time that could be spent on teaching and other more meaningful activities. One of the test-subject teachers stated:

> And on the other hand, you just know they are taking us teachers for a ride. The profession is no longer what it was. And the greater the burden, and they talk about reducing teachers' workloads, and look at the testing for Year 9, Year 5 students. So, is that more of a burden or not?

The amount of administrative work associated with the testing points to the complexity of these new professional "skills." These start with the initial data tasks. A leading member of staff—a test coordinator—explained:

> The first delivery arrives, the student lists need drawing up, the information has to be downloaded from the ASC [online class register software]. There is a precise way of doing that and a form that you have to complete in the Profi programme.

After that, the answer sheets have to be prepared:

> So then you come to the answer sheets, and so then you have to stick the labels they send us onto each answer sheet, that's four labels to stick on for each student. Two for Slovak and two for maths. For the maths, you have to get a blank sheet of A4 paper, which is stamped. It has the student's name and group code on it. Then if they need to work something out, then only on that piece of paper. ... On the answer sheets, apart from the label you have to stick on, you have the group code and the subject grade from the end of Year 4 that has be circled.

Then there are the other activities associated with getting the classroom ready and ensuring the proper test conditions:

> ... drawing up the student seating arrangements. ... And that has to be done in relation to the student list on the door showing which group they belong to. There's a precise way of doing that which has to be followed, for everything that has to be written on it.

In urban schools, even the formal pre-test administration can present an enormous burden:

> Because we are one of the bigger schools, we had to test 70 children. So the difference is I have to prepare six groups for testing. That means six lists, six seating arrangements. Some documents are in duplicate as well, but they can easily be printed out, so that's nothing, but the 70 answer sheets have to be labelled. Of course, the work is divided up among the teaching staff...

The school head also has special tasks, mainly related to receiving, sending, registering, and storing the tests. Some teachers saw the national testing as a further element in the deprofessionalization of the education system and so may put up some form of resistance, as can be seen in the following statement by a test-subject teacher:

> The teacher can generally tell ... Even without the testing they would be able to tell because they learn by how the children react and from teaching them where their potential and limits lie, so we don't make direct use of the results.

Resistance among school heads to seeing the testing as an element of teacher accountability was largely to be found in the network of private schools that claimed to have an innovative approach:

> We decided it wasn't for us ... The most important indication of the quality of a teacher's work, and even then it only applies to Slovak and maths teachers? That's just wrong. No, and we think teachers see it that way, too. They just take it that we have to do it, so we do it, and then we are left in peace and quiet, yeah. But my assessments are based on something quite different, yeah.

The teachers' responses indicate that "teaching to the test" was becoming quite important in teaching in the second half of Year 4, the first quarter of Year 5, and the third quarter of Year 9. At these points in the teaching year, they altered the focus of educational content (they stop following the national curriculum so much) and used different teaching methods (revision lessons instead of front-of-class presentations) and materials (mainly Komparo tests – tests sold to schools by a private company, copies of the previous year's test, or other sample tests and handbooks published by private publishers). They did this because the test results are becoming a form of internal and external accountability. This confirms experiences in other countries that show that national testing leads to control of educational content, formal control of the curriculum, and pedagogical control (Au, 2007). Consequently, testing has left teachers feeling stressed and anxious.

> When you take it that every final report contains the testing results, basically you just submit the final report to the trustee, the school council, and even the interim results aren't as interesting as the results of the tests to, say, parents or the trustee because the test results can be compared against other schools.

The pressure for accountability comes from the trustees, who in some cases use the test results as the basis for supplying additional funding, as one of the leading staff members at a school stated:

> For example, at the end of the year when they use up the budget. One school gets three times as much to spend on resources because it was more successful, while another school will barely even get what the state gives them, if that, so that's where they start making distinctions, even when we've presented it.

In this case, the trustee did not view the additional resources as a means of helping less successful schools, opting instead for competitiveness over equality and levelling up. At the same time, staff who teach test subjects feel the pressures of accountability from school heads:

> In addition, these teachers are under much greater pressure from the school, for instance, because they want them to prepare the children, so the school gets the best results, and from the parents as well because the parents see that one of the teachers got these results and another got those results, because the results aren't secret, they're published and the parents can get hold of

> them. And yes, at our school it's one of the criteria for bonuses. The criteria for staff pay include T5 and T9 preparation.

Naturally this affected professional relationships and the work atmosphere. On the one hand, it affected relationships between teachers who taught test subjects and those who do not, and on the other, T5 testing is covered in Year 4, so it also affected the relationships between primary and lower-secondary teachers.

> Well, and it was quite sad at the beginning... There were quite big disagreements about us wanting to show them that they were less important than the lower-secondary school teachers. ... It was – you just want to prove yourselves to us and then it was a personal issue really with us explaining to them that we girls are not here to jeer at one another or show who's better and who's worse. That was about the fact that we felt the children came up into lower-secondary school looking like they had been written off.

National testing accelerated these tensions.

> So at many schools, there's a bit of conflict between the primary school and lower-secondary levels. They argue more, not argue in the full sense, but there are certain assumptions in lower secondary about whether the primary school level coped or not, and the T5 testing should be an objective assessment of what the child actually learnt at the primary level.

As we have seen, although these new elements of "professionalism" are linked to the testing, they have not been fully accepted by the teaching community in Slovakia and have led to various tensions. Nonetheless, this trend of perceiving teacher and school accountability through national testing has been continuing to spread. Recently, "Slovakia provided secondary schools with data on their 'value-added' for students, accompanied by data showing progress between their school entrance (Testing-9) and school-leaving examinations" (European Commission, 2018, p. 31). This step, introduced in 2015, is viewed favourably by the European Commission.

Work is ongoing on the mechanisms for establishing the value added by schools. Initially, this was established at the upper-secondary level based on a comparison of T9 results and the external part of the school-leaving exam in Slovak language and literature. Slovak secondary schools have therefore received regular feedback on whether their contribution to student learning over the four years has been above, below, or in line with expectations.

We have also seen a move to extend the value-added mechanism to the lower-secondary level based on the relationship between T5 and T9. In developed countries such as the United States, models exist for establishing the added value of the teaching in a particular classroom or by a particular teacher, which has led to the idea of operationalizing the teacher's personal responsibility for student performance and growth; however, researchers

in the United States have argued that great caution should be exercised when using these methods to make staffing or other important decisions (Kurtz, 2018).

Conclusion: Incongruity in education policy

So, what does our analysis of these two examples tell us about teaching in Slovakia today? It shows how, over a period of many years, two different tendencies in education policy and the teaching profession have intersected. It tells us that the slogan "anyone can teach"—a reference to uncertified teachers from Teach for Slovakia—should not be viewed entirely negatively, as the first example shows. The fact that alternative models of teacher qualifications are being sought and implemented demonstrates an openness in the education sector, including an openness to join the profession. It is a specific example of inclusiveness in the education sector and is expressed here in terms of accepting teacher diversity and focusing on different types of professional characteristics and strengths. Comparisons between certified teachers and the Teach for All temporary teachers show that even when we look at the complex competences required of teachers today, these temporary teachers have some advantages and therefore also legitimacy. If the Slovak school sector as a whole is resistant to inclusiveness, then teachers will also find it hard to accept other types of qualification, which will elicit tensions and trigger defensive mechanisms.

For the certified teacher cohort, these tensions are basically a permanent feature of the teaching environment. On the one hand, they consider these to be their professional advantage and characteristic of what leads to good student outcomes. And it is this element that is reinforced by the new type of accountability required of them in the national testing in mathematics and first language. This pressure further reinforces their academic professional identity, but also produces other tensions within the certified teaching community. These relate to the management of financial resources and their distribution in schools and among teachers based on test performance and to the relationships between teachers at the two different education levels as well as between those who teach test subjects and those who do not.

The conditions have yet to be created in Slovakia that would enable teacher identity to be integrated with policy notions of what being a quality teacher means in the 21st century. We consider this to be the result of contradictory education policies at the national level that generate conflicting measures. Some create greater openness and accessibility within the education sphere for all teachers, including those with alternative qualifications, while others relate more to academic performance and academic accountability and have a selectivist and divisive effect on school stakeholders.

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