

Reflecting on biography as a factor in teachers' self-development towards a welfare state

Irena Zemaitaityte¹ and Giedre Pauriene¹

¹Educational Science and Social Work Institute, Mykolas Romeris University, Lithuania

Abstract. It is now widely recognised that the creation of a welfare state requires a sustained focus on one of the key drivers of educational change, schooling and, by extension, societal improvement: educators, who are expected to produce young people capable of participating actively and productively in change. The purpose of this work is to reveal the teacher's attitude by reflecting on their biographies and the lived vocation to become a teacher, developing competences and participating in the process of educational change and creating a welfare state. The study used a biographical research. Qualitative research was conducted using narrative interviews. Fourteen participants took part in the study. The research instrument chosen was the biographical narrative interview. The research revealed that the choice of the teaching profession and the perception of vocation are triggered by biographical circumstances. The pedagogical potency and childhood interests in certain activities, as well as the awareness of one's own needs, become the basis for the further development of abilities and skills. When an individual chooses a profession because of a vocation, it is as if there is a need for constant self-reflection on the part of the educator, which leads to the need for continuous development. By improving themselves, the educators also actively contribute to the change of the education system. Therefore, by educating the younger generation and constantly reflecting on their own experiences, educators actively contribute to social justice, changes in the country's well-being, and thus to the creation of a welfare state.

Key words: biography, teacher, learning, welfare state.

1 Introduction

Education is one of the most important factors determining both the development of society and the achievements of the individual in modern society. UNESCO documents emphasise that education must first and foremost serve the individual and his or her well-being; it is a public good, a fundamental human right and the basis for guaranteeing other rights. National education policies must enable everyone to realise this right, which is why it is important to focus more on access to education, increasing inclusion, and the quality of education. According to Polakowski et al. [1] the European welfare states, which have taken different forms in different periods, can be considered as one of the greatest achievements of the 20th century. The welfare state is often associated with social protection, education, and human needs. To achieve prosperity, people need to be able to

choose their personal goals and ambitions and to have the means to achieve them. Spicker [2] argues that well-being can be achieved through the satisfaction of individual and societal needs. Giddens [3] distinguishes that a high level of societal satisfaction can only be achieved when a country has a developed welfare state. According to the researcher, the modern welfare state is influenced by globalisation. These include demographic and technological changes, the emergence of a service society and a knowledge-based economy. In order to achieve the welfare state in a targeted way, it is necessary to learn to adapt to the inevitable globalisation changes. Gooby and Leruth [4] encourage action to address the challenges of a globalised and competitive world. According to Spicker [2], poverty in countries can be equated with a lack of wealth. Audukaite et al [5] define the welfare state as the state's commitment to guaranteeing a decent living for everyone, which is granted as a social right through social protection, social services, labour market and housing policies, education and health care.

The objectives of the education system as a social sub-system derive from the latter's societal functions and imply target outcomes by which the education system is judged. The accessibility and quality of education services is one of the priorities highlighted in the Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania [6] the implementing acts of the Law, the State Education Strategy 2013-2022 [7] and other legal acts. "Lithuania 2030" Lithuania's Strategy for Progress [8], notes that "Changes in the culture, thinking, behaviour and societal values of Lithuania's citizens will determine the country's successful development and help prepare it to boldly face the challenges of global competition. The greatest strength is faith in people and the mobilisation of their creative powers." (p. 6)

The environment of everyday life, conditioned by globalisation, migration processes, the rapid development of communication and information technologies, and the desire to succeed in work activities, requires continuous development. It is now widely recognised that the creation of a welfare state requires a sustained focus on one of the key drivers of educational change, the improvement of schools and, by extension, the improvement of society: educators, who are expected to produce young people capable of participating actively and productively in change. For a teacher whose activity is focused on the education of others, society is increasingly demanding more and more from him or her in terms of professionalism, effectiveness, personal qualities and other aspects. Researchers [9] note that the professional development of teachers should be seen as a lifelong process, which should be considered in its organisation and funding. For without a well-developed education system that is accessible to all, and without professional participants in this system, there can be no welfare state.

The purpose of this work is to reveal the teacher's attitude by reflecting on their biographies and the lived vocation to become a teacher, developing competences and participating in the process of educational change and creating a welfare state.

2 Methodology of the study

The study used a biographical research. Biographical research can be used in educational studies to analyse individual learning and development processes. Biographical research provides an opportunity to expand knowledge about the development of individuals within families and educational institutions. [1] The use of biographical research in adult learning studies reveals aspects that would otherwise go unnoticed, i.e. the biographies analysed reveal that beyond a career in formal education, which was not described as successful, there was a potential for 'individual modernisation' that would not be revealed in a quantitative study [11]. The reconstruction of past life events is linked to the research participants' "stories of learning and development" [12]. Alheit and Dausien [13] note that a possible alternative to the life story narrative is a reasoned explanation, a statement of

one's own opinion, but the biographical narrative gives the researcher more opportunities to empathise with the informant's narrative, discovering the details of the story that are important to them. Scientists (2005) define learning as "the transformation of the structures of experience, knowledge and action in the context of life history and the world". Here, the aspect of 'biographically' [14] plays a special role, i.e. people are able to give meaning and significance to skills, experiences, information, events, and thus to place them in the framework of biography. When people are asked to talk about their lives, they start to construct their own biography, into which they themselves consistently embed their lives.

Study sample. The sample consisted of 14 participants (13 females and 1 male) with an average age of 44 years. The study population consisted of teachers with at least 7 years of teaching experience, irrespective of the educational institution in which they work. The criterion for selecting the informants - years of teaching experience - was chosen the basing on Huberman's [15] model for the development of teachers' professional competence. It relates the professional competence of teachers to the years of teaching experience, stating that after 7 years of teaching experience, one feels stable and confident in one's profession, and that one has a willingness to experiment, as well as to evaluate oneself afresh. The sample was selected using non-probability sampling techniques, i.e. convenience sampling, "Snowball sampling".

Data collection method. Qualitative research was conducted using narrative interviews. The interview was carried out according to the following steps: preparation (selecting the informant, scheduling the time of the interview, the place where the interview will take place), conducting the interview (presenting the study to the informant, highlighting why the researcher is interested in a biographical interview; creating a positive atmosphere, conducting the discussion, and completing the interview). *Data analysis methods.* The analysis of the data and the results are based on the research logic of abdicative theory construction according to Peirce [16]), grounded theory (GT) according to Strauss and Corbin [17], and "formative interpretation" according to Bohnsack [18]. The analysis of the research data consisted of the following steps: 1) A formative interpretation of each interview is carried out. Its aim is to reveal the thematic structure of the biographical-narrative interview by reconstructing the sequence of events in the biographical narrative. 2) The text of the interview is "deconstructed", i.e., the data are analysed by forming, step by step, a subcategory for each of the semantic units, and then by combining them according to the proximity of their meanings to form a category that serves as the central axis of analysis.

Survey instrument. The research instrument was a biographical narrative interview. The narrative interview is based on Schütze [19] and is considered to be a spontaneous narration of experienced events.

3 The analysis of the study data

The personality of the teacher and the nature of his or her professional activity have a special place in the education system. Teaching is a human-to-human activity and requires, in particular, social skills that enable it to interact easily with other people. The ability to communicate and interpret are essential elements of a teacher's professional competence (its integral parts: general, didactic, and subject competence), the development of which, as the results of the study show, can be determined by biographical circumstances. Identified childhood interests and self-awareness become the basis for further development and acquisition of new skills. Self-consciousness of "being an explainer", "being an activist and a seeker of justice" in the childhood, later becomes a central part of professional identity:

“(…) I found that I really liked talking to my classmates and explaining things they didn’t understand. (…) I actually really enjoyed being an explainer, as I said. (…) During breaks you were surrounded by ‘tell me, tell me how, tell me who, tell me what’.” (Interview 1).

The professional competence of teachers bases on shared values that guide all teachers in their professional activities. These include respect for people and responsibility for their own performance. According to Pope Francis [20], the family is the primary school of human values, where one learns how to exercise freedom, where inclinations mature and become deeply imprinted, and where they persist throughout one’s life, whether as a positive emotion in favour of a value or as a spontaneous rejection of certain behaviours. The long years of pedagogical work as a biographical experience have an impact on the change of personal qualities and attitudes of an individual, which is significant for the professional competence of a teacher. This change can be seen as the result of self-directed learning. Learning and educational processes take place within the horizon of individual biographical experiences and expectations. Individuals continuously add to the potential of their knowledge, skills, and attitudes throughout their life course and this addition is reflected in their individual biographies.

Choosing a career is about deciding to enter a career or to pursue a vocational training of your choice. It can be argued that the concept of ‘profession’ has retained its ethical meaning to the present day because of its semantic origin. The semantic origin of the word “profession” derives from the concept of vocation (German: Berufung, English: vocation), which is derived from the theological Latin “vocation”, the divine vocation of man. According to Kavaliauskiene [21], “vocation, as a subjective aspect of a profession, indicates a person’s sense of direction, i.e. a combination of motives (interests, ideals, attitudes, value orientations, aspirations) that reveal a strong desire to be involved in a particular field of work throughout life.” (see *ibid.*, p. 47). It is about a particular stage of learning and decision-making, which is also influenced by social conditions (different areas of life, such as family, school and peer groups, the labour market, role models, future prospects, earnings). The outcome of this phase is the pursuit of a vocational activity.

“(…) I already knew at school that I was going to study something related to German, because I was very good at German. It was something that I liked .. and that I was good at. Or the other way round, which I was good at and then started to really like. And I definitely said all the time that I would study something .. that would be related to German.” (Interview 2).

Informants also mentioned their acquired empathic skills as a prerequisite for understanding their professional vocation. The ability to communicate and cooperate is not possible without empathy, which fosters compassion, altruism, and pity, and is the basis for many moral decisions and actions. Vocation is closely linked to self-realisation. According to Tepperwein [22], when it comes to vocational activities, neither working hours, nor rewards, nor holidays, nor money are important. The challenge to create something and to be recognised becomes the most important motivation. Creativity is also part of the pedagogical vocation. A creative personality is usually self-realisation, important, active, and independent. Creativity is an individual trait that implies the ability to find solutions, the ability to look at problems in a way that no one has ever looked before. It is also the courage to try, and the belief that one can do better:

“(…) I don’t like completely traditional lessons, the kind where you open a textbook and it’s as much as is given, so much is given. I always find a lot of information for them, a lot of footage, so maybe that’s why I’m able to interest the children.” (Interview I3).

Teachers are aware of the importance of vocation in their professional activity, and note that vocation in teaching is the basis of all their professional activity.

Teachers have to be constantly responsive to new developments in their professional activities, to be able to reorient yourself to the needs of pupils and society. It is one of the

greatest challenges - the need for reorientation - that drives the continuous learning of educators. It is a change of pace when faced with a new pedagogical landscape, i.e. a change of workplace from a higher education institution to a grammar school or vice versa, a change of teaching or training course, or a new administrative job, and a much more motivated student body than before:

“It was a completely different job again, and it was practically starting from scratch again ... how to work with pupils instead of students.” (Interview 14).

A very important incentive for a teacher to learn is the feeling of being trusted. Trust is one of the most important conditions for development. From an ethical point of view, trust involves those moral norms that relate to voluntary mutual obligations, where the relationship between one person and another is based on the belief that the other person is responsible, dutiful, competent etc. Professional activities provide teachers with rich experience and the opportunity to improve both from a subject perspective and from a personal one. Professional activity experiences related to various experiences, emotional impressions, lead to learning processes clearly perceived by the individual himself, which can be considered experiential, self-directed, and connected to both the individual's internal and external motivation. The development of professional competence is conditioned by the encounter with a new area of activity of the educator, the trust expressed by other persons and the experience of self-realization.

In summary, one can say that lived vocation, linked to biographically determined abilities and interests, not only requires from the individual certain knowledge and decisions regarding his further professional path, but also a personal self-assessment of his capabilities and limitations. Vocation leads to a positive relationship with the profession, to satisfaction with one's professional activity.

4 Discussion

The study revealed that through the learning process in childhood and subsequent biographical experiences, both in personal and professional environments, a person builds up his or her knowledge, which is not always immediately consciously understood. Individual professional experiences lead to a new understanding of professional activities, and educators' mistakes, decisions and actions, when reflected upon, lead to effective learning processes. It is personal reflection that serves as a method of personal and professional development. It responds to the research of scientists [23, 24, 25]. The reflective process of informal learning allows for a fresh look at existing knowledge that has come through experience. Experiences of professional activities and their reflection lead to experiential and self-directed processes of informal learning. The rapid changes in living environments and lifestyles mean that people need to learn throughout their lives, and according to Stoll et al. [26], 'sustainable continuous learning is an integral part of the 21st century'. Thus, teachers' motivation for development is also determined by their ability to perceive the impact of the times on their success, and not only their motivational structures change according to certain conditions or demands throughout their lives, but so the motivational structures that they apply to their pupils. This testifies to competence of educators to be able to develop the capacities of others, considering their needs and capacities, the prevailing educational paradigm, changing circumstances, etc. The work of an educator directly relates to communication and cooperation. As Böhnke et al. [27] point out, the educator is a participant in a variety of communication networks (interdisciplinary within the educational institution, and with partners outside), and social interaction constitutes the bulk of pedagogical activity. Scientists [27] argue that social interaction, cooperation, and communication are necessary since together it is possible to overcome difficulties in the case of professional tasks or personal problems. They create an

atmosphere of understanding and trust (positive social climate); they provide an impetus for changes in pedagogical methods and approaches, and for personal development; and they allow for the testing of perceptions of one's personal values. Learning through communication and collaboration in a professional environment is a dimension of self-directed learning, which reflects the processes of developing professional competence in the teacher's learning through social interaction, which confirms the claims of researchers [23, 28] that individual learning from experience is "socially open", and that self-directed learning always requires social interaction and collaboration. This social interaction and cooperation are also actively manifested in the process of building and becoming a welfare state. Scholars [29, 30] stress that welfare states are not only a network of social services, but also a collection of established attitudes and ideas, a guarantee of prosperity, stability, cooperation, solidarity and democracy. Therefore, educators, by educating the younger generation and constantly reflecting on their own experiences, actively contribute to social justice, changes in social mobility, changes in the educational level of the population, and thus to the processes of welfare state creation. By improving themselves, educators also actively contribute to the transformation of the education system, which in turn guarantees the social well-being and security of its citizens.

5 Conclusions

To conclude, the choice of the teaching profession and the perception of vocation are triggered by biographical circumstances. The pedagogical potency observed and identified, the childhood interests in certain activities, and the awareness of one's own needs become the basis for the further development of abilities and skills. When an individual chooses a profession as the result of a vocation, it is as if there is a need for constant self-reflection on the part of the educator, which leads to the need for continuous development. By improving himself, the educator also actively contributes to the transformation of the education system, which in turn guarantees the social well-being and security of its citizens. Therefore, by educating the younger generation and constantly reflecting on their own experiences, educators actively contribute to social justice, changes in the country's well-being, and thus to the creation of a welfare state.

References

1. M. Polakowski, B. Sendhardt, D. Szelewa, *The Future of the Welfare State in the Baltic Sea Region* (2018)
2. P. Spicker, *The welfare state. Theory and practice* (2018)
3. A. Giddens, *The welfare state in a modern European society* (2004)
4. P.T. Gooby, B. Leruth, *Attitudes, Aspirations and Welfare: Social Policy Directions in Uncertain Times* (2018)
5. J. Aidukaite, N. Bogdanova, A. Guogis, *Geroves valsty besraida Lietuvoje: mitasar realybe?* (2012)
6. Lietuvos Respublikos Svetimo Istatymas (2011)
7. Valstybine svietimo 2012-2022 metu strategija (2013)
8. Lietuvos Pazangos Strategija "Lietuva 2030" (2012)
9. R. Zelvys, R. Dukynaite, J. Vaitekaitis, A. Jakaitiene **44** (2020)
10. R. Bohnsack, *Rekonstruktive Sozialforschung* (Opladen: Budrich, 2014)
11. D. Nittel **37** (1996)

12. H. Kruger, W. Marotzki, *Forschungsmethoden und -methodologie der Erziehungswissenschaftlichen Biographieforschung* (2006)
13. P. Alheit, B. Dausien **28**, 3 (2005)
14. P. Alheit **8** (2007)
15. M. Huberman, *Der berufliche Lebenszyklus von Lehrern* (1991)
16. C.S. Peirce, *Peirce on Signs: Writings on Semiotic* (1991)
17. A.L. Strauss, J. Corbin, *Grounded Theory* (1996)
18. R. Bohnsack, *Rekonstruktive Sozialforschung* (2014)
19. F. Schutze, *Das narrative Interview in Interaktionsfeldstudien* (1987)
20. Popiezius Pranciskus **7** (2016)
21. V. Kavaliauskiene, *Pazintis su profesija* (2011)
22. K. Tepperwein, *Vom Beruf zur Berufung* (2004)
23. P. Dehnbostel, *Beruf und informelles Lernen* (2016)
24. V. Zydziunaite, D. Lepaite, G. Cibulskas, R. Bubnys, *Savaiminis mokymasis darbo aplinkoje: bendrosios kompetencijos vystymosi kontekstualumas* (2012)
25. R. Daciulyte, L. Dromantiene, V. Indrasiene, O. Merfeldaite, S. Nefas, D. Penkauskiene, R. Prakapas, A. Railiene, *Pedagogu kvalifikacijos tobulinimo Lietuvoje bukle ir pletros galimybes* (2013)
26. L. Stoll, D. Fink, L. Earl, *It's About Learning (and It's About Time). What's in it for school?* (2003)
27. L. Böhnke, M. Brouwer, M. Schrader, M. Wewel, *Gesunder Arbeitsplatz Grundschule* (2012)
28. P. Juceviciene, *Besimokantismiestas* (2007)
29. H. Wilensky, *The Welfare State Convergence and Divergence* (2002)
30. B. Hobson **3**, 1 (2003)