

SYNTHESIS OF THEORY AND PRACTICE IN ANDRAGOGUE TRAINING

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ABSTRACT

The article analyses opportunities and possibilities for synthesis of theory and practice in training of andragogues for vocational activity. These opportunities disclose themselves in vocational practice of students, studying in the programme of Andragogy. The modern approach to relationship of theory and practice in studies supposes their unity, though coming into conflict in the study process sometimes. It is to be emphasized that theoretical and practical training remains to be the components of an integral process. They are linked into the aggregate of different and complementing experiences, which becomes evident in the process of practice. It is the reflective study model, successfully employed in vocational practice that creates conditions for application of available theoretical knowledge and practical skills in specific working situations, gaining of abilities and experience that are necessary for future vocational activity.

The accomplished empiric research showed the students' approach to the unity of theory and practice in vocational activity. It also gives evaluation to the expedience of practice for the future vocational activity of andragogues. In the process of practice the respondents disclosed different aspects in employment of theoretical and practical knowledge in practical situations. The research also highlighted the merits and demerits of vocational practice in the process of andragogic studies, which enables the department of Andragogy to check once again the quality of implemented

studies, to make corrections in the study programme and take it closer to demands of the changing situation.

Theoretical and empiric analysis enabled to ground opportunities and possibilities for the synthesis of theory and practice in the process of studies and training of andragogues for practical activity.

KEYWORDS:

Andragogic studies, vocational practice, practical experience, reflection, synthesis, theoretical and practical knowledge.

INTRODUCTION

Modern tendencies in social life and changes in the labour market, education policy of EU countries, new economic and cultural opportunities require innovations and challenges in the process of academic training, stimulating adjustment of the study content to demands of the labour market. According to T. Bulajeva et al (2011), these new guidelines for higher education emphasize significance of bachelor studies in placement and responsibility of higher education institutions in collaboration with employers, planning of new and making corrections in already existing study programmes, planning of competences that correspond to demands and requirements of the labour market. Consequently, academic studies should provide students both with high level of education, profound theoretical readiness, gaining of exploratory skills, stimulation of scholarship and ability to employ theoretical knowledge and skills in specific working situations, to assist in gaining experience, necessary for future vocational activity. Therefore, the content of academic studies is supplemented with vocational practice, which helps students to acquire different alternatives in vocational activity both in academic and labour market environment, which preconditions vocational development and search for the vocational identity.

R. Baranauskienė (2003) notes that modern studies are based on the reflective study model, preconditioning both quantity and quality of studies, integrating theoretical and practical readiness, granting possibilities and opportunities for meaningful learning, uniting ideas of students' individual experience and newly acquired theoretical knowledge. The author maintains that realization of above study model in higher education essentially transforms the traditional approach to the building of scientific

knowledge and search for truth, when creation of knowledge is purely a researchers' privilege, whereas students remain to be passive successors of *status quo* knowledge. The reflective study practice encourages a more active role in analysis of one's own activity, i. e. training of critically thinking specialists with good basics in self-analysis and research methodology. Therefore, students in reflective study process are subjects that are able to construct their own process of knowledge, to reflectively contemplate over it and interpret; to raise and generate hypotheses, applying them to knowingly controlled activity (learning).

The topics of this article also include andragogic study practice as a subject of Andragogic study programme of KU Continuing Studies Institute. It orients towards reflective synthesis of theory and practice (appearance of 'praxis') and training of professionals for practical andragogic activity. B. Jatkauskienė (2013) maintains that training of andragogues should be focused on control of continuously changing situation in complex activity, whereas andragogues themselves should be provided with a status of innovation carriers and spreaders, who are able to develop and improve their vocational practice. Accordingly, to orient training of andragogues towards mastering of situations in their complex activity it is necessary to make vocational practice both a study subject and a conductor in a student's successful transition from the higher education system to a self-dependent working activity. It is exactly during the vocational practice that students familiarize themselves with the particularity of andragogue's vocational activity and acquire practical skills a true working environment. This experience stimulates students for further deepening of theoretical knowledge and improvement of professional skills. Therefore, andragogic professionalism in practical activity would be hardly possible without specialized knowledge or basic education, gained in the process of studies. When speaking about professionalism of specialists, most researchers (Juozaitis, 2008; Jovaiša, 2007; Tight, 2007; Guskey, 2004; Rodzevičiūtė, 2006) very often mention the quality of a performed specific work and a special readiness. Therefore, according to E. Stasiūnaitienė et al. (2011), the organized vocational practice in training of specialists at the university is a temporary push to the vocational reality, creating conditions for acquisition of abilities that are impossible to gain in the process of academic studies. Until now the andragogue's profession is not yet legally validated in Lithuania, andragogue's position in the labour market is still missing and this situation impedes the purpose of practice in the process of andragogues' training. However, it obligates to rather

than prevents from analysis of its significance in professional development of andragogues. It can also ensure demand for jobs of these specialists.

After evaluation of researchers' (Stasiūnaitienė et al., 2011; Matonytė et al., 2010; Nedinskas, 2009; Raudeliūnaitė, 2008; Ibenskytė, 2008; Kondratavičienė et al., 2007; Baranauskienė, 2003 et al.) insights it is possible to presume that above practice provides students with conditions for employment of available theoretical knowledge and abilities in specific working situations, to gain abilities and experience, necessary for further professional development and vocational activity. However, still topical is the problem, related to a huge gap between graduates' knowledge and abilities, acquired at the university and abilities that are necessary for the working environment. Most of above authors note that practical training would gain more significance in training of professionals, if theory and practice – two different but complementing one another components – could be linked into an integral study process. Consistency of theory and practice, uniting students' individual experience and theoretical knowledge would ensure training of different specialists. It is to be noted that this problem is almost untouched in andragogue training. Therefore, the article makes an attempt to solve the scientific problem: how does the vocational practice enable to reach the synthesis of theory and practice in the process of studies and grant the professional readiness of andragogues?

Aim of the research is to ground the factor of vocational practice in synthesis of theory and practice in training of andragogues.

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE AS A FACTOR IN SYNTHESIS ('PRAXIS') OF THEORY AND PRACTICE

For almost a decade Lithuanian universities are already training andragogues, which are able to develop and realize programmes, corresponding to demands of learning adults. V. Zuzevičiūtė and M. Teresevičienė (2008) maintain that andragogic study programmes of Lithuanian universities (Klaipėda University, Vytautas Magnus University) are designed for training of andragogues, who are able to analyse adults' demands and possibilities for learning, to plan, organize and evaluate the professional development of employees, the learning process and the quality of their learning in the context of lifelong learning and alteration in the labour market. The authors maintain that the tradition in training of professional andragogues is just starting to develop, however, it is evident that a more

general, more systematic base for training of professional andragogues is still to be developed.

It is understandable that training of andragogues should be oriented towards mastering of continuously changing situations of complex activity, whereas andragogues themselves should be provided with the status of innovation carriers and spreaders, who are able to develop and improve their vocational practice. To orient training of andragogues towards mastering of situations in their complex activity it is necessary to make vocational practice both a study subject and a conductor in a student's successful transition from the higher education system to a self-dependent working activity (Jatkauskienė, 2013).

When analysing the significance of vocational practice in andragogue training it is important to emphasize its value in integration of theory and practice in the process of studies. R. B. Denhardt (2001) maintains that tension between theory and practice in studies does exist. According to the modern approach, theory and practice are interrelated, though (in a sense) they remain to be warring parts of the study process. Presently no attempts are being made to prove the priority of these two components. Researchers are just trying to evaluate their interaction in different aspects and spotlight importance of academic studies in development of specialists' professionalism (Domarkas, 2003).

These topics are also analysed by other researchers (Foley, 2007; Siebert, 2007; Kondratavičienė et al., 2007; Baranauskienė, 2003). They note that the theory and practice conception, emphasizing their mutual dependence is more useful than the one that treats theory as preceding practice. Theoretical and practical training are components of an integral process and they form the unity of different but complementing experiences. However, this issue is always causing debates, as practitioners are maintaining that theoreticians know little about their sphere, whereas the latter are sure that practitioners go too far and identify themselves with institutions that they are representing. Very often it is admitted that practitioners follow their own developed practical theory, whereas theoreticians – scientific practice.

Performed scientific research on the problem also contributes to ambiguity in these discussions. V. Domarkas (2003) maintains that students of many specialities differently treat the relationship of theory and practice and their approach to the problem depends on available experience of their practical activity. He notes that those without practical experience demonstrate a larger demand for practical knowledge, as they

intuitively feel that academic studies are more oriented towards theory. Other students, possessing practical experience very often appreciate theoretical knowledge and try to better understand practical processes.

R. Baranauskienė (2003) emphasizes that reflective learning in practical activity helps to integrate theory and practice. Practitioners, involved in reflection of their own activity search for information in theory, though they avoid bigotry to normative high level recommendations and abstract theories. To the contrary, they search for and discover theories and knowledge, corresponding to their situation and employ them in specific situations. These theories are reflectively and critically evaluated prior to their employment in specific practical situations. In turn, each practical situation makes corrections to already existing theories. Thus, experience and theory are being linked by reflection.

The D. A. Kolb's (1984) study model for learning from one's own experience helps to eliminate the existing gap between theory and practice (linkage of behaviouristic and cognitive theories into holistic conception of education). This model could be treated as a bridge between theory and practice, between abstract generalizations and specific experience, between sensitive and cognitive spheres of the learning process. It is an alternative approach to training of future andragogues, as a reflective study model helps students to realize learning as an interaction of lecturers, students, supervisors and administration (Baranauskienė, 2003). Therefore, a reflective study model in training of future andragogues could be implemented by means of vocational practice.

A reflective study model, implemented in a higher school emphasizes integral interaction between theory and practice (appearance of 'praxis'), between academic truth and personal learning experience, between learning and teaching. According to R. Baranauskienė (2003), 'praxis' is a qualitatively new concept of a practical study stage and is based on synthesis of theory and practice and reflection.

S. Ojanen (2006) maintains that ability to reflect is not a natural thing and most people have to learn that. The author notes that very often students do that in academic studies, where they learn how to question their daily experience, i. e. they cross out their experience from the list of the learning sources (Reoi-Kaarento, 2008). It is due to the long dominant classical approach to the mission of universities – to provide with broad education, in which the final objective is valuable knowledge rather than its practical employment, use or any other quantity related values (Stasiūnaitienė et al., 2011).

In that sense the character of learning and gaining experience in practice is different from that of academic environment. Learning in practice enables to employ already available experience in the process of learning. Every new experience is put on top of the previous one and helps students to develop their skills and knowledge for achievement of new results. In a true workplace students interact with the surrounding environment and experienced specialists, which creates favourable conditions for tracing and development of new practical skills (Kondratavičienė et al., 2007). Thus, in the process of practice students employ academic theoretical knowledge and knowledge, gained in the process of practical work and self-dependent activity. Therefore, it is necessary also to evaluate this kind of knowledge M. Tight (2007).

Many authors (Budėjienė, 2011; Siebert, 2007; Domarkas, 2003, Jurevičienė, 2003 et al.) entitle this combination of theoretical conception and practical experience as professionalism. According to J. Juralavičienė (2003), professionalism is usually special readiness, ability to do any kind of work, a profound knowing of work. Therefore, it would be naïve to expect for professionalism without specialized knowledge or basic education (theory), gained in the process of studies. V. Domarkas (2003) explains that introduction of theory is nothing more but integration of theory and practice both in study programmes and practical activity. Very often by means of feedback the experience in that stage preconditions the appearance of new theories. Explanation of theories remains to be one of the most important study objectives. On the other hand, development and explanation of theories cannot end in itself: only consistency of theory and practice can be an assumption for development of a specialist's professionalism and improvement of entire scientific system.

Most researchers (Stasiūnaitienė et al., 2011; Ibenskytė, 2008; Siebert, 2007; Kondratavičienė et al., 2007; Domarkas, 2003 et al.) agree that vocational practice in training of specialists is an assumption for security of integrity of theory and practice in studies. They are components of an integral process, forming entirety of different but complementing experiences. According to V. Kondratavičienė et al. (2007), theoretical knowledge and specific abilities in contemplation are gained in academic studies. First practical skills are acquired in practice and later are strengthened in true activity situations. Goals in development of practical skills are shaped on the basis of aims of study programmes and developed competences.

When analysing practice in the process of studies M. Winter (2011) notes that we lack a broader understanding of notions *theory – practice* and *theory – application*. Practical activity in the context of academic studies is not only application of theory and knowledge. The author maintains that practice in the process of studies should be understood as an activity and relationship in a potential professional field. Practical activities in the process of studies should be realized not only as students' self-dependent activity in vocational sphere, when relationship between their activity and the vocational field shows itself. It also means that students-trainees generate knowledge, based on their own experience and develop concepts (Stasiūnaitienė et al., 2011).

By gaining theoretical and practical knowledge in different disciplines, students develop individual philosophy of their profession: what and how is to be done, what principles, values and position are to be followed. All imparted knowledge is conceptualized into one idea-based theory. In later studies and practicing students employ and contextualise their own idea-based theory, replacing it insensibly with the employed theory (Jučevičienė, 2007). In this case reflection assists in efficient transformation of theories and their application in practical activity. Therefore, the concept of practice gains a wider sense. It is no longer only a successful employment of knowledge or its application in the workplace.

Thus, vocational practice is very important in training of specialists, as it helps to unite theory and practice into entirety and properly prepare students for future vocational activity.

According to E. Stasiūnaitienė et al. (2011, p. 100), practice is directly combined to the study process, it is "activity, aimed at creation of conditions for employment of available theoretical knowledge and abilities in specific working situations, gaining of abilities or experience, necessary for future vocational activity". However, it is still to be remembered that there are abilities, knowledge and value-based positions that could be acquired or improved in practical learning at specific institutions. In this sense, relation between the content of subjects and the content of practical learning, also their consistency are very important.

A specialist-professional, generating surplus value in knowledge-based economy should be trained by creating knowledge, i. e. by integrating information, gained in theoretical academic studies and experience, acquired in real practice. Thus, theoretical and practical training of students should be based on their synthesis (Pic. 1).

Pic. 1. The model of interaction between theoretical and practical training



Source: (Kondratavičienė and Sajienė, 2007)

Pic. 1 shows that theoretical and practical training are components of one integral process, making one entirety of different but complementing experiences. Theoretical knowledge and specific abilities in contemplation are acquired at the university; first practical skills are gained in simulation environment and later are strengthened in real situations. Aims in development of practical skills are shaped in compliance with goals of study programmes and developed competences. Theory is an abstract, simplified reflection of a real phenomenon. To fully understand theory, students firstly have to understand the phenomenon and its properties. By employing theory in real situations, they can strengthen their understanding (Kondratavičienė et al., 2007). Therefore, practice in this case is realized as a legitimate activity in a specific workplace or enterprise, where students are provided with conditions for self-dependent activities.

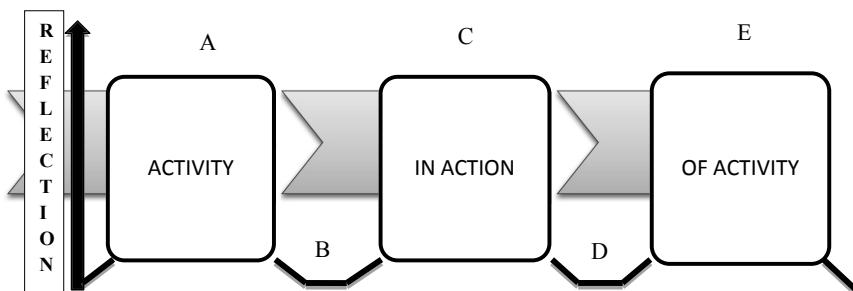
The content of practice is directly related to goals, objectives and learning outcomes of a specific study programme. In practical activity they could be tested/ checked only being ready for that. Thus, the purpose of practice is to check and evaluate learning outcomes through a specific practical activity.

Synthesis if theory and practice takes place in vocational practice, when students reflect and indulge in continuous learning/development, taking responsibility for own actions and decisions. According to R. Bubnys (2012), reflection could be defined as a process, analyzing the outlived experience and self-knowledge, integrating available and newly gained knowledge, employing theoretical knowledge in practice. Above knowledge is based on mental and emotional activities of learners, it results in widening of knowledge about themselves, identification of their own abilities, personal properties, values, etc., discovering and constructing new meanings, insights and planning new perspectives.

Each learner has a lot of previously gained experience. A general "true life" experience, gained at high school is a part of it. A big part of experience consists of a large spectrum of previous learning situations at the higher school. Though based on previously gained experience, activity of a specific moment in learning starts with prospective reflection on activities. In the process of learning students shape and reshape complex and ambiguous problems, try different interpretations and only after that they start changing their actions. The success of learning in the process of studies depends on students' early experience, which in the process of learning is related to acquired (by means of reflection) new knowledge and skills. Trying to present a better scheme for analysis of experience, J. Cowan (1998) introduces a diagram of reflection, uniting the notions of D. Schön and postulated links of D. A. Kolb. This diagram is a grounded and practical model, explaining or at least supposing students' learning in practice (Bubnys, 2012) (pic. 2).

By this diagram J. Cowan tries to explain that learners reflect their previous experience when preparing for activity, perform specific assignments or solve problems (reflection on activity). In the process of reflection on action (A) students are encouraged to explore and reflect their activity, which is well-planned (B). They try to link new information to what they already know. Afterwards they try to relate new information to what they new previously and employ it (after analysis) in their new activities. In the process of action students are offered to explore and test useful ideas, suggested by lecturers or fellows and emerging from the general

Pic. 2. Reflection diagram according to J. Cowan



Source: (Bubnys, 2012, p. 67)

experience of group reflection. Intermediate reflection in action (C) – an evaluative element is traced, but reflection remains to be mainly analytic. The essence of analytic reflection lies in an attempt to find answers to the following questions: "How can I do that?" and "How should I do that?" Reflection is valuable namely due to its proximity to action. In the process of it classification and generalization takes place and it is accompanied by a precise characterization of all learnt material. It is followed by identification and naming of advantages, difficulties and their reasons, demand for assistance in different stages of execution, failings that are to be eliminated. In the next stage (D) students are working with activity solidifying material, suggested by lecturers. By employing the presented material, learners plan and practically test the suggested ideas, which is the essential moment in this stage of activity. Students are encouraged to correct the failings, traced in the process of learning and to strengthen the reflective analysis in achieved progress yet without final performance reflection of their own activity. Though poorly, students already have a chance to practically apply the newly gained knowledge (E). It is a reflective activity, concentrated on what each student has discovered about learning, how he thought over his own thinking. At this stage students identify and define previous learning and development – learning, which is to be continued and employed in the future. A probability that reflection for activity can change always exists. In that case learners would move to another sequence, where activity would be the previously gained experience, "disgorging" into another sequence of learning. Therefore, D. Cowan's (1998) diagram is not closed and terminative (Bubnys, 2012).

Therefore, practice for students in higher school is link, uniting theory and practice and giving other surplus value. H. F. Sweitzer et al. (2009) distinguish three aspects of benefit, gained by students in practice:

- *personal perfection (development)*. In the process of practice students improve following abilities: creative thinking, lucid enunciation of thoughts in written and orally, work in team, reliance, consecutive and timely performance of assignments, purposeful choice of priorities and constructive acceptance of criticism. These are abilities, on the basis of which employers take decision regarding employment of graduates. In the process of practice students may also check gained theoretical knowledge in real practical situations, apply their own abilities in taking decisions and be evaluated by qualified supervisors (tutors);
- *vocational perfection (development)*. In the process of practice students learn how to realize the complexity of practical real works, to understand standards and values of work in a specific profession. They also acquire ability to apply available theoretical knowledge in real practical situations;
- *development of civic properties*. In the process of practice students mostly gain knowledge, abilities and form values that help to productively take part in social activity. Civic abilities reflect student's ability to adequately react to changes of external environment.

Therefore, student's practical abilities, gained in the process of practice, increase his perspectives of employment in the future, as he gains practice in a real work. The practice also helps him to more purposefully strive for the desired career, to improve practical abilities and focus on specific goals.

I. Matonytė et al. (2011) maintain that learning in a real working environment creates favourable conditions for a more efficient solution of the vocational activity related issues, a better understanding of value-based attitudes in a specific profession, cultural peculiarities of a specific institution, experiencing problems that are caused by social relations. All this predetermines advantages of learning at the working place and improves the quality of studies. The authors maintain that in the process of practice students acquire and develop their skills in practical work, their ability to theoretically ground practical situations, to self-dependently take decisions, evaluate available resources, to work in team with other professionals, identify and specify similarities and differences of theory and practice. They also gain experience in collaboration, discipline and responsibility, learn how to plan and organize practical activity, introduce themselves.

They can experience the complexity of vocational activity and try something new, taking a look at the future profession from different angles. The practice improves students' ability to analyse and solve emerging problems from different aspects, paying attention to specific circumstances. It enables to familiarize with functioning institutions, their activity and functions, i. e. to prepare for serious work and turn into mature personalities.

In summary, theory and practice in academic studies are cannot be dissociated from each other, though they remain to be feuding parts of the study process. Synthesis of theory and practice clearly reflects itself in vocational practice, which helps students to construct and transform available experience, knowledge, skills, values, creed, feelings and meanings. This experience stimulates students for further deepening of their theoretical knowledge and vocational development (perfection).

INSIGHTS OF THE EMPIRIC RESEARCH: ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' APPROACH TO THE SYNTHESIS OF THEORY AND PRACTICE IN THE PROCESS OF VOCATIONAL PRACTICE

Description of the research instrument. Theoretical and practical readiness for vocational activity, disclosing itself to students in the process of vocational practice, is very important in training of andragogues. A research in academic years of 2011/2012 and 2012/2013 aimed at evaluation of possibilities/opportunities for synthesis of theory and practice in vocational practice of andragogues (students' approach).

The questionnaire consisted of open and closed-type questions, trying to analyse students' approach to the synthesis of theory and practice during vocational practice. The questionnaire consisted of demographic data about respondents and two parts of questions. In the first part attempts were made to find out the respondents' attitude towards importance of andragogic studies and vocational practice in training of andragogues. The other part consisted of questions, directly related to vocational practice of students, trying to find out students' experience and their approach to combination and compatibility of theoretical readiness and gaining of practical abilities.

Characterization of the research sample. The ordinary stochastic sample was employed. After vocational practice 98 full-time bachelor students of andragogy (KU, Continuing Studies Institute) took part in the research. The respondents represented persons of different age, gender and working experience.

The age of respondents was different: under 25–27%, over 26 and under 35–22%, over 36 and under 45–37%, over 46 and under 55–14%. The data shows that most of respondents are middle-aged (from 36 to 45). Women made the majority of respondents (77%).

It also turned out that persons with different working experience are studying in the programme. 58% of students had more than one year experience in practical work, another 42% of them either had no experience or it made less than one year.

Research results and their interpretation. To review the results of accomplished research it is necessary to briefly discuss the aspects of practice, organized in the study programme of Andragogy.

Organization of above practice is regulated by education laws of Lithuania and KU decrees on students' practice. They introduce to basic principles for organization and implementation of students' practice.

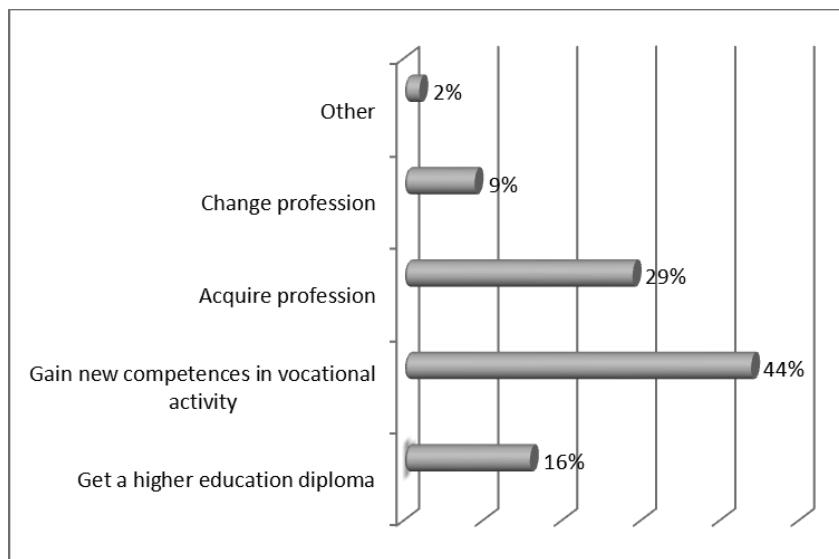
Vocational practice in andragogic studies must ensure the synthesis of theoretical readiness and practical abilities. The future andragogues have to acquire skills that are necessary for their qualification. They must also be able to integrate theoretical knowledge into practical activity. Students take their practice in different adult education institutions, business organizations, implementing training of their personnel. Students are free to choose these institutions and can always consult their supervisors (tutors). Prior to their practice students are provided with exhaustive information about it and the principles of its organization: its execution, performance of assignments, documentation, report and assessment, its discussion after completion (analysis of students' activity at practice, sharing experience, etc.). In a specific working place students familiarize with the content of andragogue's activity, observe working specialists, develop their abilities in evaluation and analysis of real learning demands of employees, plan the concept of training courses and their realization. Students have to master continuously changing situations in complex andragogic activity. They must be able to make a self-assessment and assessment of their own andragogic activity and acquired competences. It helps them to comprehensively know their speciality, to gain and develop theoretical and practical knowledge, skills and abilities.

Discussion of received research data will go together with analysis of students' practice and its aspects, topical only for this article.

Orientation towards global working demands, particularly graduates' employment issues, becomes one of the most important criteria of the study quality. The success of employment and survival in the labour

market depends on ability of future graduates to solve social and vocational problems. Graduates of higher schools must be ready for adaptation to demands of their clients, so the study programme should provide them with conditions for development of abilities, necessary for successful vocational activity in the future (Pukelis et al., 2010). To find out the demand of the labour market for the study programme in Andragogy the respondents were asked to answer the question, why they have chosen these studies (pic. 3).

Pic. 3. Students' motives to choose studies in Andragogy



The research results show that choice of the respondents is mostly reflected by two motives. The most important of them is striving for new competences in vocational activity (44% of respondents). Another 29% of them think that it is very important to acquire a profession. Only 16% of respondents think that their choice was predetermined by striving for diploma. Least influential in taking the decision was striving for another profession (9%). The last 2% of respondents maintain that "the choice was predetermined by a new interesting study trend" and "threat to lose the job". Presumably, students are not only striving for a diploma, they are motivated enough to develop available and newly gained competences, necessary for their future vocational activity, to acquire a profession

that will strengthen their status in the labour market. It means that the respondents perfectly understand that nowadays these studies become a concurrent of the labour market in different vocational activities, where adult education is realized already as a priority in development of each institution.

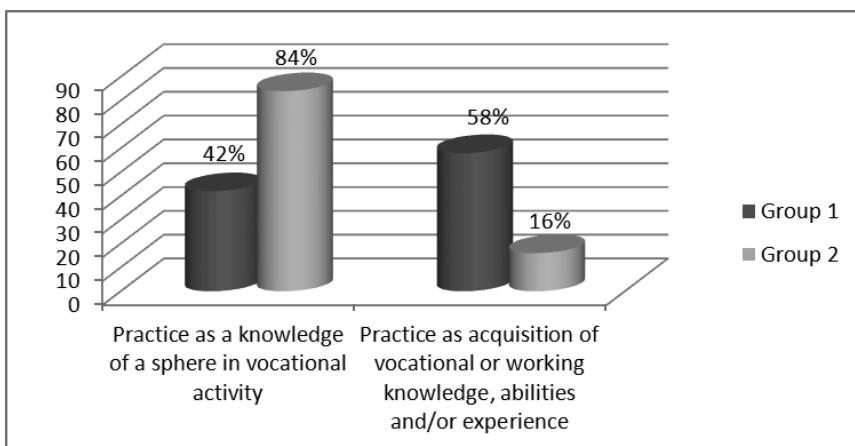
The research attempted to find out, whether the respondents are properly ready for vocational activity after completion of andragogic studies. Results of the research enable to presume that 21% of them don't know, whether or not they will be ready for that after completion of studies. It is a result of uncertainty regarding the social status of andragogues. Some of them (12%) think that they will not be ready for vocational activity after completion of the studies. Presumably, it is also a result of uncertainty regarding the profession in the labour market, as, according to B. Jatkauškienė (2013), legitimacy of the profession remains to be an open issue. However, most of the respondents (67%) maintain that gained knowledge and abilities are sufficient for further vocational activity. It means that they attach themselves to representatives of this profession and give a favourable evaluation to the quality of studies.

Vocational practice in andragogic activity is one of major spheres of activity, ensuring application of theoretical knowledge and acquisition of practical experience. The respondents were asked to answer, whether practice in andragogic studies helped them to prepare for vocational activity. Received research results are very similar to the respondents' approach to andragogic studies. The majority of them (79%) maintain that practice in andragogic studies helped them to prepare for further vocational activity. Presumably, vocational practice is one of the basic study subjects, assisting in preparation for vocational activity. Another 14% of the respondents are not sure about that and choose the answer "don't know", the remaining 7% maintain that knowledge, gained during the practice is insufficient for further vocational activity. The received research results show that students with a practical working experience make the majority (64%) of respondents, giving positive answer to the question. Presumably, working adults often choose studies already knowing what they need and what they can expect from these studies.

E. Stasiūnaitienė et al. (2011) maintain that the purpose of the practice could be characterized in the following way: 1) *as knowledge of the sphere in vocational activity*, in the process of which students apply acquired theoretical knowledge and test their abilities. Such concept could be related to the beginning of vocational activity when a person already possesses

specific knowledge, abilities and qualification, necessary for performance of a specific work; 2) *as acquisition of vocational and working knowledge, abilities and/or experience*. Such concept could be related to the working activity broadly, not necessarily to the sphere of studies, whereas gained abilities could serve later. The respondents were asked to answer what proposition about the purpose of the practice they would accept (pic. 4).

Pic. 4. Purpose of the practice in the studies on the basis of the respondents' practical experience

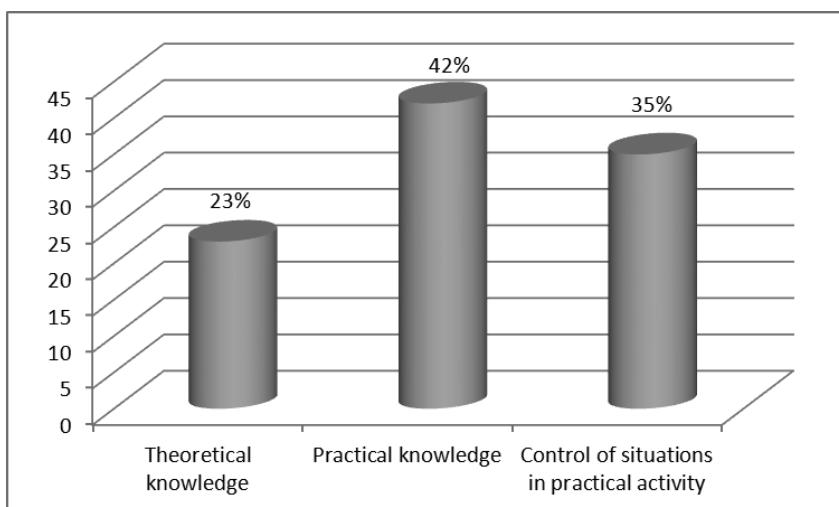


Answers of the respondents were compared on the basis of differences in approach of those without (group 1) and with (group 2) working experience. It was found that those possessing working experience were giving a more positive evaluation of practice as a better knowledge of a sphere in the vocational activity (84%). Consequently, it is important for them to gain new experience in andragogy. For another 58% of respondents (those without working experience) it is more important to gain that experience rather than to know andragogic activity as a new sphere. Therefore, the respondents with working experience are more focused on understanding and knowledge of the new speciality.

The respondents were asked to evaluate the expedience on the basis of specific criteria: 1) links between theory and practice, 2) acquired and improved vocational competences of an andragogue; 3) from the viewpoint of experience gaining and activity reflection.

In respect that vocational practice provides students with conditions for application of available theoretical knowledge and abilities in specific working situations, for gaining of abilities and experience, necessary for the future vocational activity, attempts were made to find out what knowledge is most significant for the respondents during vocational practice (pic. 5).

Pic. 5. Respondents' evaluation of the study quality from the viewpoint of gained theoretical and practical knowledge

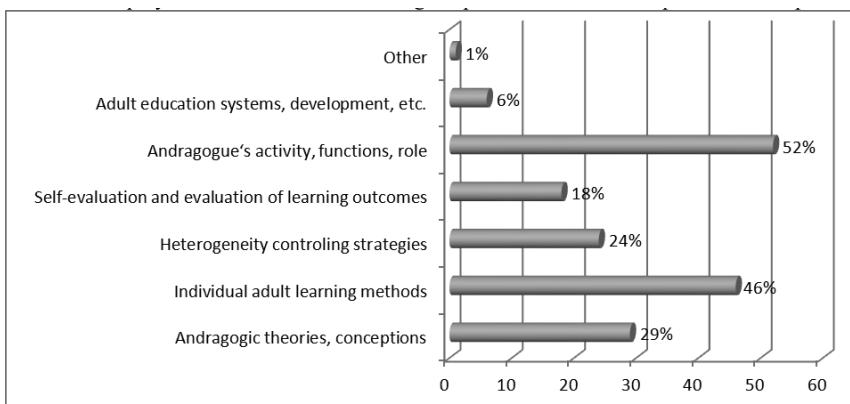


When analysing data from pic. 5 it was found that practical knowledge (42%) and mastering of practical abilities (35%) are treated by the respondents as most important elements in vocational practice. They also distinguish control of situations in practical activity and treat it as one of the most significant moments, which means that vocational practice in the process of studies should receive a particular attention. All this points to the importance of above practice and necessity for andragogue's training for vocational activity. Attention also should be paid to the fact that relevant for students are also theoretical knowledge, assisting in gaining practical skills and experience in real situations of vocational activity. It is proved by J. Walkington and other researchers (1994), who maintain that students are provided with opportunities for strengthening of their understanding by employment of theory in vocational practice. Learning

in the process of practice enables to employ available experience. Each new experience is “placed” on the previous one and helps students to improve their skills and knowledge in the direction of desired results. In a working place students are interacting with the surrounding environment and experienced specialists, which creates conditions for discovery and development of new practical skills (Kondratavičienė et al., 2007).

It was also important to find out what theoretical knowledge students apply in the process of vocational practice (pic. 6).

Pic. 6. Employment of theoretical knowledge in practice from the viewpoint of the respondents



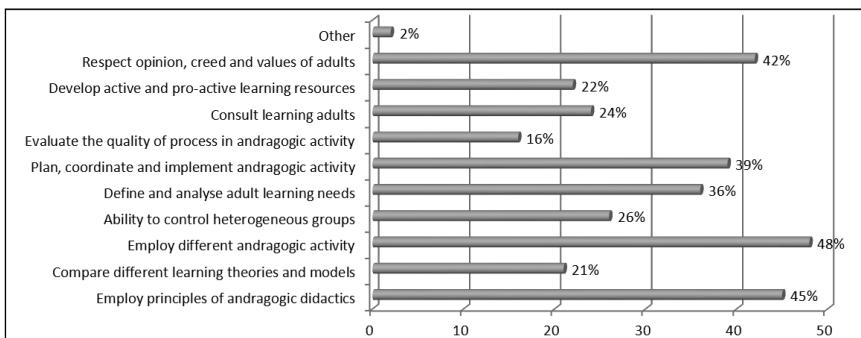
Pic. 6 shows that the respondents do employ theoretical knowledge in the process of practice. Most frequently they make use of theoretical knowledge about andragogue's activity, functions and roles (52%), individual learning methods and styles of adults (46%), andragogic theories and conceptions (29%). Least employed is knowledge in education systems, development, etc. Presumably, students employ theoretical knowledge in the process of practice and do that purposefully.

The respondents were also asked about practical knowledge, gained in studies (lectures) and their employment in the process of practice (pic. 7).

The research results show that in practice the respondents successfully apply practical knowledge, received in the process of studies: they are able to perform different roles of an andragogue (48%), they employ principles

of andragogic didactics (45%), they are able to plan, coordinate and realize andragogic activities (39%), etc. It means that andragogic practice is oriented towards application of gained practical knowledge. Presumably, theoretical and practical knowledge is united in studies entirety, which later helps students to successfully apply theoretical and practical knowledge in practice. It points to integrity of theoretical and practical knowledge. Naturally, attention should be paid to the spheres that are to be improved, as a part of theoretical (pic. 6) and practical (pic. 7) knowledge fail to be successfully applied in the process of vocational practice.

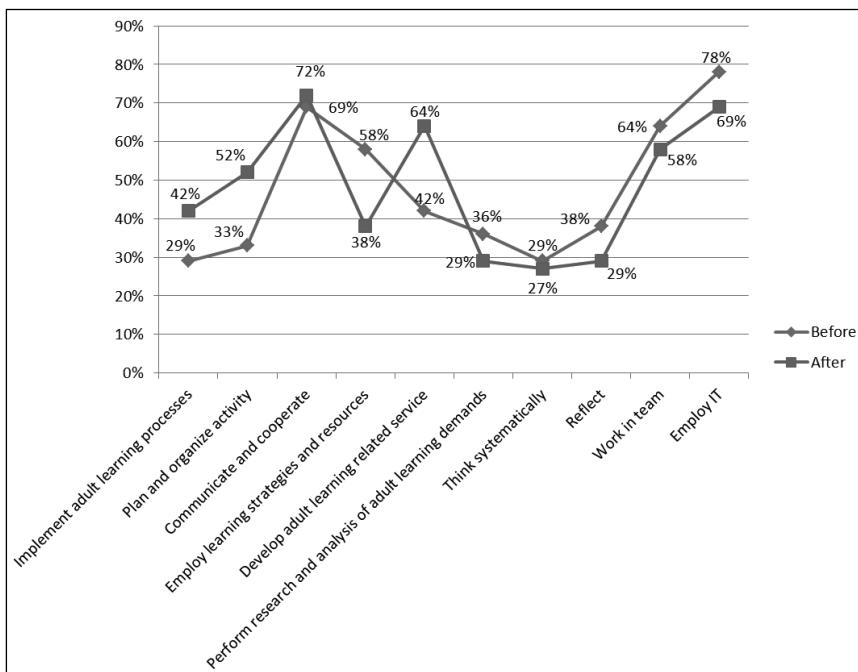
Pic. 7. Employment of practical knowledge in practice from the viewpoint of respondents



It was important in the process of the research to find out how the respondents evaluate their own vocational andragogic competences prior to and after practice (pic. 8). On the basis of the research results it is possible to presume that particular attention in entire process of studies is paid to theoretical and practical compatibility of students' readiness for vocational activity. Comparison of above evaluations prior to and after practice enables to presume that students develop and improve abilities that are important in vocational activity of andragogues. They are: development of adult learning related service (42% before and 64% after practice), ability to plan and organize activities (33% and 52% accordingly), ability to implement adult learning processes (29% and 42%). It is possible to maintain that practice assists students in development of their vocational competences. However, students overestimate some of their abilities and after practice they note about missing competences in

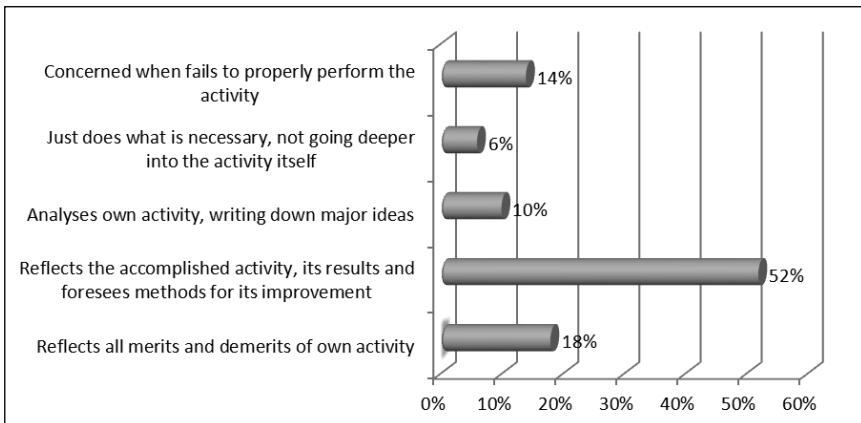
ability to reflect, apply learning strategies, methods, etc. Presumably, more attention is to be given in lectures and practice to practical issues. It is necessary to encourage future andragogues to give their own evaluation of acquired theoretical and practical knowledge, analyse it and evaluate in the context of their vocational activity.

Pic. 8. Evaluation of available and acquired competences of the respondents prior to and after practice



R. Raudeliūnaitė (2008) notes that after a completed practice it is important for students to make analysis of their own practical activity, discussing specific questions: 1) experience that was gained in the process of practice; 2) acquired new knowledge and skills in vocational sphere (merits and demerits in performance of assignments); 3) acquired knowledge about own vocational abilities and correspondence of personality to necessary vocational properties; 4) self-evaluation of performed activity. The respondents were asked to note what they were going to evaluate in the process of vocational activity (pic. 9).

Pic. 9. Self-evaluatio and evaluation of respondents' own performed practical activity



After analysis of inquiry and its results it is possible to presume that in their vocational practice students are able to improve their vocational experience, strive for necessary competence and define the spheres that are still to be improved (52%). Consequently, the majority of future andragogues realize the importance of reflection in their vocational activity and perceive it as an opportunity to act more efficiently in different situations of vocational activity. However, other respondents very narrowly understand the significance of reflection. They think that contemplation over merits and demerits of their own vocational activity is sufficient enough (18%). When analysing one's own activity it is also sufficient to write down major ideas (10%). It means that they fail to properly realize the benefits of reflection for gaining of practical competences in real activity. A very small part of the respondents avoid exhaustive analysis and perspectives of their own vocational activity – they simply become anxious, if they fail to properly do the work (14%) or do it without any attempt to analyse it (6%). It means that they superficially perform analysis of their own activity, making no conclusions about its improvement. They just state merits and demerits in performance of activities.

The respondents were given an open-type question, trying to find out what problems they face in the process of practice. The majority of them pointed to the following problems: insufficient time-span of vocational practice, i. e. the period of time is too short to gain necessary practical skills; lack of skills in organization and planning of the learning process;

it is difficult to find a place of practice; amount of theoretical knowledge for its practical implementation is insufficient; assignments are too complicated, requiring much practical experience in vocational andragogic activity. There were also problems of a private character and they are also to be seriously approached.

In summary, above practice points to a problem, related to the synthesis of theory and practice. According to the research data it appears that the majority of students are sure they do not experience the shortage of theoretical and practical knowledge that they could employ in practice. They are also certain about necessity and expedience of above practice. Practice helps andragogues to more impartially evaluate their own vocational competences. Evaluation and self-evaluation of future andragogues' practice helps the department of Andragogy to check the quality of implemented studies, to correct the study programme and adjust it to demands of changing learning environment.

CONCLUSIONS

The problem of relationship between theory and practice in academic studies remains to be relevant and provokes controversial discussions. Despite this nowadays nobody speaks about priority of these components – instead, mutual dependence of theory and practice is emphasized.

Theoretical and practical training are components of an integral process. They are united into one entirety of experiences, consisting of different but complementing each other components. Reflexive learning, so frequent in practical activity, helps to integrate theory and practice in the process of studies. Students are not chained with abstract theories, they are reflectively and critically evaluated and only after that they are applied in specific practical situations. In that sense practice is characterized by a different learning and experience gaining character, compared to that in academic studies. Consequently, a reflective study module, employed in training of andagogues, enables to strive for the synthesis of theory and practice ('praxis'). It is a qualitatively new concept of the practical study stage and is based on the synthesis of theory and practice and reflection.

Vocational practice in the process of studies is more than application of theory and knowledge. It is understood as an activity and a relationship in a potential vocational field. Practice aims at creation of conditions for employment of available theoretical knowledge and abilities in specific working situations, acquisition of abilities and experience, necessary for

future vocational activity. Through a specific practical activity practice helps to check, how learning outcomes were achieved and how to evaluate the quality of studies.

Analysis of the research data confirmed the principle of compatibility between theory and practice. The majority of the respondents think that in vocational practice they need both theoretical and practical knowledge, as in true situation of vocational activity they help to gain practical skills and practical experience.

The majority of the respondents acknowledge the expedience of practice for the future vocational activity. Analysis of the research data shows that in the process of practice the majority of students apply theoretical and practical knowledge, employ them in practical situations and understand their expedience for the future vocational activity. However, all possibilities and opportunities are not properly employed. The majority of the respondents improve and develop their vocational competences, whereas about 30% of the respondents overestimate their vocational competences. It was found that after completion of practice they still lack some important competences: ability to reflect, apply learning strategies and methods, perform analysis of adult learning and evaluation of quality. To strengthen the synthesis of theory and practice in the process of andragogic studies it is important to strengthen vocational practice.

Evaluation and self-evaluation of future andragogues' practice helps the department of Andragogy to check the quality of implemented studies, to correct the study programme and adjust it to demands of changing learning environment.

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