




## Practical training and practice kindergartens at the Kindergarten Institute in Sopron (1964-1972)



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### KEYWORDS

- kindergarten teacher training
- Sopron
- history of education
- history of women's education
- practical training

### ABSTRACT

In the history of kindergarten teacher education in Hungary, the application of theoretical knowledge in the real kindergarten environment has always played a prominent role; as several researchers (Vág, 1989, Patyi, 2010) point out, a significant part of the content of the early childhood teacher education that was formed in the first half of the 19th century was characterised by the time spent in the kindergartens, by active practical training. As part of several major teacher education reforms of the twentieth century, practical training was prioritised, with an increase in the number of practical hours and a greater emphasis on practical training. Decree-Law No 26 of 1958, which raised the level of teacher and nursery teacher training to higher level, also gave priority to practical training for students: in addition to the time spent in the training kindergartens opened alongside the newly opened kindergarten training institutes, students were systematically involved in several weeks of regional work placements during their training.

The main motivation for my research was to gain a better understanding of the tasks, structure and influence of institutions supporting the practical side of pre-primary teacher education in shaping the personality and values of young students. In my work I used qualitative research methods, mainly document and content analysis. My sources were the archival materials of the Benedek Elek Faculty of Education at the University of Sopron, with a special focus on the period between 1964 and 1972. Among the archival materials, I mainly looked at official statistical data on training institutions, practical information bulletins and documents relating to the Institute's work plans for training kindergartens and practical training. In my research, I sought to answer the following questions. In what ways were they involved in the life of the Institute, and in what activities were the teachers of the kindergartens involved, which went beyond practical training but contributed to the training and personal development of the students? In what ways were the practitioners involved in the correspondence courses?

### KULCSSZAVAK

- óvónőképzés
- Sopron
- neveléstörténet
- nőtörténet
- gyakorlati képzés

### ABSZTRAKT

**Gyakorlat és képzés: a Soproni Óvónőképző Intézet gyakorlati képzése és gyakorló óvodái (1964–1972)** | Az óvodapedagógus-képzés hazai történetében mindig kiemelt szerepet kapott az elméletben megszerzett tudás valós óvodai környezetben történő alkalmazása; ahogy arra több kutató (Vág, 1989, Patyi, 2010) rámutat, így már a XIX. század első felében formálódó kisedővő-képzés tartalmának jelentős részét is a példányóvodákban töltött idő, az aktív gyakorlati képzés jellemezte.

A XX. század több jelentős pedagógusképzési reformjának részeként a gyakorlati képzés előtérbe helyezését, a gyakorlati órák számának emelését és előtérbe helyezését jelölték meg. Az 1958. évi 26. törvényerejű rendelet, mely a tanító- és óvónőképzést felsőfokra emelte, szintén kiemelt szerepet szánt a hallgatók gyakorlati képzésének: a hallgatók a frissen megnyílt óvónőképző intézetek mellett megnyílt gyakorló óvodákban töltött idő mellett rendszeren vettek részt a képzés ideje alatt többhetes területi szakmai gyakorlatokon.

Kutatásomban elsősorban az motivált, hogy még inkább megismerhessem az óvodapedagógus-képzés gyakorlati oldalát támogató intézmények feladatait, felépítését és befolyását a fiatal hallgatók személyiségének, értékrendjének alakításában.

Munkám során kvalitatív kutatási metódusokat, elsősorban dokumentum- és tartalomelemzést alkalmaztam. Forrásaim a Soproni Egyetem Benedek Elek Pedagógiai Kar irattárának anyagai voltak, különös tekintettel az 1964 és 1972 közötti időszakra. Az irattári anyagok közül leginkább a gyakorló intézményekről őrzött hivatalos statisztikai adatokat, gyakorlati tájékoztatókat és az intézet munkaterveinek gyakorló óvodákkal és gyakorlati képzésével kapcsolatos iratokat tekintettem át.

Kutatásom során az alábbi kérdésekre kerestem a választ: Milyen szerepet vállaltak a gyakorló intézmények a hallgatók képzésében? Milyen módon kapcsolódtak az intézet életébe, milyen, a gyakorlati képzésen túlmutató, de a hallgatók képzéséhez, személyiségük alakításához hozzájáruló tevékenységekben vettek részt a gyakorló óvodák pedagógusai? Milyen módon jelentek meg a levelező képzésben a gyakorló intézmények?

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## Introduction

Article XV of Law 1891 was an important milestone in the life of nursery schools and nursery schools, as it made both “a state function” (Szabados, 1964:52). The law stipulated that nursery training required the completion of the fourth grade of a civil or higher girls’ school or the second grade of a higher folk school. The great advantage of the kindergarten teaching law was that it standardised the training period, curriculum and admission requirements of the educational institutions (Patyi, 2010:102). Another significant achievement of the new law was that it introduced a centrally determined uniform set of requirements instead of the chaotic set of requirements that had been in place (Szabados, 1964:52). The teaching of Hungarian language in the law was intended to promote the Hungarian language skills of the ethnic minorities (Bajkó, 1984:438). This was often achieved by sending only kindergarten teachers who spoke Hungarian or did not speak the national language to areas of obvious nationality, thus encouraging children to reinforce the “homogeneous educational basis” at home after they had mastered the language in kindergarten (Kelényi, 1969:8-9). As a result, the law transformed early childhood education into an intermediate level (Szabados, 1964:52).

The emergence of kindergarten and teacher training colleges created opportunities for middle-class girls to continue their education and seek gainful employment in both public and private education. Qualified teachers, and especially kindergarten teachers, were also readily employed as governesses (Kóger, 2020:74). Although the law also provided opportunities for boys to become governesses, it kept the education of boys and girls strictly separate (Bajkó, 1984:439).

Before the First World War, many had already expressed dissatisfaction with the short length of the training period. The National Association of Kindergarten Teachers, founded in 1912, for example, already proposed reforms to introduce a four-year course (Patyi, 2010:102). During the Soviet Republic, kindergarten education was given a central role in child protection. On 29 March 1919, the institutions that had previously been run by the denominations were nationalised. The contemporary name of the kindergartens, “play school”, indicated that they were seen as part of the educational system, a kind of preparatory course (Vág, 1979:151-154). After the

First World War, various reformist and alternative trends in kindergarten education emerged. The rise of Montessori pedagogy was outstanding, and its most important representative in Hungary, Erzsébet Bélaváry-Burchard, was also highly influential (Bajkó, 1984:442-443).

In 1926, the kindergarten training was converted into a four-year course, consisting of three years of theoretical training followed by a fourth year of practical and medical training. During the course of the training, there was an increase in educational and psychological knowledge. Students took two examinations, one in the third year to assess theoretical knowledge, and a qualifying examination to measure practical and vocal-musical skills (Kövérné, 1996:52). Requirements for admission included successful completion of the fourth grade of secondary or civil school, the age of 14, good hearing, sound senses and a healthy physique (Mészáros, 1991:81).

In 1937, the quarterly practical training in external institutions was abolished and this subject was also transferred to the institute, where it was studied together with other theoretical subjects (Kövérné, 1996:52). Although as early as 1936 the teaching community of the Pest training institute had petitioned for the upgrading of the training of kindergarten teachers to college level, this planned transformation was not implemented either then or after the Second World War in 1948, when the Hungarian Kindergarten Teachers' Association proposed similar changes (Krajcsosvzky & Krajnyák, 1984:73).

Introduced in 1949, the pedagogical high schools were intended to transform the training that had been provided until then. However, after only one year of operation, these institutions were converted into vocational schools. The transfer of the training of kindergarten teachers from gymnasiums and teacher training institutes proved to be an inappropriate solution for schools preparing pre-school children (Szabados, 1964:53). The kindergarten teacher training section of the pedagogical gymnasiums lasted three years and was completed by a qualifying examination (Tóth, 1965:12.). From the academic year 1950/51 onwards, the pedagogical gymnasium was gradually phased out and replaced by independent teacher and kindergarten teacher training institutes (Tóth, 1965:13.).

### **The role of practical training in kindergarten teacher education**

In the early decades of institutional kindergarten education, the main emphasis was on practical training: on school days, after about two hours of theoretical instruction, students spent most of the day in the so-called "example kindergartens" (Patyi, 2010:100). In the first years of the training of nursery school teachers, the full 12 months of training were not always completed, and it was often the case that they started working in the "example kindergartens" after the training was completed because of difficulties in finding employment (Vág, 1989:23). As part of this, a kindergarten training was to take place every year (Patyi, 2010:102.). During Kunó Klebelsberg's activity as Minister of Culture, the training was restructured in 1926, and the duration of the training was modified along with it. In the first year, they

visited kindergartens, and in the second and third years, students spent 3 and 6 hours respectively on active practical activities. In the fourth year, the training was exclusively practical, with some methodological areas (singing, music, drawing) and religious studies (Patyi, 2010:102-103).

Throughout the 1950s, the training of kindergarten teacher training took constantly changing forms. During this period, journals on nursery education, such as “Óvodai Nevelés” (Kindergarten Education), repeatedly emphasised the role of practical training. For example, in 1953, Béla Radnai, in the journal “Óvodai Nevelés”, suggested that in practical training, students should place greater emphasis on becoming better acquainted with the individual and age characteristics of children. In his view, nursery teacher candidates who are unsure in analysing observations may be equally unsure in leading independent creative play (Radnai, 1953:42-43). In the same period, Alice Hermann expressed her views on the documents relating to the training of nursery teachers and opposed formalism (Hermann, 1953:105-107).

Éva Varga, an instructor at the kindergarten teacher training institute in Püspökladány, drew attention to the importance of cooperation between theoretical and practical subjects in a study that ran for several issues. She emphasized the role of psychological and methodological subjects in practical training (Varga, 1954). Among the responses, Albert Csiszár, the head of the kindergarten teacher training institute in Esztergom, suggested teaching methods of leading undivided groups, while Sándor Lauday, an instructor at the training institute in Hőgyész, considered the careful planning of observation aspects to be crucial (Csiszár & Lauday, 1954:106-107.). From the practical side of kindergarten, Lászlóné Mezei and Ilona Varga also contributed to the debate. According to Lászlóné Mezei, the parallel implementation of methodological and practical training was important and she believed that three years of intermediate level training did not provide enough opportunities for students to try themselves in all fields of activity (Mezeiné, 1954:142). Ilona Varga also stressed that the general subjects should be designed to support practical training and considered increasing the duration of the training to four years (Vargha & Varsányi, 1954:171.). László Varsányi, a teacher at the Pécs training institute, stressed that although it was important to follow the Soviet example, it should not be used without criticism and adaptation (Vargha & Varsányi, 1954:172.).

Therefore, in the 1950s there were active debates and reflections on the training of pre-school teachers, and different views and proposals on training programmes and practical elements emerged. The quality of practical training was an important element in the training of pre-school teachers, and the Sopron Institute for Teacher Training took responsibility for this training in the further training of pre-school teachers and kindergarten supervisors in Transdanubia. In the context of the placements, the regional placement of the students was designed to ensure that they were placed in their own county or even in their own future workplace. During the placement, they had to carry out a set number and type of sessions, first with assistance and then independently. They were regularly supervised by the nursery

teachers and nursery managers at the placement site and visited frequently by the teachers from the sending training institute. The quality of the written materials also influenced the grades of the practical training (Bizó, 1961:143).

Practical training for practicing kindergarten teachers was a priority. They contributed to the strengthening of the students' sense of vocation by their personal example and by their warm welcome (Sebő, 1971:152). Dr. Judit Földiné Boros emphasized that the personality of both the practicing teacher and the supervising teacher has a great impact on the professional performance of the student practitioner. In her study, Judit Boros divided the tasks of practical training into three major groups: ideological and political education, moral, aesthetic and physical education (Boros, 1967). These elements show that practical training was complex and thorough, and that great attention was paid to the professional preparation and personal development of the students.

### **The implementation of practical training at the Sopron (Higher) Institute for Teacher Education**

The structure and focus of the practical training at the Sopron Institute for Teacher Education has paid great attention to the practical preparation and the gradual introduction of students to the tasks of a kindergarten teacher.

The first semester was based on the principle of gradualism, where the main objective was to get to know the group of children very well. Involvement in practical tasks was continuous, and students first observed the activities of the nursery passively. Familiarity with the daily and weekly rules of the kindergarten and participation in care tasks were the primary requirements. In the second semester, the tasks of the kindergarten teacher were extended and new activities were introduced, such as physical education, poetry and story-telling, and the study of quantity, space and shape. The students spent more time in the kindergarten and worked with a student assistant who helped them to prepare the activities and to prepare the visual aids. An additional challenge in the second semester was that the students had to plan their sessions independently, and these were checked and developed from three different perspectives: the kindergarten teacher, the methodological teacher and the group leader teacher responsible for the practical training were all involved in the check.<sup>1</sup>

This process enabled the students' theoretical and practical knowledge to be checked and ensured that the planned activities could be implemented in the nursery environment. This structure and focus helped students to gradually integrate into the work of a pre-school teacher and provided them with a thorough and complex preparation for the practical training in pre-school tasks.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> SOE BPK Irattár 84/1966. Gyakorlati képzési útmutató az 1965/66-os tanév II. félévére. Közreadja: Földi Lőrinc igazgató. Sopron, 1966. február 10.

<sup>2</sup> SOE BPK Irattár 84/1966. Gyakorlati képzési útmutató az 1965/66-os tanév II. félévére. Közreadja: Földi Lőrinc igazgató. Sopron, 1966. február 10. p. 5.

Practical training was further extended and deepened in the second year, allowing students to gain a broader and more varied practical experience of the work of a pre-school teacher. This semester has already seen a significant increase in the time spent in the nursery and students have been given a wide range of tasks in different areas of nursery education.

In the third semester, the students not only participated in the kindergarten exercises, but also particularly emphasized the observation of individual and age specificities, which they called “different traits”. This shows that the practical training also paid extensive attention to the individual needs and abilities of children.<sup>3</sup> In addition, during the third semester, the students were introduced to the administrative activities of the kindergarten, such as keeping a group diary, preparing a parenting plan and timetable, keeping an absence diary, etc.<sup>4</sup> This practical training helped the students to gain a complete picture of all aspects of the kindergarten work. The students were also given the task of methodically observing the “socialist kindergarten teacher’s manifestations” and the moral education of children. This shows that as part of their training, students had to learn the principles and practices that were applied in kindergarten pedagogy on the basis of socialist ideology. The teaching of the subject Marxism-Leninism and its subsequent practical application contributed to the students’ ideological and methodological preparation.<sup>5</sup> This detailed and multifaceted practical training helped students to prepare for a wide range of work as pre-school teachers and to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for the effective and responsible education and training of children.

The final practical training of the last semester was crowned by a final workshop. As part of this, the trainee designed and led the session himself and then produced a complex analysis of the session. One week before the final session, the final year students were given their topic by the trainee tutor. The final session was preceded by individual observation, followed by drafting and methodological analysis. The session was evaluated by a three-member committee, chaired by the lead teacher and composed of the methodological teacher and the group leader. The chairperson of the committee was entitled to determine the marks based on the opinions of the members. The minutes of the final examination also recorded the outline of the final exercise. If the final examination had ended with an unsatisfactory mark, it could be retaken.<sup>6</sup>

The Sopron site for the training of kindergarten teachers, which was upgraded to a university level in 1959, made use of the infrastructure and teachers of the previous secondary education in terms of both staff and equipment. The students were trained in

<sup>3</sup> SOE BPK Irattár 558/1966. Gyakorlati képzési útmutató az 1966/67-es tanévre. Kiadja: Dudás János, vezetőtanár Sopron, 1966. szeptember 23. p. 7.

<sup>4</sup> SOE BPK Irattár 558/1966. Gyakorlati képzési útmutató az 1966/67-es tanévre. Kiadja: Dudás János, vezetőtanár Sopron, 1966. szeptember 23. p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> SOE BPK Irattár 784/1965. A marxizmus-leninizmus órák rendje a Soproni Óvónőképzőben. Közli: Földi Lőrinc igazgató. Sopron, 1965. szeptember 14.

<sup>6</sup> SOE BPK Irattár 84/1966. Gyakorlati képzési útmutató az 1965/66-os tanév II. félévére. Közreadja: Földi Lőrinc igazgató. Sopron, 1966. február 10. p. 11. SOE BPK Irattár 784/1965. A marxizmus-leninizmus órák rendje a Soproni Óvónőképzőben. Közli: Földi Lőrinc igazgató. Sopron, 1965. szeptember 14.

groups of children led by the kindergarten teachers from the previous secondary education and in the practical training facilities used in the secondary education. The statistics and reports in the archives of the Benedek Elek Faculty of Education at the University of Sopron, as well as various information and guidance documents on the practical training, show that the daily contact between the training institutions and the training institute has been strengthened, as has the collegial relationship between the two institutions, with the students' interests at the forefront. In several cases, the capacity of the training institution's own nurseries was insufficient to accommodate the number of students, and other nurseries in the city were involved in the training process.

A special feature of Sopron in the period under review is the renewed regional-professional practice introduced from the 1965/66 academic year, which was developed by the institution's teachers. The renewal of this practice involved a change of date, a rethinking of professional methodologies and the incorporation of suggestions from the head kindergarten teachers and kindergarten supervisors. This innovative approach has strengthened the practice-based, field-based approach to the institution's field practice.

## Summary

Based on the available documents, it can be seen that the higher kindergarten teacher training was provided in three different training locations (Sopron, Szarvas, Kecskemét) during the period under review. The students were involved in the work of the teachers in the training nurseries set up next to the educational institutions and met groups of children every semester. The practical training in each of the institutions followed the state guidelines and supervision, and the teaching plans were uniform, so that the placements were scheduled in a uniform way in all three sites.

At the beginning of the training, the students were introduced to the tasks of caregiving, and gradually increased their autonomy and responsibility in carrying out the tasks in the different educational areas and in planning, implementing and documenting the different occupational plans. Both the group leader trainers and the nursery managers of the practising kindergartens were involved in the organisation and delivery of the practical training.

The students prepared various practical documentation materials during each semester, and the practical trainers and the teaching teams helped them to complete the tasks. The link between theoretical and practical training was also important, and the 1957 manual "Educational Work in Kindergartens", the content regulator for kindergarten education of the period, was also used in practical training. The plans and topics for practical training were based partly on official documents and partly on guides and information sheets drawn up by the trainers. The students were involved in the life of the kindergartens, for example in the preparation and organisation of celebrations, which contributed to enriching the life of the institutions and enriching the students' experience.

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