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**Teacher's Competences : Prospects  
for Development and Professional  
Training**

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## **Teacher's Competences – Prospects for Development and Professional Training**

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### **Introduction**

The conclusions of the latest research findings and many years of discussion on what constitutes a competent teacher, show that this issue is not well understood. Such gaps are evident in, inter alia, analysis regarding the issue of “teaching as a vocation” versus “no one is born a teacher” and the consequences of adopting one of these extreme options especially for beneficiaries of the educational system. Terminology and practical proposals based on pedagogical, psychological and sociological theories or theories of human resources management seem to bring us closer to an agreement on the issues between aforementioned professionals. According to Kwaśnica, one should not forget though, that the competences required for the teaching profession “are always incomplete, forever insufficient and constantly remain in motion, development, constantly requiring changes” (Kwaśnica, 2003, p. 294).

### **Defining competences**

A competence – means a proper scope of knowledge and skills, expertise, “to know one’s stuff”, being competent. The concept of competence is interpreted in many ways in pedagogical literature. Legal sciences and organization and management theory might be a significant inspiration for teachers.

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From the legal sciences point of view, this term is understood as the scope of decision making powers granted to an individual. In this approach, a person holding a public post or representing an organization makes decisions within his granted powers, in accordance with his competences. In such a case, the competences are identified as the powers associated with holding a particular position or performing a function. In this context, the competences become the synonymous with power, which is gained thanks to the decisions of other people, made on the basis of established acts and regulations of law, but not necessarily deriving from the individual's extensive knowledge, skills and abilities.

In contrast, in the case of management science, the concept of competence mainly refers to the possession of present, interdisciplinary knowledge in a particular field and necessary skills, which enable the proper performance of one's duties and tasks, ensuring the effective implementation of the objectives of a given organization. It can be argued that the concept of competence is a reflection of professionalism. Competences describe a number of reactions and behaviours of people in specific work-related situations. They are seen as a tool which triggers intellectual processes, the ability to think and use one's knowledge and experience, causing an adequate response to a situation. Competence is the ability to effectively use a person's knowledge, skills, capabilities, system of values and personality traits in order to achieve aims, results and standards of performance expected from him because of his particular position in an organization (Walczak, 2010, p. 6–8).

In the opinion of Poczowski (2003, p. 153), competence is a term covering "general, permanent human characteristics, forming a cause-and-effect relationship with significant or above-average effects he has achieved in his work, which have a universal quality".

Competences are treated as higher-order skills, complex personality traits. Professional competences are defined by the synonymous terms: efficiency, ability, qualifications, powers, "worthiness", capability, preparedness. The possession of these competences determines whether a person can be considered capable of performing specific tasks or operating at a certain level. A competent teacher is a person perceived

through a number of his personality traits to be fit for performing different aspects of his role. Competences are created as a result of integrating knowledge with a large number of small skills. The competence is expressed by the ability to transfer knowledge and skills to new situations within a task situation. It also includes work organization and planning, readiness to implement innovations and the ability to cope with unusual tasks; those are also personality traits indispensable for effective cooperation and collaboration (A to Z Open training, 1997).

The nature of the teaching profession, as well as the multitude of teaching specialities, make it impossible to provide a full description of the competences needed in a teacher's work (Kacprzak, 2006, p. 51), particularly in a situation where, all too often, competences are irresponsibly equated with the professional qualifications of a teacher. According to Denek (2012, p. 29), a teacher's qualifications come down to his competences. However, qualifications relate to whether a teacher can pursue his profession, which means, whether he has completed his education, holds a diploma and whether he possesses the proper knowledge and skills. Qualifications are part of the competences which relate to the ability to make use of one's qualifications (Kacprzak, 2006, p. 47, Gawrysiak, 1998).

Also Oleksyn (2001, p. 227) claims that the concept of competences is broader than the concept of qualifications, because qualifications do not include the ability to perform effectively. **Qualifications** are determined by the level of education attained, as proved by a proper diploma, and the appropriate skills and abilities needed to perform a specific job or tasks. **Competences**, however, are a set of behaviours that are the sum of knowledge, skills and attitudes, which themselves are a function of professional experience with occupational activity, work environment characteristics and the stage of one's working career. In contrast to qualifications, competences are not given once and for all, they are subject to updating, and in order to be developed, they require newer and newer experiences (Kwiatkowski, Symela, 2001). Qualifications are gained at schools, but competences through professional practice. Without practice and personal teaching experience, one cannot comment on the professional competences of a teacher (Gawrysiak, 1996, p. 51).

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Teaching competences will affect changing functions and professional roles of teachers. "A teacher will no longer be, as he used to be, the depository of expertise but his role will diversify and enrich. Although his main duty will remain a transfer of knowledge, he will also be required to explain the aims and the meaning of the act of education, showing ways, creating collective dynamics in groups entrusted to him, continuous assessment of his students, but also evaluation and preparation of reperory of sources of knowledge" (Mayor, 2001, p. 395). Then teachers' competences will consist of: mastery of specific knowledge, the knowledge of his students and the capability of creating an education-friendly environment and controlling it.

To an even greater extent than in the past, the teacher's role cannot be limited to the transfer of knowledge. Meaningful educational reports in recent years (e.g. *Education – there is a hidden treasure*, a report for UNESCO under leadership of J. Delors, 1998; F. Mayor, *The future of the world*, 2001; *Teaching and learning. Towards a learning society*. White Book of Learning and Excellence, 1997) indicate new requirements for the teaching profession:

- apart from imparting basic knowledge, teachers are increasingly expected to help young people achieve independence in learning, more through the acquisition of core competences than by learning it by heart;
- they are required to abandon *ex cathedra* teaching models for a more constructive approach focused on cooperation, involving facilitating the learning process and class management;
- these new functions require teachers to be familiar with various styles and teaching methods. More and more often classes are made up of young people from different backgrounds, having different abilities and of different degrees of disability;
- teachers are required to make use of opportunities offered by new technologies and to answer the need for individualization of learning;
- these changes require teachers not only to acquire new knowl-

- edge and skills, but also to constantly develop them. It is therefore necessary to provide teachers with high quality basic pedagogical education and a coherent process of continual professional development, so that they will be knowledgeable about the competences required for a knowledge-based society;
- as is the case in any modern profession, teachers are also responsible for continual deepening of their professional knowledge through reflection, scientific research and systematic engagement in the ongoing development of their professional career (Announcement, 2007).

### Typologies of teaching competencies

The nature of the teaching profession, as well as the multitude of teaching specialities, make it impossible to provide a full description of the competences needed in the teacher's work (Kacprzak, 2006, p. 51). Among foreign studies, it is worth quoting an original approach to the key competences of a teacher by Kyriacou (1991) and by Průcha (2002). The classic Polish typology of teaching competences is presented in the work of Kwaśnica (2003), Dylak (1995), Strykowski (2003) and Szempruch (2013). Atomization of this issue is noticeable, as well as attempts to fill new fields of teacher's work with new content. These include studies on emotional, empathic, leadership, praxeological, therapeutic and social rehabilitation competences of a teacher.

The most common division includes:

- 1) **factual competence**, relating to the subject taught – a teacher is an expert and a subject counsellor;
- 2) **didactic and methodological competence**, relating to a teacher's and student's didactic experience, which includes methods and techniques of teaching and learning, organization of activities, designing classes and teamwork – a teacher is an expert and didactic counsellor;

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- 3) **educative competence** relating to different ways of influencing students – they include communication skills, making contacts, solving problems specific to a particular age group – a teacher is an educational and life counsellor (Taraszkiewicz, 2001, p. 175).

Components of professional competence according to Kyriacou (1991) include:

- 1) **Specialist, subject-related competence** (scientific basis of particular subjects);
- 2) **Psycho-didactic competence** (“create appropriate conditions for learning – motivate to learn, activate thinking, create friendly social, emotional conditions and working environment, guide students’ learning processes – individualize them by taking into consideration time, pace, scope, degree of difficulty, interpret the content of teaching, basis of individual areas of expertise due to students’ characteristics corresponding to their age [...]”);
- 3) **Communication competence** (“to communicate not only with children, but also with adults – parents, colleagues, superiors and other social partners of the school”);
- 4) **Organizational and leadership competences** (“to plan and arrange actions, to propose and maintain a certain order and system”);
- 5) **Diagnostic and intervention competences** (“to check how a student thinks, feels, behaves and why, what are the reasons for that, what are the student’s problems, how can he be helped”);
- 6) **Counselling and advisory competences** (“particularly in relations with parents”);
- 7) **Competence to reflect upon one’s own actions** (“I and my actions as a subject of analysis, the ability to draw conclusions from recognizing phenomena, modification of own conduct, approach and methods”).

The areas of key competences of a teacher, according to a proposal by Průcha (2002, p. 194–201) include: (a) planning and preparation of classes,

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(b) giving classes (c) directing lessons (class management), (d) class climate, (e) discipline, (f) students' performance assessment (summary and in terms of format), (g) reflection upon one's own work and evaluation (in order to improve it).

On the other hand, in the Netherlands, de Jong divided competences into: communication, pedagogical, specialist and didactic, organizational, cooperation with parents and other teachers, in terms of reflection and professional (De Jong, 2008, p. 27–32).

Kwaśnica (2003) based the division of a teacher's competences on the concept of two so-called rationalities (human experience builds up in two areas of meaning): in the area of practical-moral knowledge and in the area of technical knowledge. On this basis, he proposes the following division of a teacher's competences:

**1. Moral-practical**, among which the following can be singled out:

- interpretation competence, which means the ability to relate to the world in an understandable manner,
- moral competence, which means the ability to undertake a moral reflection,
- communication competence, which means the ability to maintain a dialogue with others and himself;

**2. Technical competences**, which include:

- postulate competence, which is defined as the ability to support students treated in an instrumental manner and to identify with them,
- methodological competence, constituting the ability to act according to rules which determine the optimal order of actions,
- execution competence, understood as the ability to choose the means and to create conditions for achieving the objectives (Kwaśnica, 2003, p. 298–302).



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Dylak (1995, p. 38–39) divides teacher's professional competences into three groups, as follows:

- 1) **Basic competence**, allowing teachers to communicate with children and co-workers;
- 2) **Necessary competence**, without which a teacher would be unable to perform his professional duties in an effective way – working efficiently; it includes interpretation, self-creative and realization competences;
- 3) **Desired competence**, which may be, but does not have to be, present in the professional profile of a teacher; it includes interests and skills related to sport, culture, playing musical instrument, etc.

On the other hand Szempruch (2013, p. 103–111), in a detailed characterization, indicates precisely the necessary teacher's competences:

- 1) **Interpretation-communication competence** – which is expressed as the ability to understand and define educational situations and as the efficiency of communication behaviours (both verbal and non-verbal).
- 2) **Creative-critical competence** is the ability to create something new and original, offers the potential to develop creativity in their students. This competence represents innovation and efficiency of a teacher's work.
- 3) **Collaboration competence** – the effectiveness of the pro-social behaviour of a teacher and efficiency in the integration of a group of students and other educational subjects.
- 4) **Pragmatic competence** – represents a teacher's efficiency in the planning, organization and execution of educational processes.
- 5) **IT-media competence** – represents the ability to use information and communication technology to improve educational processes.

The position of Denek (2012), in a debate on teachers' competences, is significant because it is based on an analysis of pedagogical literature and his own scientific research, and presents a wide spectrum of possibilities and necessities in this matter. The author writes „It's about competences: didactic-education, referring to general knowledge and occupational counselling, psychological (of general, developmental, educational, social and learning psychology); cognitive; research; creative; innovative; methodological; philosophical (in particular axiological and ethical); ethical; interpersonal; artistic; aesthetic; social-civic; family; ecological; religious studies; organizational; economic; European – confirming humanistic values (ideas of: truth, goodness and beauty, freedom, justice, tolerance, democracy, respect for human dignity, respect for individuality, preservation of inheritance of religion and culture, European identity); media-information-technical; tourism; self-education” (Denek, 2012, p. 29–30).

### **Perspective of development**

The way in which a teacher does his work depends on the level of integration of his personality traits with his acquired knowledge. “A good teacher” should have a wide range of qualifications, which, in simple words, may mean possession of: a) personality traits, attitudes and beliefs as well as b) pedagogical knowledge and skills. As part of a broader perception of professional competences we accept Igvarson's holistic approach (1989, p. 1006–1031), according to which a competence assumes possession of individual traits and attitudes as well as one's own skills and knowledge, which develop as a result of one's own work.

If we take as an object of the observation professional behaviours, then, according to Jaszczyszyn, (2014, p. 241–249) it is possible to analyse them and to create individual teacher profiles. Questions which researchers are interested in concern, among other things, types of behaviours which may be associated with “successful teaching” or types of attributes which an effective, competent teacher has. Considering competences in the

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context of a particular concept of a man, their different essences and types are stressed as well as the extent of their meaning (Dudel, 2013, p. 16–17).

While reflecting on learning and improving, we wish to recall Holt, who thinks that “learning occurs inextricably with experience, in the course of real, authentic interpersonal meetings, in which no one plays any roles and puts on any masks”. When we do something for the first time, it usually does not work out. However, by making another attempt – imitating good models, taking the advice of more experienced people and by practising, we achieve a state at which we are doing better (Holt 2007, p. 39). This never-ending process is described by models of human development and learning, based on “Four stages of competence” theory (Jaszczyszyn, 2012, p. 259–269).

Noel Burch, an employee of Gordon Training International (GTI) in the 1970’s, developed the „Four stages of competence” theory, initially described in literature as „Four stages for Learning Any New Skill”. We owe the model of human development and learning to this theory. It is assumed that this process always runs in four stages. What is important for the process of becoming competent are decisions which can be made by people in relation to the particular stage.

**Stage I.** Unconscious incompetence (“I am not aware that I do not know”) – at this stage a person is not aware that he cannot do something, that in a particular area he does not have any experience and he is completely unaware that a particular skill or competence exists. However, in a particular situation he discovers himself (or somebody makes him aware of) the area of his ignorance, lack of competence or lack of skills. This may cause the person to be indifferent or trigger anger or curiosity (Taraszkiewicz, Rose 2006, p. 29). Only the last possibility, though, motivates a person to identify the situation and to make an effort to learn, which means stepping into the second stage. It is worth noting that people qualifying for the first stage make up the biggest group, and the most difficult to convince.

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<sup>1</sup> John Holt is a close co-worker of Iwan Illich, a participant of education debates on building up societies free of schools.

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**Stage II.** Conscious incompetence (“I am aware that I do not know, but ...”) – at this stage a person begins to realize that there are things he knew nothing about before, that there are skills which can be useful in his life, skills in which he is interested and would like to acquire. A person at this stage begins to do things, but does them clumsily, with difficulty, and new activities require very high concentration during their execution. At the second stage, a person experiences both unpleasant states (e.g. I do not understand, I failed) and pleasant ones (e.g. I do understand, I can). At his own pace, a person experiencing changeable states steps into the third stage. This stage is considered to be the most difficult one. It is here where learning starts. But also at this stage, people give the largest number of arguments against learning (naming reasons which make it impossible for them to learn something new). This is also the stage at which the majority of people make the decision to give up.

**Stage III.** Conscious competence (“I am aware that I know”) – at this stage, a person gaining competences and skills starts doing things more and more smoothly, it requires less effort than at the second stage, but it still demands concentration and thought on how “this” should be done. Still, there is no question of automatism. This is a phase of practice and improvement of skills. At this stage, a person must practise a lot because practice is the most effective way to move on from this stage to stage four. Motivated and persistent individuals move on to the fourth stage (Taraszkiewicz, Rose, 2006, p. 29).

**Stage IV.** Unconscious competence (“I am not aware that I know”) – this stage allows a person to make use of acquired skills without the necessity of concentration on performed tasks (habits). After reaching this stage, the teacher is able to make use of a number of skills at the same time and teach others.

The improvement process itself should be treated as a part of the motivation system. The methods of a worker’s stimulation assume

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putting strong emphasis on interpersonal relations and social skills development. They also allow for the improvement of professional skills.

### **The prospect of improvement**

*The Department of Education and Training* (2004, p. 6) pointed out in its document some professional competences which teachers should demonstrate at all stages of their professional careers. It is therefore expected that teachers will collaborate with others with ease, will engage in activities defined as “in the students’ best interest”, communicate efficiently, represent ethical conduct, innovation and the tendency towards integration of students (inclusion), present a positive attitude to students and thoughtfulness. Such thinking about competences is confirmed by Lemov (2010), who, thanks to research carried out among teachers, defined their needs to acquire/strengthen their professional skills. He defined them as the need for expertise, skills training and exchange of experience with other teachers. This indicates that the need among teachers does exist, which can be called “the need to have a perspective of development”. It can be met through the participation of teachers in three different types of training: (1) preparing for work in the profession; (2) held in course of teacher’s work (preparing or developing skills to work in a particular position); (3) serving re-qualification of a teacher (a change of position or profession).

From the point of view of the beneficiaries of national education systems, the efficiency of such projects should be subject to assessment. Professional development and improvement can be characterized in a dynamic way, combining the model of an individual’s development and learning presented in this analysis, with the efficiency of training which is given at three levels (Łagan, Gontarz, 2009, p. 19–20).

The first level is the level of implementation, which means a job well-done. Training at this level is designed to bring an effect in the form of “catching up with standards”. The decision to organize the training is made based on identified gaps in skills or knowledge of teachers, with reference

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to established standards. Improvement is based, to a large extent, on the instructions and models given (lectures, talks, demonstrations).

The second level is training which serves to improve the processes and efficiency of work. Participants are put in situations making teamwork easier and which, therefore, motivates them to learn from each other. At this level, activation methods based mainly on interaction are used (discussions, role-plays, tasks to be carried out by subgroups with elements of competition).

Level three is defined as an innovative one. Training here serves to initiate some changes in organization and to prepare workers to implement new methods of operations. Emphasis is put on stimulating cooperation, the exchange of experience, combining skills in order to achieve a common goal, inspiring good practices and rousing a sense of responsibility for the implementation of innovations. Methods focused on starting up processes (engaging participants in preparing the training, best practices sessions, meetings to exchange experience, on-site visits, and social events outside the company, moderated group work, and common analysis of work after completing tasks) are helpful in this course of professional development.

To sum up the issues of working methods with a training group, we would like to refer to the Szczepan-Jakubowska classification (2008). Depending on the goal to be achieved by the training, Szczepan-Jakubowska (2008, p. 89) details the group (a) instruction and model delivery methods; (b) activation methods and (c) work aimed at starting up a process (e.g. professional coaching, mentoring, counselling, therapy, consulting).

Lieberman and Miller (2001), in order to have the desired influence on changing the way teachers think and act, suggest applying the following forms:

- forming teachers' groups – informal, being the driving force of changes;
- writing of the curriculum by teachers and from teachers' initiative;
- implementing and financing teachers' research projects (mainly in the collection and analysis of data);

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- observation of each other's classes – in pairs, usually planned beforehand (video recording, sound recording);
  - conferences in small groups – teachers' meetings in order to discuss individual cases;
  - centres of teaching aids for teachers;
  - participation in external conferences and organizations.

In addition, the following is proposed: improvement based to a greater extent on the school, on work in school, on the workplace.

In our opinion, the most valuable resources available in each school are the teachers. Such an assumption allows us to present the thesis that there is an urgent need to remodel the teacher development system – with a concentration on strengthening the potential present in the idea of the professionalization of teachers (and their assessment) in terms of teaching standards (related to what they should know and be able to do). Furthermore, we support the opinion that the process of training for the profession should be extended. The first university degree would give qualifications (in accordance with the *Regulation on teacher training standards* and the Bologna system), but it would make it possible for a teacher to obtain the position of trainee or contract teacher. However, the next professional promotion would depend on the completion of a second degree, compliant with already possessed qualifications (master's degree) Klus-Stańska, Konopczyński, Krauze, Śliwerski, *An opinion about draft regulation on qualifications required from teachers as of August 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015, its reasoning and impact assessment (IA)*, 2015, p. 8).

Teachers' qualifications are not "closed" properly. In the course of teacher training, one should pay attention to the specificity of educational activities, the nature of this profession, because there is nothing repetitive in it. A surplus of knowledge is something which is needed in education in order to overcome hardships in the profession in the future. A teacher must be equipped with surplus qualifications, so that he can quickly generate new cognitive abilities (Henryka Kwiatkowska at KNP PAN in Szczecin – June 2015) and such an opportunity is created by the procedure and methodology of teachers' professional development.

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### Summary

After brief remarks related to the current discourse present in the professional literature on the perspective of the development of competences and professional improvement, this text focuses on ideas which have important implications for their perspective of development and the assessment of the process of professional improvement of teachers, namely (a) building teachers' professionalism, especially for those who are trapped in an increasingly formalized system, based on documents, content of teachers training courses and then in a rigid career path and (b) defining and assessing the standards of the professional development process.

The text ends with the thesis that the most valuable resources available in each school are the teachers, that there is an urgent need to remodel the current system and to concentrate on strengthening the potential present in the idea of the professionalization of teachers (and their assessment) in terms of teaching standards (related to what they should know and be able to do).

**Keywords:** teacher's competences, development of competences, professional development, perspective of development.

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