

Probationary Year

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In 1950 a decree with legal force created institutes of training primary school teachers. It was the task of the institutes training primary school teachers to offer theoretical and practical formation for educators who are suitably qualified for the junior section (1st to 4th classes) of primary school and who are generally educated capable of going on for higher studies. After attending the institutes of training primary school teachers, students sat for a final exam. After the final exam they were employed at schools as paid practising primary school teachers for a year. At the end of the probationary year training was accomplished by sitting for a successful qualifying exam for primary school teachers. Institutes of training primary school teachers kept on lasting four years but the duration of training primary school teachers became a five-year period by inserting a probationary year.

The research is aimed at presenting and analysing the documents regulating the probationary year. The paper studies the difficulties in organising the probationary year, its problems and the issue whether it made possible for teacher trainees to develop their professional knowledge. By interviewing retired primary school teachers, we looked into the system of tasks and activities of teacher trainees in their probationary year, their living conditions as well as their opinions concerning the successfulness and importance of a probationary year.

Probationary Year Mirrored by Written Sources

From 1950 onwards, the training was qualified as lasting for five years according to the official documents seeing that a probationary year was inserted in the period after the final exams. The document entitled 'Regulation of Teacher Trainees' Probationary Year' was published in 1951. It contained rules concerning the teacher trainees' work and it also appointed those responsible for organising and checking the practice (Tanítójelöltek, 1951):

- ❖ *Organising the practice.* Assigning teacher trainees in terms of counties was carried out by the primary school department of the Ministry. Within the counties, it was the educational

department of the county council which elaborated the detailed scheme.

- ❖ *The teacher trainees' work.* In the first term, trainees either had to study or do classroom observation while in the second term everybody had to teach. In the majority of cases, those 'practising' were to teach throughout the academic year.
- ❖ *Directing and checking the practice.* The trainees' work was checked and evaluated by the following persons: director of studies (deputy headmaster). Headmaster of the primary school, superintendent of studies, leader of the county, municipal, resp. district educational department, director of the teachers' training college.
- ❖ *Financial provision of the practising teacher trainees.* Those carrying out teaching as teacher trainees were entitled to have some fee in addition to other bonuses (e.g. a bounty of 50% in case of schools for children living on detached farms).
- ❖ *The qualifying exam.* The qualifying exam was to be taken after the end of the probationary year. The parts of the qualifying exams were as follows:
 - 1) written part (pedagogy, teaching practice)
 - 2) oral part (teaching, methodology, theory of school organisation)
 - 3) practical exam (teaching practice, teaching for 20 or 40 minutes).

Teachers' training colleges prepared the practice among fourth-year students well. In their lessons, form teachers spoke about the beauty, importance and difficulties of working in the countryside. They invited practising teacher trainees to tell their experiences. The letters of those practising were read out. The students of the third year made demonstrative appliances for their classmates who were to get to the countryside. Undergraduates before their finals patronised students at the practising school (see Komlósi, 1954).

The scheme of assigning teacher trainees was changed several times during the decade. At first, assigning the students to counties was done by the primary school department of the Ministry. Within the counties, it was the educational department of the county council which elaborated the detailed scheme. For some years, there was a more humane system, too, in which the Ministry made it possible for the students to indicate the places where they would like to teach. The Ministry then sent the locations and, at the teachers' training colleges, undergraduate students were assigned to concrete schools. From 1955, undergraduates before their finals were appointed to counties. They had to present themselves at the counties and the assignment was made by the district councils. Fourth-year students were assigned by committees of distribution. At the beginning of the

50s, all teachers' training colleges strived after making as many students as possible carry out the probationary year and fulfil the prescriptions of the Ministry because of the big lack of teachers. It happened several times that students had to be retained from going on for higher education at universities or university colleges in order to have the right number prescribed by the Ministry. Assigning the posts of the teacher trainees in their probationary year was precisely defined by the Ministry of Public Education: *'In case the committee of distribution cannot provide the institute with the appointed amount of students in their probationary year, the needed number of students has to be retained from among the students who have applied for further studies on the grounds of talks conducted with the students while considering the difference between the original number of applications for the probationary year and the amount indicated in the Appendix. /First of all, it applies to students applying for the Faculty of Humanities, the Technical University, Faculty of Natural Sciences and Pedagogical College./'* (VML KFL XXVI. 61. 776/1952-53) As the Teachers' Training College in Kőszeg was unable to fill the required allotment, it received a letter with the following content from the relevant governing Ministry:

'...Instructions have been given that, if needed, the committees of distributions should fill the appointed allotment /posts/ by retaining the students who have applied for further studies ... [the students retained] cannot take an entrance exam ... if s/he is admitted, it will be null and void.' (VML KFL XXVI. 61. 917/1951-52)

From 1954, a new rule appeared in the general outlines: *'35% of the students in their fourth year at the teachers' training colleges are allowed to go on for higher education, 65% will spend their probationary year. The attention of the committees of distribution is emphatically drawn to the fact that the selection of those going on for higher studies should not take place in a way that the probationary year can be only spent by students having mediocre and weak achievement because it could seriously jeopardize the level of education at the junior section of primary schools. The task of teachers' training colleges is principally aimed at strengthening the educational teaching at the junior section of primary schools by providing educators' training with increasingly good quality and by means of replacement.'* (JNKSZML VIII. 52. 52/1953) In May, 1954 it was already 20% of students who were allowed to apply for further studies.

In 1956, the posts of primary school teachers were partly filled; there was less need for students in their probationary year. The amount of students assigned to spend a probationary year was defined by the Ministry of Education, at the same time the number was also given how many students were not allowed to be appointed to do a probationary year. Those retained from the probationary year

were moved to the lines of gathering, adult education and military forces. After doing classroom observations, they were allowed to take a qualifying examination. It was not necessary to take similar steps because there were a great number of unfilled posts, in 1957 there were as many as 400 educators without qualification who were employed by the educational departments of councils.

After preparing the scheme of assignment, the directors of teachers' training colleges asked the primary schools where they sent practising trainee teachers for information. It can be exemplified by the following letter of director *Kosztra Pál* in Kőszeg, who wrote: '*You are kindly asked to provide detailed information concerning the foreseeable position of the trainee teacher spending his/her probationary year, the size of your school as well as the way you can arrange his/her living, boarding, and the kind(s) of vehicles by means of which your community can be reached.*' (VML KFL XXVI. 61. 268/1954) The anxiety about the trainees can be felt from the text. This letter was a nice example of the role of teachers functioning as a kind of parents' substitution at the teachers' training colleges.

The anxiety of the teachers at the colleges was not ill-founded as they knew the living and boarding problems of students spending their probationary year well enough. Their desperation was, first of all, aimed at issues like '*...how our students would develop in Maty, Gyűrűfü. In Gyöngyösmellék, the trainee can hardly get any help or guidance!*' (Tibor, 1955:396)

The patronisation of teacher trainees spending their probationary year was not carried out by experts prepared for this purpose. Primary schools received training tasks that they were unable to perform. As an additional task, teachers were to take part in developing teacher trainees. The following joke is about this enforced task: '*Director Khin István in Hajós was quite witty to nickname his school GYAK. GYI as there were several teacher trainees at his school. The Hungarian abbreviation was to mean Supporting Institute of Teacher Trainees in their Probationary Year.*' (Köves, 1955:6)

Teachers' training colleges generally organised conferences for those spending their probationary year every half of term. At the conferences, they prepared them for the qualifying exam, they discussed the topics that were more problematic and besides, trainees could also get answers to the problems which emerged during their everyday teaching and educational work. The costs of the first conference were paid by the Ministry, which was not the case later on.

A director of studies summarised his impressions about the problems of the probationary year, the difficulties of the trainees as well as the level of their work as follows: '*...most trainees teach in divided schools, a minor part of trainees teach two classes in partly divided schools. There are some of them who also teach certain*

subjects at the senior section ...We will report it to comrade Faragó. The work of many trainees was made more difficult by the fact that they were directed to locations other than their assigned one and their allotment has even been changed since that time... Trainees have not been busy enough to prepare for their qualifying exam... Trainees brought along their lesson plans made throughout the year to the conference. On the grounds of these, we could state that they prepared for their lessons with plans, the drafts were however quite formal in several cases, they did not mirror any painstaking preparation for the lessons... It was not the conference which meant the only contact with our trainees in their probationary year... We sent a letter to the directors of each trainee of ours and asked them to inform us about the allocation, occupation, work of the trainees performing their probationary year.... Most directors sent us detailed reports. On the grounds of these ... we could state that the majority of our trainees worked conscientiously, their directors were satisfied with them.' (BFL VIII. 131. kd. 1954. febr. 2.)

Questioning the efficiency of the probationary year, Tibor István brought forward a scheme for improvement: *"The lack of educators has surely come to an end ... trainees should be sent to schools where they could really practise by taking the advantage of professional guidance thus their teaching skills could develop and the probationary year could really become an organic continuation of teacher training"* (Tibor, 1955:396).

In 1956 the issue arose that the fourth-year students of teachers' training colleges should spend their probationary year at their schools. This decree was given a tremendous reception by the teachers' training colleges. Among the opinions concerning the changes, the probationary year was assessed in Jászberény in the following way: *'The teaching staff applauds and finds it necessary to organise a fifth year instead of the probationary year ad interim until the introduction of the academy training. It is a matter of common knowledge that the introduction of the probationary year was not made necessary by interests of pedagogical relevance and it was also proved that the institution of probationary year had not worked. The primary reason why it did not work was that..., in the majority of cases, trainees had not been able to develop in terms of gathering theoretical and practical pedagogical knowledge, they had even regressed instead... They had not been able to cope with the dual task each part of which required complete personalities... They should have performed work of full value by teaching, educating, guiding the class which had been assigned to them... Besides all their work of this kind they had to prepare for the qualifying exam that ended their studies...'* (JNKSZML VIII. 52. 9/1957)

Organising the fifth years did not take place, the students of the last secondary school classes were sent to perform the probationary year.

When assessing the probationary year, we have to mention as a positive feature that trainees could practise in the teaching process for a long time, in the meantime their work was supported. It could have had a real value if teacher trainees had not been left alone for this academic year, they should have been in daily contact with the training institute. In the course of the probationary year, the theoretical knowledge of the trainees may also have decreased that is why it would have been more expedient to organise the written and the oral part of the qualifying exam simultaneously with the final exam. Probationary year can be considered as the organic part of teachers' training, it functioned as an uninterrupted individual complex practice of profession. In implicit form, it also reduced the lack of primary school teachers. In the form it was realised it only had an insignificant professional value.

Interpretation of the results of interviews: Probationary Year

Those interviewed spent the probationary year at their dwelling place (7%), near their place of residence (64%), in remote settlements (26%) and in Budapest (1%). Trainees were generally assigned to villages, farming centres and farmsteads lying far away from their dwelling places thus they lived in lodgings.

Trainee teachers generally taught in classes drawn together. Contrary to rules, they also got assignments to teach subjects in the senior section of primary school. They had several out-of-school activities, they carried out agit-prop work and activities in connection with the movement:

- organisation of the cultural life in the village (leading the library, dance groups, stage-plays, sewing and other courses),
- arrangement of community celebrations,
- teaching in evening schools and illiterate courses,
- assistance in organising co-operative farms, population census, stock-taking of animals, harvest, produce collection,
- subscription to Peace Loans, supervision in cultural centres while watching the television collectively.

Professional assistance was, in many cases, only a nominal matter. The main protector of the trainee teacher was the older teacher. The interviewees also indicated the headmaster as a helper. 17% of those

interviewed remained without help during their probationary year, only 8% of them were satisfied with the help provided by the mentor, leading teacher. 45% of the trainee teachers had no contact with the mother school, they were left alone. It mainly occurred in the cases of those whose training school had been winded up. 16% of the interviewees reported good contact, in case of a problem they went to the training school or sent a letter, every quarter of a year they appeared in the training schools to have a consultation.

The practice was controlled by the headmaster, the deputy headmaster, the school inspector of the primary school. The headmasters, educational leaders, subject teachers of the teachers' training schools could rarely go to carry out inspections (Molnár, 2013:272-273).

Summary

The proportions and the amount of lessons provided for practical training did not change, they kept on having their conditions in syllabuses all the time. A new form of practical training was introduced from 1950: a probationary year. During this probationary year candidates could practise for a long time, in the meantime their work was helped with. It could have had a real value if candidates had not been left alone during their practice, they should have been in daily connection with their training institutes. Probationary year can be considered as an organic part of training primary school teachers, it functioned as a connected, individual, complex professional practice. In a hidden form it reduced the shortage of primary school teachers. In its realized form its professional value was small. Syllabuses, the content and quantity of subjects made it possible to acquire the bases of general education and craftsmanship at institutes of training primary school teachers of secondary level.

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