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A. Zarin

Saint Petersburg, Russia

E. M. Kulesza

Warsaw, Poland

EXPERIENCE OF INTERACTION BETWEEN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION AND EMPLOYERS IN THE COURSE OF PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION OF FUTURE TEACHERS IN POLAND

Abstract. Interaction with employer in the practice of training specialists for the sphere of education has become an urgent problem both in the theoretical and practical perspectives in the context of solving tasks of modernization of pedagogical education in Russia. It is also urgent for designing basic education programs of training bachelors and masters of education in the field of “Special (defectological) education”.

The article presents an analysis of the experience of cooperation of university and employers in the process of education of special pedagogues in Poland as a prerequisite for improving the quality of their training. It describes the activity of student career offices (tasks, basic forms, conditions of organization) as structural units in charge of organization of interaction with employers and ensuring satisfaction of the needs of employer, university and student. The authors show the effect of clearly defined qualification requirements to the positions of pedagogical workers in the area of education of persons with special educational needs on the lines of development of education programs for bachelor's and master's degrees, and their focus on the level and specificity of graduates' professional work (age and category of persons with special educational needs) in different educational environments (types of institutions).

The authors formulate the conditions facilitating the effectiveness of interaction between the higher education institution and employers.

Keywords: higher professional education of teachers, interaction between university and employers, teacher-defectologist, qualification, education program, quality of training.

About the author: Zarin Alitsiya, Candidate of Pedagogy, Professor.

Place of employment: Department of Oligophrenopedagogy, A. I. Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia.

About the author: Kulesza Ewa Maria, Doctor of Pedagogy, Professor.

Place of employment: Head of Department of Pedagogical Therapy, The Maria Grzegorzewska University (APS M.Grzegorzewska ASE).

Further improvement of professional training of teachers for the Russian system of education is one of the most important modern higher school

tasks defined in the draft conception of the support (modernization) development of pedagogical education.

Interaction with employer is an

urgent condition of solution of this problem [3]. Cooperation of general education institutions with employers in the form of networking has become one of the main ideas of the projects of pedagogical education modernization realized in 2014-2015 [1; 4]. Working out basic educational programs of teacher-defectologist bachelor and master's degree training courses in the field of "Special (defectological education) is one of such projects [2; 5]. A study of foreign experience of such cooperation in the conditions of teacher training close to the Russian tradition (as it is presented, for example, in the Polish system of higher education) may turn out rather fruitful.

The modern system of education in Poland has undergone considerable changes in two recent decades as a result of integration into the European educational environment. These changes concern, in particular, the problems of training pedagogical staff for the system of education. Interaction between the higher education institution and employers in the context of solution of the problem of improvement of professional training of graduates is one of such significant tasks. In this connection, the part "Cooperation with Employers" is included in the programs of higher school development including the ones that train pedagogical staff for work with persons with special educational needs (SEN).

Attempts to improve interaction between the higher education institution and the employer were made in the system of Polish higher education in the mid 90s of the 20th century. Be-

ginning with the school year of 1996/97, special services (centers) called "Academic Career Offices" (Akademickie Biuro Karier) or "Offices of Career Support of Students and Graduates" were created in the leading universities of Poland. The main task of these services is to provide help for students and graduates in employment [8; 10; 13; 16]. The first "career center" was created in 1993 at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń and became the first such model of interaction between the university and employers in the world [16, p. 8].

Academic career offices are called upon to provide assistance for students and graduates in defining their path of professional advancement, carry out career counseling, assist in searching for attractive and interesting jobs, accumulate and spread information about employers and the current situation on the labor market (about the vacancies) and develop the students' readiness and will to make efforts to reach their career ambitions (to take a certain position).

In addition to this career offices ensure establishment of contacts and keeping in touch with employers, and spread of information about the university and its activity. Thus, this service may be useful for the academic community and the community of employers playing the role of the center of information, counseling, mediation and assisting students and graduates by exercising development of their independence in active and successful search of employment [16, p. 9].

The decision about the organization of a career office is taken inde-

pendently by each university which defines its place in the organization structure, the number of the staff and the main tasks and the name.

Such service has been functioning for about 20 years at the oldest Polish university training specialists for work with persons with SEN – The Maria Grzegorzewska University. The main tasks of the service include provision of assistance for students and graduates in looking for jobs and taking decisions about professional advancement and building a career, enrichment of knowledge about the state of the labor market and stimulating independence in searching for jobs in accordance with their qualification and personal wishes [6; 12].

The successful solution of the outlined problems presupposes that the following measures should be taken:

- delivery of information about the labor market, assistance in definition of future career, search for permanent and/or temporary employment;
- delivery of information about preferences and demands of employers, language courses, vacancies during vacations in Poland and abroad, advancement courses, practices, voluntary activities and possibilities of getting additional education;
- counseling on the preparation of documents for employment and passing qualified interviewing;
- delivery of information about advancement courses, vacancy fairs and presentations of employers;
- search and spread of information about the labor market;
- providing students a possibility to use the materials collected by the

career office (for example, videos about searching for a job, assertiveness, self-presentations, interviewing, overcoming stressful situations and filling in questionnaires about professional qualifications);

- conducting presentations of activity of various organizations at the university during which employers have a chance to present the sphere of their activity and the main tasks, values and achievements to the students, offer advancement courses, practice sites and vacancies and formulate the requirements for prospective members of the staff.

These measures characterize the work of the majority of career offices of the Polish higher education teacher training institutions.

So, career offices are established to provide services for the following categories of consumers [16, p. 9]:

- students and graduates wishing to get individual counseling, take part in master classes, courses, get advice in the future professional activity, information about advancement courses and practices and other forms of employment and further education possibilities;
- higher education institutions which can demonstrate to potential employers their possibilities and results of training specialists and carrying out scientific activity and use the accumulated data about organizations and institutions with the aim of monitoring their own educational activity in the sphere of working out and improving realized educational programs;
- employers for organizing effective choice of highly qualified can-

didates for practices, advancement courses or vacancies.

The realization of the state program "Human Potential" for 2007-2013 in Poland as one of the most significant priorities had a high quality system of education which was to be achieved by bringing the system of training specialists in line with the needs of society in the sphere of education, culture and social support of citizens through working out and implementation of the Polish system of qualifications based on the European qualifications frameworks [9, p. 79].

Most effective forms of construction of interaction between the universities and employers with the purpose of improving the graduates' professional training were looked for in order to solve the set tasks. The main aim of cooperation was defined as intensification of practical orientation of educational programs of higher professional education and rising competitiveness of the graduates of a concrete university on the labor market [10]. The search was stimulated by realization of various projects whose results were analyzed, generalized and implemented in the practical activity of other universities. The project "University Friendly to an Employer" was one of such initiatives. Its results showed that the following forms of interaction between a university and employers are the most widely spread ones [10; 11; 13]:

- inviting students to have practice and organization of advancement courses;
- participation of employer representatives in scientific-practical

conferences and seminars held by the university;

- cooperation of employers with the university faculty in solution of significant theoretical and practical problems of education in the process of realization of joint projects;
- organization of presentations of employer institutions and vacancy fairs at the university;
- conducting academic training of students by lecturers or heads of education institutions.

The following forms are used less frequently:

- selecting students and graduates for work at institutions on their request by the university;
- implementation of jointly created technologies, manuals and materials in the practical activity of institutions;
- participation of employers in the work of the Council of Employers established at the university with a voice but no vote in the structure of the university management.

The analytical data at hand [10, p. 19] show that in the process of interaction with universities employers prefer to give information about vacancies (72 %) and create conditions for conducting advancement courses and practices (59 %). Much less frequently they formulate more concrete requirements for qualification and professional skills (24 %) and organize courses or seminars (13 % each). Only one third of employers (33 %) take active part in holding vacancy fairs and only 10 % really used the recommendations of career offices for hiring workers.

In this list we noted an increase of the forms of interaction which are directly connected with the realization of an educational program.

An important role in successful interaction between the university and employers is plaid by fairly good knowledge of the latter about the forms of cooperation having, on the one hand, direct relation to the professional training of students and, on the other hand, practical significance for the employers themselves (organizations and institutions), as well as usage of these forms by the employers. The list given above contains such forms. Many universities refer systematic meetings of various formats to such forms [8, 10].

Such meetings give the university students and the faculty a chance to get acquainted with the conditions of organization of the activity of different institutions, with the requirements to the staff, and provide the career office with a possibility to collect concrete information about urgent vacancies and enable the students to make up their minds about their future career. Institutions, in their turn, get a chance to hire well-qualified specialists interested in their professional activity.

Much attention is also paid by the universities to vacancy fairs [6; 8; 11] as a form which allows both the employer and the student looking for a job or place for having practice (internship) to compare mutual interests during face-to-face meetings.

A new innovative and effective practice-oriented method of training specialists is “transfer of knowledge to institutions”; it consists in writing

graduation qualification papers in partnership with institutions which define the concrete problem to be studied and create the conditions necessary for its completion. The student doing such project gets a chance to write an interesting work based on real practice and enriched by real examples and can make a contribution to the development of the practical activity of the institution.

Joint creation of “case studies” is one more effective method of the employer’s participation in enhancing the practical constituent of the educational program. Their realization facilitates the students’ acquisition of certain knowledge and skills in the process of analysis of a real situation arising at the institution in connection with its activity. While doing such project the student provides a detailed description of the causes of the problem, its consequences and conditions of resolution. Such work stimulates the student’s creative thinking, forms the skill to look at the problem from different angles and develops prognostic skills. The employer can use the created materials for taking organizational decisions.

Well-organized interaction with employers also presupposes the use of such forms of work with students as holding meetings with the leading specialists of institutions and establishments, their giving master-classes, seminars, organization (together with the students) of various events, allowing them to demonstrate their professional mastery [8; 10].

Practically all materials [8; 10; 15] specify the dependence of effectiveness of cooperation between uni-

versities and employers on its financing. Much attention is paid to it in Poland – financing is made by various funds (EU, government or regional) and financial organizations.

While organizing cooperation with employers, university career offices offer them various kinds of assistance. For example, the career office of the University of Silesia in Katowice [7] offers the employers recommendations about the content and organization of the presentation of the institution at the university in the form of a stand or meeting in person at the chosen faculty and demonstrates the advantages of each form. Thus, a presentation in the form of a stand makes the information about the institution or establishment accessible to a large number of students and creates a possibility to have an individual talk with those who are interested in getting a job in it. Presentation in the form of a meeting in person is recommended in those cases when the employer makes an offer about the employment of a group of potential workers without clear requirements to the profile of their professional training.

The questions of interaction between universities and employers in the sphere of creation or improvement of professional education programs taking into account the needs of employers have hardly been covered yet. They are regulated on the level of the law-normative basis the creation of which involves the Ministry of National Education (Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej) as employer. The “Order of the Ministry of National Education of the Republic of Po-

land of March 3, 2009” formulates the requirements to the teacher applying for a certain position at a certain institution.

Thus, § 14.1 contains the requirements to the qualifications of teachers working with children with intellectual disability which run as follows:

“To fill a vacancy of a teacher at a special kindergarten, special basic school, special gymnasium, special schools higher than gymnasium, special educational centers and special educational centers for children and young people with mild, medium or severe intellectual disability, special schools for adjusting pupils with medium or severe intellectual disability and multiple disabilities to labor, centers providing children and young people with severe intellectual disability and children and young people with multiple intellectual disabilities with a possibility to realize the obligatory one year preschool training and to pass school attestation, as well as to give revalidating educational lessons with children and young people with severe intellectual disability on a high professional level may be entrusted to a person who:

1) has a higher education diploma in the specialty “Oligophrenopedagogy” or

2) has a qualification necessary to fill a vacancy of a teacher at the given type of school or the kind of an institution listed in § 2–5 and has completed a program of post-graduate education or a course of professional advancement in the field of oligophrenopedagogy,

3) has taken a course of professional training in the field of oligophrenopedagogy [11].

It is worth paying attention to the fact that special importance is given to the training profile of the candidate for a corresponding position: the right to work with children with intellectual disability is given only to the specialist having professional training in the field of oligophrenopedagogy. These requirements form the basis for creation of educational programs of training such specialists and define concrete outcomes of the educational program.

The characteristics of each educational program realized at the Maria Grzegorzewska University in Warsaw contain an indication of the position that can be occupied by the person who has successfully completed it.

For example, the master's degree program "Rehabilitation of Persons with Multiple Intellectual Disabilities" in the field of education "Special Pedagogy" ensures training the graduate for the following positions: *teacher (pedagogue)* of special schools for adjusting pupils with medium or severe intellectual disability and multiple disabilities to labor; centers providing children and young people with severe intellectual disability and children and young people with multiple intellectual disabilities with a possibility to realize the obligatory one year preschool training and obligatory school program, – as well as qualification to give revalidating educational lessons with children and young people with severe intellectual disability; *therapist – special ped-*

agogue of a center of early intervention, rehabilitation center, center of psychological well-being, psychopedagogical counseling center, centers of labor therapy, and homes of social help [6; 12].

Accordingly, the content of the program is markedly oriented at the specificity of the graduate's professional activity (age and category of persons with SEN) under different institutional conditions (kinds of institutions). This defines the high level of preparation of the graduate to execution of concrete professional functions and actions which is the main indicator of the quality of professional education.

The undertaken analysis makes it possible to formulate the conclusions that may be useful for solving the tasks of improvement of training teachers-defectologists in the field of "Special (defectological) Education".

As a result of serious state support, Polish pedagogues have accumulated and processed diverse experience in interaction between universities and employers in realization of educational programs in various educational fields including training specialists for the sphere of education and rehabilitation of persons with SEN.

Normative clarity in the requirements for the level of education (bachelor or master's degree) and professional training of the teacher-defectologist applying for the corresponding vacancy clearly defines the targets of designing educational programs and allows to distinctly formulate the expected outcomes and to reach them in the process of interaction with the employer.

Proper financing interaction is one of the most important conditions of effective work and ensuring practical orientation of the professional training programs. High effectiveness of interaction between the university and employers is achieved by means of various forms which guarantee consideration of the interests of all participants: university (administration and faculty), students and employers.

Realization of state programs (projects) aimed at stimulating the activity of universities and employers in the sphere of development of interaction, search of new forms of interaction, working out new methods of its assessment and improving the quality of higher professional education facilitate the improvement of effectiveness of university/employer cooperation.

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