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RESEARCH PAPER

Prison Education in Slovakia from the Teacher's Perspective

by SILVIA LUKACOVA, MAREK LUKAC, EDUARD LUKAC, IVANA PIROHOVA, & LUCIA HARTMANNOVA
University of Presov, Slovakia

Abstract: *The present study deals with teaching practices in prison education in Slovakia. Attention is paid to secondary school teachers who, at the same time, teach adult prisoners. The aim of the qualitative research conducted was to find out in what ways, in the view of the teachers approached, prison education and school education differ and how they react to the differences. Another objective was to find out whether the teachers feel competent enough to teach prisoners. It was found out that the absence of teacher training for prison education and the power of the prison regime strongly affect teaching practice. The teachers adjusted the syllabus, the pace and demands placed on the learners to the limited conditions of the prison regime. The authors believe that the present study sheds more light on teaching practices in prison education and helps recognize such areas where specific teacher training is needed.*

Keywords: *Prison education, prison teaching, incarcerated students, prison teacher training*

Within Slovakia's formal education, prisoners can only be taught by qualified teachers who also teach children and youths in mainstream schools. They are trained for their teaching career at university level at Faculties of Education. In Slovakia, there is no further education that would train them for teaching adults in the specific conditions of prison. Although some research into professional development exists, there is a gap in the research into prison teaching in Slovakia, despite the fact that prison education has a long tradition reaching back to the 1850s and 1860s (John, 2010). This might be caused by the fact that research in Slovak prisons is rather problematic, as any research activities are subject to authorization and regulation by the General Directorate of the Corps of Prison and Court Guard[1]. All research in prison is conducted by means of questionnaires or surveys with no personal contact between the researcher and the prisoners (according to *Conducting research in the conditions of correctional facilities by external observers*, 2008).

There are some inspiring publications on teaching in prisons, teacher training for this specific practice, as well as reflections on this activity, professionality, or support available in Europe and overseas (e.g. Patrie, 2017; Hawley, Murphy & Souto-Otero, 2012, 2013; Hurkmans & Gillijns, 2012; Eggleston, 1991). The way teachers approach prison education depends on their training for this specific target group in an environment different in a number of ways from traditional education. Teachers coming to prison without appropriate training enter an unknown and oppressive environment they were not prepared for. Most of them rely on information and advice from their more experienced colleagues or on their own instincts (Eggleston, 1991; Gehring & Wright, 2006; Reis-Jorge, 2009). Teacher training for prison education has been criticized in a number of studies, where it is portrayed as insufficient or completely lacking. Almost twenty years ago, Elrod and Ryder (1999), as well as Ashcroft (1999), pointed out that training teachers for prison education is insufficient. Later on, Mathur, Clark and Schoenfeld (2009) asked for opportunities to be created for continuous professional development for prison teachers that would allow them to better meet the needs of their students. According to Hawley et al. (2012, p. 67), only in four out of 26 monitored European countries are prison teachers required to have specialist qualification. Insufficient specific training might not only cause helplessness in prison teachers but also often lead to decreased effectiveness of education (Gehring & Puffer, 2004; Wright, 2005; Sayko, 2005). Ravneberg (2003) found out that prison teachers are more often oriented towards the traditional

Correspondence: Silvia Lukacova, Email: silvia.lukacova@unipo.sk
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school system and see the same objectives for prison education as for education in mainstream schools on the outside. That is why most of the authors mentioned above recommend devoting more attention to the training and support of prison teachers (pre-service and in-service training) that could lead to higher effectiveness of the education, educational outcomes and satisfaction of the incarcerated students and teachers (cf. Gehring & Puffer, 2004; Sayko 2005; Lawton, 2012; Hawley et al., 2013; Patrie, 2017).

Research into the professionality and practices of prison teachers is not sufficiently advanced (e.g. Wright, 2004; Reis-Jorge, 2009; Bhatti, 2010; Hawley et al., 2012; Rogers, Simonot & Nartey, 2014), which is, to a large extent, determined by the limited access of researchers to the prison environment and by the relatively strong impenetrability of the prison system. "The overwhelming majority of correctional education literature focuses on the outcomes of inmate participants as well as the types of programmes offered and not on those who teach in the prison system" (Messemer & Valentine, 2012, p. 29). Wright (2004) also states that the area of knowledge and experience of correctional educators[2] is poorly documented in research.

Apart from insufficient preparation for the prison environment, training for adult learners' education is also absent (Irwin, 2008). Therefore, the pedagogical approach of the teachers is strongly influenced by teaching children and youths in mainstream education. This situation brings up many questions regarding preparation, adaptation and professionality of prison teachers as well as the effectiveness of the teaching process. Since, in Slovakia, these issues have not been subjected to empirical research, the authors of the present paper decided to study the approach of teachers to prison education.

Theoretical Background

Prisoners' education and the training of their teachers are discussed in the background of the main conflict between freedom and a lack of it. This dichotomy is projected into various areas. The teachers come to teach prisoners from an environment of freedom. They are trained to teach students in accordance with the concept of creative-humanistic education (Zelina, 1996) while, in prison, their activity is rigidly controlled and regulated. The teaching process, the relationship between the teacher and the learners, teacher's creativity in choosing the forms, methods and means of education are strongly determined by the character of a total institution. The teacher brings into prison education his or her own view of the world, an approach to education that is, oftentimes, incongruent with prison and prison culture. "As such, these contradictions can become a source of stress for the correctional educator" (Patrie, 2017, p. 18). At the same time, it is a challenge for a prison teacher to realize that the classroom is one of the very few areas inside prison where free discussion can take place in a relatively safe environment not limited by the presence of wardens (Yates, Frolander-Ulf 2001). Wright (2005) compares the experience of first-time prison teachers to a culture shock. Education in the prison environment has significant specific features related to the character of prison as a total institution. The theoretical concept of a total institution was introduced by Goffman (1961), who characterizes it as an isolated, closed social system whose main aim is to control most aspects of its inhabitants' life. It specifically determined what prisoners are supposed to do and when. Room for any innovations or disagreement is minimal.

The prison regime also affects the way in which the teacher communicates with the prisoners. The space for personal communication between the teacher and the prisoners is limited, which is why teachers prefer to focus on the curriculum (Gehring & Puffer, 2004). In mainstream education, teachers often gain information about the private lives of their students, which might help in the understanding of the social background of students while, in prison, they are warned by the prison staff to keep a distance from the prisoners. Messemer and Valentine (2012) identified two contextual dimensions that prison teachers must take into consideration when making decisions or planning the lessons – classroom characteristics and security/safety. Thus, when planning lessons, teachers must do so within the boundaries of the prison's policy regarding security.

Another significant factor prison teachers have to face is the learner characteristics of prisoners. Prison education is presented with a diverse student population with a variety of educational needs (Foley, 2001, p. 257). The population of incarcerated learners represents one of the most disadvantaged groups in society, predominantly coming from the underclass with a generally lower socio-economic position. Most prisoners come from the working class, which is why they reflect a very common opinion that education is not for them (Rocks, 2006). Incarcerated learners are less educated, have a higher drop-out rate and a more often negative

experience with education. They often have learning difficulties (Champion, 2012), they are addicted to drugs or alcohol and are more impulsive and frustrated (Ross & Fabiano, 1985). Compared to standard adult education, it is problematic to use life experience in prison education because these learners' life experience is often socially inappropriate. Moreover, incarcerated learners' negative life experiences create a frame of generally oriented predispositions that can hinder them in changing their own perspective (Mezirow, 2000).

The motivation to learn seems to be the key because self-motivated prisoners do well in their studies. Some studies (e.g. Smith & Silverman, 1994; Love, 1991), however, showed that external motivation and desire for immediate results prevails in prisoners. On the contrary, Eikeland (2009) states that, in Scandinavian countries, prisoners were motivated by the need for a meaningful way to spend their sentence (the so-called 'push factors') and to be better able to cope with life upon release (the so-called 'pull factors'). Analogically, Manger et al. (2010) found out that those prisoners who were motivated to participate in education by a chance to be better ready for life after their release were also motivated by the possibility of acquiring useful knowledge and skills. Interesting results were also brought about by research conducted by Halimi et al. (2017), which looked at two motivation categories. In the category 'learning orientation', internal motivation to learn prevailed in the respondents, while in the category 'goal orientation', the motivation was obtaining a diploma or a certificate. There are a great number of different factors influencing the motivation of prisoners to learn which, regarding their life history and current situation might differ from the mainstream population. This is why it is necessary to study the influence of the prison context on educational motivation (Costelloe, 2003).

The teachers must be aware of the fact that a lack of freedom and desire for freedom is what rules the motivation and activity of prisoners, and teachers should develop realistic responses to the various needs of prisoners (Manger et al., 2010, p. 546). The world outside and the world inside has its different rules, people, rewards and incentives (Montross & Montross, 1997). Several key authors (Freire, 1973; Mezirow, 2000) claim that adult learners bring to the process of learning their own knowledge, experience and understanding of themselves, their community and the wider society. As the teachers are not specifically trained for this group of learners (e.g. Wright, 2005; Hawley et al. 2012; Elrod & Ryder, 1999), they need to find their own way of teaching prisoners (e.g. Eggleston, 1991; Reis-Jorge, 2009).

Adult education, regardless the conditions in which it takes place and the target group, should also follow broader, not only instrumental, aims focused on the development of skills for employment. Education comprises more than just forming skills; it also has a personal, social and economic dimension. This is especially true for all educational programmes in prisons (Warner, 2007), in which the process of social rehabilitation is considered most important. In the paper *Education in Prison* (1990, p. 8), the following reference to the overall development of prisoners' personality is the key message for incarcerated learners' education: "Education in prison shall aim to develop the whole person bearing in mind his or her social, economic and cultural context". To achieve this goal, adult education completed during the sentence must be brought as close to the best adult education practices in the outside society as possible (Tüllinen, 2009; *Education in Prison,* 1990) and as such cannot be realized without well-trained educational staff.

Aims and Research Questions

The study presents the results of the research whose aim was to explore:

- *in what ways, in the view of the teachers approached, prison education and school education differ and how they react to the differences;*
- *whether the teachers approached feel competent enough to teach prisoners.*

The following research questions were formulated to achieve the aim:

- *How were the teachers trained to educate prisoners?*
- *How do they respond to the differences between educating incarcerated adult persons and the teaching of mainstream students?*
- *How do they assess the conditions of prison education?*
- *Are teachers aware of the individual characteristics of the educated prisoners (such as their life history, socio-economic conditions)?*

- *Do teachers consider themselves competent enough to teach adult prisoners?*

The specific form of partial questions differed with respect to the course of the dialogue and the process of theoretical saturation.

Methods

Research characteristics

Qualitative research was selected to achieve the research aims. According to Strauss & Corbin (2008), it is adequate to use qualitative research when one tries to define someone's experience with a phenomenon. The aim here is to form a new theory. Based on the character of the research aims and insufficient elaboration of the given issue in Slovakia, the research strategy of grounded theory was selected to describe teacher practices in prison education.

Research participants and location

The research participants were teachers of secondary vocational school (upper secondary education ISCED 3C 353), who were also teaching incarcerated students outside their morning timetable (within the identical study programme 'machine repair technician'). The interviews were conducted in the teachers' offices at the secondary vocational school in question and were always planned and carried out during the teachers' free periods. A selection criterion was the length of the participants' teaching experience at school (a minimum of five years) and in prison education (a minimum of one year). Even though there is no clear agreement with regard to the periodization of the professional development of teachers, the period of stabilization, in which one can consider a teacher to be an expert, usually comes after five years' experience (Průcha, 1999, pp. 214-215). The minimum requirement of one-year teaching experience in prison education was set with the aim of avoiding first-time teachers entering the prison environment. According to Wright (2005), prison teachers in the initial phase are more likely to be fascinated by the new, exotic environment and captivation with the new experience prevails.

Five teachers of the secondary vocational school were interviewed. They were teaching students at the school in the mornings and, since educational legislation does not specify when part-time forms of education are to take place, they were teaching in the prison in the afternoons. They were employed full-time by the school while they were not paid by the prison (import model). Three teachers were teaching theoretical subjects and two teachers were training the practical skills of the incarcerated learners. All teachers were fully qualified with a degree from university. Qualification requirements on primary and secondary school teachers are specified by Act No. *317/2009 on teaching staff and vocational training employees* (*Zákon č. 317/2009 o pedagogických zamestnancoch a odborných zamestnancoch*). Teachers educating adults at 'second chance' schools are not required to take any specific training in education of adult learners and, thus, no specialized training is necessary in order to teach prisoners.

Table 1

Participant characteristics

Participant	Length of practice at school (years)	Length of practice in prison	Taught subjects
Peter	34	14	Slovak, Civics, English
Ján	15	5	Specialized mechanics, Mathematics, Physics
Miro	15	4	Introduction to engineering, Machines and equipment, Technology of repairs
Emil	15	4	Vocational training
Jozef	29	4	Vocational training

The interviews were conducted at a secondary vocational school in Eastern Slovakia. The school provides training of experts in metallurgical, machinery and electro-technical study branches while also providing afternoon classes in 'machine repair technician,' a three-year study programme for prisoners. Should prisoners apply for the programme, this form of education becomes part of their individual rehabilitation programme. Violation of duties set out by such education is then considered failing to meet part of the rehabilitation programme (*Statute No. 368/2008,* § 44), which might be sanctioned.

The prisoners' education carried out by the school took place in a minimum-security prison located near the school. The first personal meeting with the teacher took place in October 2014. Once mutual cooperation had been agreed on, a teacher, Peter[3] (henceforth 'Peter'), as a coordinator, facilitated for other teachers of theoretical subjects to be interviewed, enabled the researchers to view teaching documents, and accompanied them in the school during the interviews. The research was conducted with the official agreement of the school principal. Since the research did not take place in the prison and was not primarily aimed at the target group of prisoners, no formal agreement from the general director of the Corps of Prison and Court Guard was necessary. The collection of data and their analysis was carried out between October 2014 and February 2015.

Methods of data collection

The methods used in the research followed grounded theory. The data were gained using the method of semi-structured interview. Pedagogical documents provided by the school in the form of study programmes and syllabi were also used. These served to verify the teachers' statements regarding greater or lesser emphasis on specific subjects (extent and allocated hours) and theoretical and practical education (the ratio of theory to practice).

To maintain the ethical principles of the research, every teacher became familiar with its aim, the way the data and research results are to be used, the rules of the interview, the rights and duties of the researchers and participants (teachers signed informed consent).

The interview covered several areas of prison education. The main areas were training for prison education, teaching experience in prison, evaluation of differences between teaching in school and in prison, problems and conditions of education, etc. The questions were gradually modified and edited as the analysis progressed. In accordance with grounded theory (Svaricek, Sedova et al., 2007), the data were analyzed immediately after the first interview (open coding) to find out which areas required more depth and what aspects of teaching experience needed further exploration. The interviews were recorded by means of a digital voice recorder and transcribed and encoded by MS Word and MS Excel.

Methods of data analysis and interpretation

The data were analyzed according to the principles of grounded theory in a three-stage coding process (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). Each interview was transcribed verbatim and consequently analyzed by the first and the second author of the study in the *open coding* phase. The result was a collection of indicators that were assigned more general meanings and a creation of codes. The constant comparison method (Strauss & Corbin, 2008) was used to continuously compare indicators and codes, to search the same, or similar, meanings among indicators, to assign them to already existing codes and to create new codes. The new codes were grouped according to the same features and characteristics, and categories, or sub-categories, were created. The data compilation from other interviews led to constant comparing, sorting and changing within the groups of codes, and to forming, or re-forming, of categories.

In the *axial coding* phase, the categories and subcategories were described, analyzed, and their content was defined. The phenomena they were related to (the extent, time and the way they happened) were defined. In the *selective coding* phase, the focus was placed on the identification of the core category around which the basic *analytical story* was organized (Strauss & Corbin, 2008).

Quality assurance of research and ethical aspects

According to Denzin & Lincoln (2005), an alternative to validity in qualitative research is *triangulation*. It represents the use of more sources and methods in the individual research phases. The participants were selected to fully meet the criteria of the research aims. Only those teachers who had sufficient experience with prison education and could be considered experts in the researched phenomena participated in the research.

In every single research phase, experts in the area of pedagogy and andragogy were consulted concerning the progress and partial findings of the newly created theory. The principals' office was consulted whenever necessary with regard to the gained data which were also compared to and contrasted with legislative documents and pedagogical documentation.

The research was restricted by the fact that no other research methods could be used during data collection (e.g. lesson observation, interviews with incarcerated learners), since prisoners could not be contacted personally. In the effort to maintain the good name of the school, the decision was taken not to reveal the identity of the school.

Results

Table 2 presents the main categories resulting from the data analysis.

Table 2

Category	Codes
Teacher's reflection on prison environment	Organization of education and conditions of the teaching process
	Teaching material and aids
	Selection of teachers and students
Teacher preparedness for prison education	Absence of specific training for prison education
	Feedback for the teacher
Teacher and incarcerated learner	Heterogeneity of the learner group
	Relationships between incarcerated students and teachers
	Prisoner learners
Theoretical and practical teaching	Adult learners
	Requirements for the learners
	Teaching preparation
	Activity
	Time and space to learn
	Evaluation of teaching

Teachers' reflection on prison environment

The present category reviews how the teachers perceived different educational environments and how they assessed the conditions.

Organization of education and conditions for the teaching process. Education of prisoners is mutually convenient for the school and prison: a qualified workforce for the prison and financial attractiveness in the form of a higher total number of students for the school.

Peter: *"...there is an economic advantage – there is a triple norm for a student..."*

The school offers study programmes in which the emphasis is placed on practical education. At the beginning of the cooperation with the prison, a four-year study programme ending in a school-leaving exam (Maturita) was launched; which was, however, considered by the above teacher as too demanding for the prisoners, which is why two- and three-year programmes were selected instead.

Peter: *"...only one class was opened; later, we cancelled it ... it seemed the learners would, mainly,*

not manage English, which is why we changed to a three-year programme...” The teachers understood but criticized the *paradox of good behaviour.* On the one hand, good behaviour increases the chance of parole; on the other hand, however, it means the prisoner will not complete his or her education.

The prison education was realized part-time, in the form of afternoon classes, when the prisoners finished their work duties. Block teaching was convenient for both, the prison and the school. The teachers were able to teach mornings at school and spend the afternoons teaching in the prison with no increased security or administrative strain for the prison (monitoring and accompanying the teachers).

For the teaching process, the school had two rooms available in the basement; one was used for theoretical lessons while the other one served as a workshop. Peter and Jozef felt unsafe in this environment and considered it inappropriate for the education. They, however, got used to it.

Peter: *“...but it is a basement. It is so depressing to teach in a basement.” “…it does not look like a classroom…” Peter was also concerned for his own safety: “… there are condom machines on the walls and I know I could scream as much as I want, there is no one there [to protect me] ...” The punitive nature of the environment was described by Jozef:“...wherever you go, the door opens and immediately locks, there are magnetic locks that close right behind you…”.*

The teachers understood the fixed conditions for the education as part of the total institution. They did not try to negotiate because they knew that other schools were also interested in prisoners’ education for economic reasons. The teachers went through the process of acclimatization, gradually adapted, got used to it and did not feel permanent fear for their safety. They relied on the fact that the prison guards decided rightly that no guard was needed during the teaching process, as it was a minimum-security prison. Moreover, only non-risk ‘adequate candidates’ were chosen to be educated. However, routine precautions caused teachers to have negative feelings even after a number of years.

Ján: “*…they will search and scan you, [make you] hand over this and that, they look into your bag; it is restricting, there are bars on the windows...”*

The teachers had to adjust the rules to the prison regime, which, in many aspects, was in sharp contrast with the culture of the school (such as free movement or free communication with students).

Teaching material and aids. Restricted space conditions also shaped the extent and character of the teaching aids used, subjected to a rigid bureaucratic process, which is why the teachers did not even think of innovations in this area. The classrooms had standard but old equipment; there was a blackboard, desks and an overhead projector.

Miro: *“...it takes a complicated process to get a computer there ... it is administratively difficult to get something, all kinds of steps need to be taken...”*

In practical teaching, the workshop could not be equipped in the same way as in the school due to the limited space. The teachers had to check and register the equipment, as it presented a potential safety risk. The prisoners only had old discarded textbooks; no new textbooks were used. The teachers gradually stopped lending prisoners the books because they used them to make cigarettes.

Ján: *“...I give them books because I have extra, I do not give them any new books; and the older ones they use soon have pages missing...”*

Selection of teachers and students. The teachers were selected to teach in the prison based on their interest, but as Peter (coordinator) said, mainly those who were not bossy but rather easy-going were chosen to teach in the prison. Even though the law does not explicitly forbid women to teach in male prisons, there is an unspoken requirement that the teachers be male.

Peter claimed the most important criterion when choosing a prisoner to be educated, after applying, was the level of conformity over aggression in his behaviour.

Teacher preparedness for prison education

Absence of specific training for prison education. In order to teach prisoners, teachers in Slovakia are not required to complete any *specialized training*. The teachers in the present study only completed a for-

mal course on security (induction) where they were instructed what they could and could not do in relation to the prisoners (for example ask them about their personal life, why they were convicted, etc.). What a teacher can, must or must not do was the only form of preparation for prison education the teachers were provided with.

Ján: *"...we did not take any courses on how to teach, we were only told how [the prisoners] were, how they would behave, how it would be appropriate for us to behave..."*

The teachers agreed that educating prisoners did not require any professional training because they all considered themselves experts in the subjects they were teaching. They would have, however, welcomed psychological training. The absence of specialized training led to the fact that the teachers searched for their own way of teaching and working with the prisoners, as Jozef stated: "*…the way of working in the workshop is also different here; you have to find out for yourself what works best for you*."

Feedback for the teacher. For the teachers, exchanging experiences and getting advice from those who also taught in the prison were the only source of information. They did not talk about teaching in prison with other colleagues from the school because they were sure their colleagues would not have understood them anyway.

Jozef: "*... I sometimes talked to my colleagues and they said: just say no to them directly; do it this way. But I cannot do it this way and solve the situation as I would at school.*"

Prison education is not discussed in school meetings. Nobody guides or supervises the teachers involved in prison education. Observation is absent, which is why the quality of the teacher's work is only proved at the final exams.

Ján: "*...there were no observations, but my work is checked by means of the final exams they take in technical subjects, which means you can find out what I have taught them in those years…"*

Teacher and incarcerated learner

Heterogeneity of the learner group. The group of incarcerated persons engaged in education was markedly *heterogeneous* in comparison to the standard school population concerning age, level of education, general knowledge, life experience, and, in some cases, the level of Slovak.

Peter: *"...A paradox that there is an illiterate person in the classroom, a person that has no primary school education and there is a student who has secondary grammar school education ... It is very diverse concerning their knowledge."*

According to the teachers' statements, better-educated learners were bored during the teaching process because the level of study was adjusted to the less educated learners. Also, the prisoners who did not finish primary school, or could not prove they had, were being educated. Some prisoners had not even finished the basic level of education. They were allowed to study with the condition that they would have completed primary education during the first year of the study. Various levels of education and differing ages of the prisoners led, according to the teachers, to lowering the difficulty of the curriculum and to the selection of shorter study programmes with less theoretical and more practical preparation (theory was taught one day a week while practical training was allocated four days a week). There is always a possibility that the study group will change during the teaching process, which makes the teacher's work harder. Some prisoners leave the education because they are on parole, while some have to undergo addiction treatment.

Relationships among incarcerated students and teachers. Mutual relationships between teachers and students were markedly influenced by *information embargo,* legitimized by an agreement between the school and the prison. The teachers were only provided basic identification data of the prisoners due to compulsory administration; they, however, did not have any information about the crimes they had been convicted for, who they were in their civilian life and so on. The teachers claimed that it mainly caused problems for them at the beginning.

Ján: *"...it is the worst in the first year because I am getting to know them there and I do not know what I am actually allowed to say so you have to be very careful about choosing your words..."*

Peter: *"...we cannot contact them – the prisoners – closer, personally."*

The teachers could not cooperate with families as is common in mainstream education, since they could not ask about the prisoners' personal life. The prison system is not interested in developing any other than formal relationships among the teachers and the prisoners. In total institutions, the relationships are rigidly hierarchically structured and it is necessary to consistently maintain this form to fulfil the main functions of imprisonment. The behaviour of the teachers towards the prisoners was marked by an effort to avoid conflicts and by carefulness.

Jozef: *"...if you do not think hard about what you say, it will come back to you immediately; you need to choose your words and sometimes think twice and then say what you want to say..."*

An effort for a relationship without conflict between the teachers and the prisoners was also obvious in the way the teachers used their *authority*. The teachers were more benevolent towards the prison students in comparison to mainstream students. Miro provided an example – when a prisoner refused to cooperate during the teaching process, he did not care, but if it had happened in school, he would not be so benevolent. The teachers also did not react to the prisoners' disinterest in the way they would at school.

Ján: *"... I see he is not paying attention to me; he is somewhere else with his thoughts but he is not disrupting the others... You will miss out but it is not disturbing my lesson."*

The effort to avoid conflicts was mutual. The teachers wanted the teaching process to run smoothly; therefore, they did not act upon the prisoners' inappropriate behaviour in order to avoid their punishment. The most effective tools to prevent possible problems were, according to the teachers, clear rules stated in advance, which they saw as a way of protection from the possible manipulative behaviour of the incarcerated persons.

The teachers agreed that it was important to set clear rules, keep to them and not let the prisoners manipulate the teachers.

Jozef: *"... you do have compassion but there has to be clear boundaries because if you let them come closer to you, they ask for more..."*

The teachers believed that the teacher should not only teach. The effort to build mutual trust was shown, according to Jozef, through the willingness to give advice, help, and listen:

"...I am also here to listen to them, to give them some advice... actually this is how a relationship between a teacher and a prisoner is maintained..."

The relationship between the prisoners and the teachers was not only influenced by the strict prison rules, but also by the fusion of the roles of a prisoner, student and an adult.

Learners as prisoners

From the teachers' point of view, the role of the learners as prisoners was mainly obvious in education in the areas of *motivation* and *discipline*. All the teachers approached agreed that the prisoners found the study secondary; what was primary was a chance of parole. Getting praise may make parole come faster.

Emil said: *"One of the reasons they apply for the programme is a chance of getting praise or advantage for that"*.

The teachers believed education was a meaningful activity for the prisoners, as it eliminated boredom and cabin fever, and it was a kind of therapy.

The teachers primarily identified the learners as prisoners. The prisoners were wearing prison clothes as a symbol of their primary role during the teaching process.

Ján: *"...my take on that is that they are prisoners; to me they are simply prisoners in their uniforms with a stripe on their backs..."*

Discipline was seen as the most important feature distinguishing incarcerated learners from the students in the school. None of the participants had ever had a problem keeping discipline in the classroom.

Peter: *"... they are... students that every school would want, concerning discipline..."*

The prison regime gave the teachers some capacity, also enabling them to suggest punishment for a prisoner. The source of permanent discipline was, according to the teachers, their own authority, or partial

power that they informally had, but the process of mortification could play an important role.

Ján: *"...they are afraid that if they cause offense during my class, I would tell someone and they would have a problem, so they are calm..."*

Learners as adults

The teachers realized that they could not behave with the adult prisoners in the same way they would with the students at school.

Jozef: *"...I thought it would have been as in our school but the directive way does not work in the same way it does in school… I cannot solve the situation as I do in mainstream education."*

They strived to gradually build a partnership relationship with incarcerated learners in spite of the limiting factors of their prison identity and the prison regime, which would enable them to define themselves against the uniform.

Peter: *"...when I enter the classroom, I shake everybody's hand; they really appreciate it, everyone else just shouts at them..."*

The relationship of the teachers towards the prisoners was shown to be conditioned by the situation; it varied between seeing a person as a student, adult, and prisoner. Peter used a different approach towards the prisoners due to their age. The same reason was mentioned by Ján, who pointed to the different way of talking to the prisoners compared to the students at school. But at the same time the teachers emphasized their role as a teacher during the teaching process.

Emil: *"...the relationship is actually the same as to a student; they sometimes really behave just like the students at school and have the same excuses..."*

It was shown that the teachers reacted to the multiple identities of the prisoners according to the situation. If the teaching process ran without a problem, the teachers chose a partnership approach – the learner as an adult person. If there were some problems, they overtook the expert power of the teacher – the learner as a student. In such situations that could be dangerous, the teachers were ready to use regime precautions of the prison – the learner as a prisoner. Even though the teachers had some *power*, they only had minimal influence on positive changes in the prisoners' situation. The teachers were not allowed to reward the prisoners (in the past, after half a year of study, the teacher could give praise). The teachers still have the right to impose sanctions but, as was mentioned, they did not impose them in order to avoid conflicts.

Teacher and teaching process

Based on the conditions of the education process created by the prison regime as well as with regard to the abilities and needs of the prisoners (as the teachers saw them), the teachers identified significant differences in the *practical* and *theoretical* parts of the teaching process.

Peter: *"...for them, practical training is more interesting and beneficial because by learning Slovak in lessons, they are not going to make a breakthrough."*

In Table 3, those features of the teaching process are listed in which important differences between the theoretical and practical lessons were noticed.

Table 3

Theoretical and practical lessons

	Theoretical lessons	Practical lessons
Demands on the teacher's preparation	lower	high
Homework	sometimes	never
Requirements for the student's activity	lower	higher

Amount of time	1 day/week	4 days/week
Motivation by the teacher	low	higher
Informal diagnostics	none	partial
Individual work with a student	lower	high
Type of teacher's behaviour	passive	active

The teachers of practical subjects considered their own *preparation* and the *process* of practical lessons more difficult, as they had to be more active, maintain the students' motivation, check the work of the prisoners more frequently and consistently prepare all the equipment (including work tools) necessary for the teaching process.

Jozef: *"... I think that the school (in the sense of teaching theoretical subjects) has it a little bit easier because when [the students] come to the lesson, they sit; they want to sit because they do not want to work..."*

The prisoners did not have adequate conditions to do their homework in prison; therefore, the teachers of theoretical subjects only rarely set homework. The prisoners had no appropriate space or time to prepare for the lessons; access to the study material and computer equipment was restricted.

The practical lessons were also different from the theoretical ones in the *requirements* that the teachers placed on the incarcerated learners. The teachers had, generally, lower expectations of their performance, based on their level of education, a smaller number of lessons and limited possibilities for preparation. Lower expectations were reflected in lowered requirements on the final level of knowledge and abilities. The teachers markedly *reduced* the curriculum mainly in the theoretical part of education, which only made up 15% of the curriculum.

The teachers of the practical subjects stated that, in comparison to the theoretical lessons, they and the prisoners had to be *more active*. They were forced to permanently activate, motivate, instruct and check the work processes of the prisoners that used the activity to gain skills. They had to use an individual approach, eliminate mistakes during their work and attract their interest so that they wanted to work.

Jozef: *"...they start to work but it is not enough to show them something once; we always come back to the same thing so I never stop there because they keep asking me what they are actually supposed to do..."*

In the theoretical part of education (e.g. Slovak, mathematics and specialized subjects), the prisoners were mostly *passive*, the teacher worked with the whole group and used the method of explanation. The various difficulties of the teaching process in the practical and theoretical lessons also had an influence on how the teachers generally *assessed* their work in the prison. The teachers of theoretical subjects, who were generally more passive, were more likely to look forward to teaching in the prison because nothing interrupted their actions in comparison to teaching mainstream students.

Peter: *"Teaching them is better because you do not have to tell anybody to be quiet... to pay attention; they sit and look at you. They have nothing to distract their attention, no cell phones and so on."*

On the other hand, the teachers of the practical subjects considered teaching in the prison more difficult, as they were forced to devote more attention to the prisoners and communicate more with them.

Jozef: *"...when I come [to the school], I finally see regular people… the work here with students, I would say, is nicer, you get a better feeling from working with them here than there, because... there is always someone, or, often, most of them, who looks like they are forced to be there..."*

Discussion

The study presents what it is like to be a prison teacher and how prison education differs from mainstream education at schools, as well as how teachers react to the differences. Attention is also paid to teacher training for prison education, which, in Slovakia, is not required. In the present research, the teachers did not even consider such training necessary. They considered their competences for prison education to be suffi-

cient, based on the length of their teaching experience and legislative norms that do not place special requirements on prison teachers. Lawton (2012) found that prison teachers considered special training necessary, mainly in the didactic area, as they had experienced prisoners not being able to meet the requirements of the traditional way of teaching. The participants in the present research also confirmed the above fact; however, they did not look for the solution in improving their professionality but rather in decreasing the requirements for the learners' performance. Another factor contributing to their competence as adequate was the fact that no one monitored the teaching process, which is why they did not feel the need for change or improvement.

Their approach was mainly based on their intuition, since no one had prepared them to teach people of various ages, levels of education, knowledge, abilities, experience and, often, with pathological behaviour. The teachers learnt how to teach prisoners through learning by doing (Eggleston, 1991; Gehring & Wright, 2006; Reis-Jorge, 2009). Acculturation of the teachers into an environment that is unknown happens undirected and without corresponding support. Every teacher has to find their own way of performance in the prison and if they need it, they can only rely on the experience and advice of their colleagues.

The teachers approached identified the differences between the prisoners' education and mainstream education in the following main areas: organization and conditions of education (teaching), characteristics of learner groups, relationships between the teachers and the prisoners, and teaching theoretical and practical subjects.

The work of the teachers was defined by an agreement between the school and the prison with the aim of minimizing interference with the prison regime. This also affected the selection process of the students and teachers. Students apply for the study voluntarily; however, their inclusion is also assessed from the viewpoint of safety risks. Those teachers who behave calmly and avoid conflict are preferred. Since the teachers gave morning lessons in a mainstream school while the prisoners worked, block education in the prison took place in the afternoons, which was also convenient for the prison regime. A part-time form of education expects self-study from the learner and requires a chance to find time for self-study, as well as access to study sources. However, the prisoners were not enabled to manage time for education; the space to do their homework was completely lacking and access to study sources was markedly restricted (minimum of teaching material, a lack of teaching aids, study room, or library with scientific and technical literature for prisoners). Similarly, Hall and Killacky (2008) found out that noise, scheduling conflicts, and a lack of instructional materials have a negative impact on the study process. The teachers criticized the teaching conditions due to insufficient material and technological equipment, the nature of the classroom, as well as the disturbing, albeit necessary, security regulations, as security concerns take priority over education (Jurich et al., 2001). Rogers, Simonot and Nartey (2014) also identified the negative impact of the prison regime in relation to the availability of ICT, the movement of students within the prison environment and difficulties with specific resources. This is in contrast with, for instance, the situation in Norway where the teachers assessed the teaching environment in the prison in a very positive way (Ravneberg, 2005). Many prisoners, on the other hand, experience problems with a lack of access to computer equipment and the security routines in prison interfere with their education (Diseth et al., 2008).

The relationships between the teachers and the prisoners in education are an important factor of quality in the educational process (e.g. Moeller, Day & Rivera, 2004; Gee, 2006; Mottern, 2013). The research showed that the relationships between the teachers and the prisoners were conditioned by the individual situation and varied between seeing the learner as a student, an adult, and a prisoner. Wright (2004, p. 206) also characterizes the situational conditionality of the teachers' relationships towards the prisoners when she talks about relationship dilemmas of prison teachers. Watts (2010) mentions that it is a great challenge, but also an opportunity, for a teacher to realize that a student in prison mainly considers himself a prisoner. In the same way, the teachers participating in the present research considered the learners first as prisoners, since the environment where the education took place only slightly differed from the prison itself and the rules of prison life significantly influenced the students' behaviour. An explanation for the above fact can be found in Goffman (1961), who describes the process of mortification as the civilian death of a prisoner. For teaching behind bars, Parrotta and Thompson (2011) recommend ignoring the prison identity, which should be separate from the identity of a student (Simmons & Branch, 2015). The issue of the fusion of the roles of a prisoner and a student

and their influence on prison education is strongly established by Wright (2014), who calls for applied research in order to describe 'identity conversations' between teachers and students in more detail.

The teachers tried to avoid a directive approach inappropriate for communication among adults, which they described as a significant difference from teaching at school. Since the teachers only had little information about the prisoners, they approached them carefully with the aim of avoiding problematic situations. Due to the specific learner characteristics and restricted executive power of the teacher, they tried to gain respect and keep discipline in the classroom by building informal authority. Lawton (2012) also states that those teachers who can behave towards prisoners with respect and avoid negative attitude can decrease the risk of disturbing behaviour in the classroom. The teachers were made aware not to develop anything other than formal relationships with the prisoners, which was also reflected in the fact they aimed the teaching process at the curriculum. Similarly, Gehring and Puffer (2004) claim that, in the classroom, prison teachers mainly apply an approach focused on the curriculum rather than the student (student-centred approach). The teachers approached identified a significant difference between theoretical and practical lessons. A higher emphasis in the education was placed on practical preparation, on the development of practical skills necessary for further employment. The teachers considered the theoretical general subjects less important. Warner (2003, 2007) criticizes the above fact when he talks about narrowing the focus of education in prison where more general education is missing. Practical lessons were allocated more generous time and less significant reduction of the curriculum. The teachers justified reducing the theoretical part of the curriculum by limited practical use of theory, the learners' low education level and limited conditions for homework and self-study.

A lesson was the only space where learning could take place. For the teachers, this meant increased demands on the preparation for and realization of the teaching process. The differences in the contentment of the teachers of theoretical and practical subjects were interesting. The teachers of the theoretical subjects assessed teaching in prison more positively, as they were satisfied with the learners' discipline. Their overall activity (preparation for teaching and prevailing monologic methods of teaching) was lower. In the practical lessons, the emphasis was placed on acquiring and managing demanding technological techniques, which brought about higher requirements on the teacher's activity as well as the prisoners being educated. The teachers of practical training emphasized intense interaction with the prisoners (individual approach, motivating and monitoring activity). That is why those teachers considered prisoners' education very difficult and they were more satisfied with teaching at mainstream school. If no one is controlling and putting some pressure on the teachers' performance, the teachers will not expect better performance of their students. When educators label and lower expectations of students (stigmatize them), students perform accordingly (Jussium, 1989). Nevertheless, Bannon (2014) states that the possibility for teachers to positively influence the lives of prisoners is an important source of their work satisfaction. The findings of the present research show that even the character of the teaching process connected with higher, or lower, requirements on the teacher's activity can have an influence on the teacher's overall assessment of the education.

The ways in which the teachers perceived and assessed the conditions and the process of the prisoners' education were related to their understanding of the learners as prisoners, to the different material, didactic and organizational conditions of the prison education, to the restrictions determined by the prison regime, to the different learner characteristics and their own professional specialization (theoretical versus practical). A lack of teacher training for prison education and the conditions determined by the prison regime were manifested in the way the teachers approached education in the following two areas:

- *relation-communicative*, when the teachers chose different communicative patterns towards the incarcerated students than towards mainstream students at school, as these were adult learners about whom the teachers lacked knowledge (information embargo) and, thus, tried to prevent possible problematic situations,
- *didactic*, when the teachers reduced the curriculum and adjusted the pace of the teaching according to the heterogeneity of the group and the restricted conditions of the teaching process determined by the prison regime.

Implications and limitations of the study

Since the above are qualitative research findings, it is necessary to limit them to the area and sample used in the present research. It is not possible to generalize the results or apply them to all prison teachers since, in other Slovak prisons, education in different study programmes and different levels of education also takes place. The results could also differ depending on the nature of the prison regime (the level of security) and, naturally, also the personal and professional characteristic features of the teachers and prisoners. A more complex image of prison teaching experience could be provided by the views of the prisoners on the teachers and the teaching process.

In spite of the above limitations, the authors of the study believe that the outcomes provided bring about valuable findings on a blank map of prison education in Slovakia. Since the teachers are not professionally trained for the specific educational needs of prisoners and the prison environment, it means that for any new problem in class, "the wheel needs to be reinvented" (Gehring, Puffer 2004, p. 23). Therefore, in the given conditions, no established system of specialized teacher training is in place for education in correctional facilities; moreover, there is no system for professional support and counselling for teachers working in the above environment.

Equally to other areas of teaching, prison education also requires an increased level of professionalization. One of the possibilities is an enrichment of existing induction taken by first-time prison teachers by the characteristics of the prison environment and prisoners. Education of first-time teachers as well as continued development of teachers' competences (in-service training) could become part of the established system of continuing education of pedagogical employees in Slovakia, as recommended by Koudahl (in: Eikeland, 2009). The development of teachers' competences should also take place by means of sharing and exchanging experience between prison teachers, as well as the broader pedagogical community. The findings regarding the ways the teachers assessed the conditions and the process of prison education could serve as a basis for further research, which, in Slovakia, is lacking (for instance, what motivates prisoners to education, what teaching methods are used, etc.). Teachers' views on prison education should also be studied more in depth in order to provide relevant feedback for the prison system with regard to the improvement of study conditions (e.g. adjust the teaching conditions in prison as best as possible, to improve the prisoners' approach to the study material, minimize the influence of the regime measures on education, etc.) with the aim of increasing its quality and effectivity in accordance with international conventions and recommendations. The results of the present study can be considered useful for enhancing the need to create new theoretical and practical approaches in training teachers for their unique educational activities in prisons, which should also be transferred into new educational programmes for prison teachers.

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Footnotes

[1.] An armed force that performs the roles connected to detention, imprisonment, protection and supervision of the force's premises and with protection of order and security in courts in the Slovak Republic.

[2.] The terms 'correctional educators' as well as 'correctional education' are used mainly in the USA and Canada. The term 'prison education' is more common in Europe, which is why the teachers who provide prison education are, in the present study, referred to as 'prison teachers'.

[3.] Instead of teachers' real names, pseudonyms were used to guarantee the anonymity of the participants.

Silvia Lukacova is a university teacher at University of Presov in Presov, Slovakia at the Department of Andragogy. Her research deals with issues of education in prisons, the competencies of prison teachers and the education of adults from marginal groups of the population.

Marek Lukac is a university teacher at University of Presov in Presov, Slovakia at the Department of Andragogy and deals with issues of adult Roma/Romani education from marginalized communities and prison education.

Eduard Lukac is a university teacher at University of Presov in Presov, Slovakia at the Department of Andragogy, dealing with adult education in formal school system and history of adult education in Slovakia.

Ivana Pirohova is a university teacher at University of Presov in Presov, Slovakia at the Department of Andragogy. She deals with issues of individualization in adult education, evaluation of adult education and adult Roma/Romani education from marginalized communities.

Lucia Hartmannova is involved with internal doctoral studies with the Faculty of Arts at University of Presov.