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Topical Needs of the Development of University Professors' Competencies, Especially Teacher Trainers' Competencies, in Latvia

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Contents

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Abstract

Nowadays the teachers' education standards in Latvia are oriented to the teaching, therefore teachers' education also is more oriented to the teaching not to the learning. University professors as teacher trainers have an impact on the teachers' education quality. The results of the international research project in 2006 in Latvia showed that Latvian teacher trainers have rank-ordered the following competencies as the three least important competencies: "*design and implementation of didactic materials*", "*tutorial competency*" and "*evaluation of teaching-learning processes*". This seems to be typical for the traditional role of an academic "teacher," who understands himself/herself as an expert in his/her academic field, and his/her task is to "transmit" this knowledge to the students. The purpose of the paper is to present the research findings of the study conducted in 2006 in Latvia and compare them with the results gained in 2009 during the repeated research of professors' competencies.

Key words: future oriented competency(-ies); professional development; continuing education programme; teacher trainer.

1. Introduction

In the context of creating European Higher Education Area according to the Bologna process, the question about quality assurance in higher education is of great current interest at the level of the state's education policy and at the university level. Education quality is a social category that describes the situation of the educational process and its effectiveness in meeting the needs of society. The university creates changes in society and itself also changes along with the needs of the age, and gives its students the possibility to become competent in the field of their practical work. The need to assure a kind of education quality that will foster an improvement of the quality life is accented. One of the most pressing aspects in quality assurance for higher education is the pedagogic competency of university teachers in the context of socio-cultural changes in society, so that they can successfully foment the quality of the education of students for lifelong learning, as well as ensure the integration of academic studies and scientific research, on the basis of the principle of unity between higher education and science.

According to Max de Pree "[…] quality is the goal [...]. When we speak about quality, we think about quality of the results of collaboration and about the quality of the services. But we also think about the quality of our relations and our communication, about promises that we make one another" (de Pree, 1992). The quality of the study process depends on several factors. One of the essential factors is the quality of the professional work of university teachers. University teachers are also confronted with this question every day: how can they integrate theory and practice in their professional work?

2. Latvian national development strategic documents: Quality of education for quality of life

The interest and the context of this research in Latvia are clearly affirmed in the body of strategic documents. The Latvian National Development Plan for 2007-2013 (2006) recognises the necessity of lifelong learning for improving people's quality of life and capacity for creativity. This information is related also to research that has been conducted in Latvia in 2006, which concluded that quality of education is part of people's quality of life (*Dzīves kvalitāte Latvijā*/Quality of Life in Latvia, 2006)

Latvia's long-term development strategy until 2030 (2008) basically affirms that human resources are Latvia's principal resource, and thus, investing to the development of human capital is the primary challenge. Human capital is defined as the average of the inhabitants' talents and capacities multiplied by the number of economically active people. To invest in human capital means to invest in health care, education, and professional preparation. That means that even in our technological era the importance of man is politically recognised.

The minister of Science and Education of Latvia, Prof. Tatjana Koķe, wrote that "The greatest value of Europe is man, and this is why the first thing to do is to increase the investment in human resources instead of investing in institutions. In this context, the main criterion to evaluate the activities of institutions must be their contribution to improving the people's quality live" (Koķe, 2002).

The report on Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA, 2009) insists on the fact that the most important and accessible learning resource for students is the teacher. This is the reason why universities have to implement quality assurance measures and have to verify, that the personnel involved in the university has the necessary qualifications and competences: that they have a good command of the subject they teach and perfectly understand it, that they have the necessary savoir-faire and experience, so that they can transmit it to the students efficiently in the different study contexts and have feed-back about their work. The University is a learning organisation, and it must provide the teachers with the opportunity to complete and enlarge their teaching capacities through continuing education. It must also foster teachers' assessment of their teaching (self-assessment at the level of the individual). Thus, a high level of education will be tied the level of appropriate education and qualification of the teachers.

According to the 34th paragraph of the Education Law of the Republic of Latvia (*LR Izglītības likums*, 1998, 1999, 2000), "Assessment of scientific and pedagogic qualification", the scientific and pedagogic qualifications of candidates for professor or associated professor posts are evaluated by the Council of Professors of the faculty in accordance with the indications of the Cabinet of Ministers, but in the case of candidates to the posts of docent, lecturer, or assistant, the assessment of the scientific and pedagogic qualifications of candidates is made by the Faculty or Institute Council.

3. University teachers' professional development in the context of lifelong learning: Theory for practice

Up to the second half of the 20th century in the field of pedagogy, the "study process" was studied from the position of teachers and from the point of view of "teaching"; nowadays, however, researchers look at the study process in the university's pedagogy from the students' perspective. According to the constructivist approach, the foundations of the study process are interactive learning, exchange of viewpoints, and discussions. Students learn the contents of studies though learning situations that result from lessons that are centred on the students (Rubene, 2004). In fact, "education is a process in which the interaction between people is most important" (Prets, 2000, p. 231), and this is the reason why we must not forget the teacher, if man wants to be faithful

to himself, to his capacities and possibilities, "in the richness of human relations" (St Exupery, The Little Prince).

In the beginning of the 21st century, the question about the importance of pedagogical education (competence) is important for anyone who works in pedagogy, in pre-schools, as well as in schools, high-schools or university. In Latvia, research is lacking about university teachers' pedagogic experience and education and about the way it affects teachers' pedagogic work, as they form young specialists in all fields.

Rasma Garleja (1999) was the first professor in the field of university pedagogy in Latvia to be elected after the country recovered its independence. She insists on the importance of university-level education pedagogy, because all higher-level education in other fields depends on it. Pedagogic science is realised in the pedagogic process and in pedagogic work. That means that in pedagogic work, it is necessary to have not only a full knowledge of the concrete subject to be taught, but also knowledge in pedagogy, so that teachers can use this knowledge creatively.

One of the essential aspects in the assessment of the quality of studies at a university is the faculty's contribution: their work with students. One of most common assessment methods in universities is to make students fill out questionnaires about the courses, the process, the teaching staff and the whole programme. In those questionnaires, various different criteria are used to identify quality. Sometimes the students are asked to make a quantitative assessment; various criteria could be proposed, as, for example, lesson comprehensibility or the capacity to make lessons interesting for students. The students' global assessment can be also qualitative. For example, they may be asked to answer the question: Would you like to have other courses with this teacher? The results are used quite widely. For example, they are included in reports about university self-assessment. They are used by experts on accreditation as well by committees to elect teaching staff. All of this ensures also the students' active participation in the study process: as they assess teachers' professional work, they also learn something, because they focus not only on the way the teacher ensures qualitative work, but also on the quality of their own studying: how do I, as student, take care of the quality of my studies?

In the countries of the European Union, high quality in high-schools is related to teachers' education, which follows up-to-date tendencies: knowledge, lifelong learning society, European integration, European dimension, mobility, and so on. "The teacher fulfils very important functions for the development of society, which includes the transmission of generational experience and a society's cultural heritage. He ensures the quality of pedagogic culture as a cultural component of society, which, for its part determines the content of the studies in his own education as teacher (Žogla, 2001, p. 98). At the same time, the teachers' educational process in university should be oriented to lifelong learning, as a characteristic and proof of professionalism. May teachers have the personal desire to continue their education even after finishing their studies – to be ready for a dynamic process of lifelong learning for teachers, which starts at the university, while carrying out professional pedagogic work with an exemplary attitude towards work and research as a condition of innovative work (Žogla, 2001).

What is a good university teacher? What is a good teacher for teacher training? Teacher training is a wide field of scientific research. The quality of teacher training is understood as a condition for ensuring quality in general education. Also in everyday life it is normal for teachers to pay attention to the way their students learn.

But can we say that it is also usual for teachers to pay attention to the way they carry out their own professional work? Professor of the National University of Distance Education (Spain) Antonio Medina Revilla (2007) insists on the fact that the professional identity is a meta-competence of university teachers, and this implies that the teacher tries to answer the following questions:

- Why am I a teacher?
- What is the meaning of my vocation – to be a teacher?

- What kind of satisfaction do I receive from being a teacher?
- What do I need, and how must I be, in order to become a good (excellent!) pedagogue?
- What is the difference between me and a physician, a lawyer, an architect?
- How do I develop my own professional identity?

Every professional must answer these questions in the context of his own professional work. There are no right answers to these questions. Also Alexander Wörner (2008) insist on this: if you want to teach well, to be a good university teacher, it is part of your duty to think about yourself and to pay attention to yourself, to respect, to honour yourself. The professionalization of university teachers, that is, their professional development, takes place in practical activities. This process is simultaneously a working process and a learning process. If we use lifelong learning categories, it is called informal learning (Koķe, 2002).

The keywords of the essence of lifelong learning existed already in the pedagogy of the Latvian people, which is brilliantly expressed by the traditional aphorism: „*Mūžu dzīvo, mūžu mācies*" (A life you live, a life you learn). That is to say, you must learn all your life, in order to improve yourself, to get a good job, to do it well, to have a good salary, and so to have a good standard of living, or, speaking in a more general sense, to have quality of life. Nowadays in Latvia lifelong learning is understood as learning all one's life and in all of life's aspects, including formal as in informal education and learning in everyday life (*Mūžizglītības memorands*/Lifelong learning memorandum, 2005). We learn when we participate in any event or activity, and the greatest way of learning is life's experience: not only our own personal experience, but also others' experience. The concept of lifelong learning includes the idea that man learns from his birth till the end of his days. Lifelong learning today is an indispensable part of life, because man in everyday life must continuously find new solutions and approaches.

Lifelong learning – to learn all our life is an omni-comprehensive (large) concept. It includes formal, non-formal, and informal (everyday) learning that helps to reach objectives in personal, social, and professional life. It means also that the learning process does not happen anymore only in educational institutions, but also, for example, at home, in social organisations, in the work place. Lifelong learning is not a preparation for life; it is an integral part of life (Nache & Dohmen, 1996 by Gerlach, 2000).

In the development of professional competencies, nowadays more and more attention is paid not only to students' studies, but also to the competence of the academic staff of the university. This is so because professionalism and competence are obviously needed to do effective work, but they are not just results; they are also means to obtain a deeper understanding (Fulans, 1999). The "approach of a model of competencies" is often used in professional field, but also in studies. This approach includes concrete requirements, which are needed to carry out successfully one's professional duties. These demands concern not only the professional knowledge of the worker, but also his personality and value system. Also, the results of studies are formulated in the form of competences. Nowadays special attention is paid to employees' academic abilities, communication skills, languages skills, thinking abilities, critical thinking skills, problem solving skills, capacity to assess situations and to take decisions, positive attitude, responsibility, teamwork and lifelong learning, "imagination and capacity to be creative" (Rifkins, 2004, p.9), which are essential components of professional competence. So, the university teacher not only teaches, but also learns. Moreover, he learns from those whom he teaches; he learns from the way in which he teaches.

The increasing demands on employees' professionalism for their part make new demands on education and reinforce the importance of the co-existence, respect of the person, dialogue, and total creativity activity (Alijevs, 2005), that correspond to the human-pedagogic paradigm. This is the reason why changes affect also the university and the people that work there. Because of their orientation to the knowledge society, the contents of the studies changes also, as do the study process, methods, and need for teachers' professionalism. The main themes of university education today are: critical thinking, autonomous learning, lifelong learning, creativity, openness to change, innovation, collaboration and teamwork, integration, relationships with partners, and

flexibility (Blūma, 2001). The contents of the studies are oriented to students' learning process and to the holistic appropriation of the lessons. During the study process the student use his own experiences and collaborates with the teacher, and in this way he himself constructs his own knowledge and forms a self-assessment. On the other hand, the teacher's professionalism is measured in terms of the utilisation of a wide range of strategies, creative knowledge, imagination and creativity, work organisation (one-to-one, group, team-work), organisation of mutual help and reinforcement of students' autonomy, as well as the ability to integrate interdisciplinary knowledge into continuous professional development (Žogla, 2006).

Thus it is essential to turn our attention to the issue of the continuing education, especially professional development of the higher education staff. The possibilities of continuing education (professional development) in the work place are not sufficiently used in the modern university (higher educational institution) in Latvia. The shift of emphasis from individual learning to the learning organization ("Learning in the work place") is an integral development trend in the field of professional development (Geissler, 1995 by Otto, Rauschenbach, & Vogel, 2002). It means that the professional development in the work place is attributed great significance and in this context we are speaking about the learning organization. The organizations turn into the key centres for developing the professional competences of their employees (Bahnmüller, 1999 by Otto, Rauschenbach, & Vogel, 2002).

The learning in the work place may have both an organized form and unorganized form. The organized learning forms in the work place include different courses, seminars as well as activity (learning) in the so called "quality circle (team)". Courses and seminars provide possibilities for learning and as a result especially the young employees gain the competences necessary for the context of their professional activities. The fact that learning takes place in real situations and it is connected with particular tasks is considered to be an advantage of learning in the work place. Thus the transference of the learned to the practice is left out because the learning and the application of the learned are integrated (Trier, 1999 by Otto, Rauschenbach, & Vogel, 2002).

Several forms of learning in work place are being differentiated (Severing, 1994; Georg, 1996; Bergmann, 1999; Bibb, 1998; Trier, 1999; all by Otto, Rauschenbach, & Vogel, 2002): Quality circles: the aim of this form is to involve the employees in the problem solving, decision making. The participants meet in small groups for a relatively short period of time (1 – 3 hours) to discuss a topical issue, a problem, work assignments and to look for solutions. The activity is led by a moderator. The Quality circle is a small group established for a period of time, which meets in certain conditions, develop the offers for solving the problems and mutually exchange the information; Coaching – the concept of systematic consultations and activities; Job-Rotation-Programme; Self-education programme – all the activities in which the employees are self-motivated and self-directed in learning.

The everyday professional development has a tendency to increase (Bundesministerium, 1999 by Otto, Rauschenbach, & Vogel, 2002), it means, the employees independently learn in the process of work. This form of learning does not depend on the place of learning and it serves as an intrinsic feature of the decentralization of the professional development (Dehn-Bostel, 1995 by Otto, Rauschenbach, & Vogel, 2002). Visiting the professional exhibitions, participation in congresses, exchange programmes, presenting a report or reading of professional literature as well as all forms of learning using the computer is the professional development. Charles Spencer (2008) too, in his study concludes that teacher educators mainly develop their own professionalism through self-education.

There is a need to improve the pedagogical professional development programmes of the university staff at national and international level, to create the teacher training programmes in order to increase European higher education. The International research project "Evaluation of Spanish cooperation and international teacher training programmes: the model for the development of future projects in the common European education space" worked out by the Ministry of Education of Spain (*Ministerio de Educación de España*) for the purpose of the above-mentioned problem solving.

4. Short description of the International research project "Evaluation of Spanish cooperation and international teacher training programmes: the model for the development of future projects in the common European education space"

From February 2006 to September 2006 the University of Latvia has been participated in the international research project "Evaluation of Spanish cooperation and international teacher training programmes: the model for the development of future projects in the common European education space". Alongside with the University of Latvia another five universities have been participated in the project: National University of Distance Education (Spain); Vigo University (Spain); Oviedo University (Spain); University of Tübingen (Germany); Algarve University (Portugal).

The objectives of the project were the following:
▪ to elaborate and write a report, which would reveal the homogeneity and correspondence of the data obtained to the set criteria, thus promoting future contribution;
▪ to create the framework for an international teacher training programme in order to improve European higher education;
▪ experience exchange and exchange of ideas among several countries involved in the creation of a new education programme for the development of students' professional qualification;
▪ based on the Delphi method to design the quality analysis matrix for the designed new programme.

The Delphi method was originally developed in the 50s by the RAND Corporation in Santa Monica, California. During the last fifteen years, the Delphi method with some modifications and methodological improvements was used more often especially for social science. The Delphi method is based on structural surveys and makes use of the intuitive available information of the participants, who are mainly experts. There is not the one Delphi methodology but the applications are diverse. There is agreement that Delphi is an expert survey in two or more 'rounds' in which in the second and later rounds of the survey the results of the previous round are given as feedback. (Skulmoski, Hartman, & Krahn, 2007; Turoff & Linstone, 2002; Turoff, Hiltz, Yao, Li, Wang, & Cho, 2006 et al.). Thus, the Delphi method is a "relatively strongly structured group communication process, in which matters, on which naturally unsure and incomplete knowledge is available, are judged upon by experts" (Häder & Häder, 1995, p. 12).

During the first phase of the international research project from February 2006 to September 2006 a survey and 2 focus group interviews were conducted in Spain, Latvia and Portugal, as well as continuing education programmes for the educators of higher educational establishments in Latvia and continuing education programme for young professors in one of German states were analysed. Quantitative data were processed applying SPSS software and qualitative data were processed applying AQUAD software. The purpose of this paper is to present the research findings of the study conducted in 2006 in Latvia and compare them with the results gained in 2009 during the repeated research on professors' competencies (the second phase of the international research project).

5. The research findings of the study conducted in 2006 in Latvia

The results of 2006 in Latvia showed that the three most important competencies for Latvian professors (n=94) are no. 1, 5, and 10, that is, *acquisition of professional identity*, *development of methodological strategies*, and *construction of approaches to educational research*. This result seems to be very promising, because it combines in the highest ranks of preferences competencies of teaching, investigation and personal development. However, the qualitative findings from the analyses of group discussions among professors demonstrate quite clearly a misunderstanding of item no.1 (*acquisition of professional identity*): The participants in the study conceived of this item not as a competency to develop professional identity through experiences "on the job," but rather as a personality characteristic:

> 61 So on the basis lies the analysis of my work. *And if I analyzed my work I would*
> 62 *give 11 points to the criterion – competent professional identity - if I myself*
> 63 *understand who I am.* Certainly, I have to start to assess my work from the fact

On the other hand, as the three least important competencies the Latvian participants (professors as teacher trainers) rank-ordered no. 6, 4, and 7, that is *design and implementation of didactic materials*, *tutorial competency*, and *evaluation of teaching-learning processes*. This seems to typical for the traditional role of an academic "teacher," who understands him/herself as an expert in his/her academic field, and his task is to "transmit" this knowledge to the students. Positive changes will be expected in the future, because the answers of younger professors show a tendency – although not statistically significant – towards higher rankings of tutorial competency than their older colleagues' questionnaire rankings [see Appendix A, Table 1, 2].

As regards differences between younger and older professors, we found one significant result showing that younger professors rate their need for *language competencies* (no. 3) lower than older professors, probably because they have greater language proficiency. If we assume that younger colleagues have generally greater need of professional training, we may apply one-sided significance criteria. Thus, we find two differences in the expected direction: need of tutorial training (no. 4) and need of support to meet the challenges of the information and knowledge society (no. 11) [see Appendix A, Table 1, 2]. No difference was found in ratings of training needs as regards competencies to develop and implement didactic materials (no. 6).

The findings underline the adequacy of the different programmes for professional training developed and offered in Latvia. Particularly the erroneous understanding of "professional identity" as a personality characteristic and not so much as a process of permanent development highlights the importance of the programme offered at the University of Latvia "Professional development of the staff of higher education institutions/innovations in the system of higher education." The main focus of the programme is to help experienced lecturers to understand and implement the shift of paradigms in higher education to join European common education space and implement the Bologna process in the classroom. 160 hrs, out of which 40 are contact hrs. The target group are lecturers with more than 3 years work experience in higher education institutions.

In general, the professional training programmes meet central needs of promotion of university professors' competencies. The programmes aim at promoting:
- investigation and assessment-based planning and preparing study courses and programmes;
- critical pedagogical thinking on the basis of acquired didactics of tertiary education, theories of teaching-learning and psychological regularities of a person's development;
- modelling and conducting the process of teaching-learning, using innovative pedagogical means and guidance to implement innovations;
- creating a learning community, initiating partnership in a multicultural setting, supporting and assisting the learners to meet their essential needs;
- reflecting on the process of teaching-learning, assessing achievements and providing quality assurance.

These programmes meet the addressees' subjective and objective needs for training. However, not all of the important competencies listed in our research instruments are covered by the existing training curriculum in Latvia. What needs further consideration and development is competence no. 6 "*Design and development of didactic materials to foster students' competencies.*" To which degree this training support leads to accomplishments is another question. Therefore, the programmes have to be complemented by a thoroughly designed approach to evaluation.

6. The research findings of the study conducted in 2009 in Latvia

Interpretive paradigm was chosen for the study. The choice was determined by the use of qualitative and quantitative approach. Theoretical and empirical methods of the research – data obtaining methods (online survey, analysis of information from the e-platform: chats, forums etc.) and methods of qualitative and quantitative data processing and analysis (frequencies; descriptive statistics; Mann-Whitney U; K Independent Samples Test, Kruskal-Walis H; pedagogical interpretation) have been used during the study.

An e-mail invitation to participate in the web-based study was sent to 165 teacher trainers. Each potential respondent received a letter of invitation together with the link of online survey at the home page of the Institute of Pedagogical Sciences of the Faculty of Education and Psychology of the University of Latvia (www.pzi.lu.lv). The letter of invitation gave details of the purpose of the study, use of information and an assurance of confidentiality and anonymity.

The participants were asked to complete online evaluation survey (username and password was provided):
- firstly, to assess the content of the continuing education for the development of the university staff competencies evaluating content importance on the 6-point Likert scale (1 – "not at all important"; 6 – "very important");
- secondly, to rate each competency priority using the 11-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all important, necessary) to 11 (very important, necessary);
- thirdly, to describe the existent continuing education programmes for professional training promoted the development of the university staff competencies in the common European education space.

Two reminders were sent by e-mail, and surveys were accepted until one week after the requested due date. This stage yielded 36 total respondents for a response rate of 22%.

We collected demographic data in order to provide a profile of the respondents. Of the 36 initial respondents all individuals provided demographic information (gender, qualification, institution, position, work experience etc.). Approximately 83% (n=30) were female and 17% (n=6) male. The work experience of the respondents ranged from 1 to 47 and the average seniority was 17 years. Regarding the participants' professional background, 39% (n=14) were younger professors (with work experience ≤ 10 years) and 61% (n=22) were older professors (with work experience more than 10 years).

In this section of paper the results of competencies priority ranging and description of the existent continuing education programmes for academic staff professional training are analysed.

The statistical data of 2009 in Latvia showed that the three most important competencies for Latvian professors as teacher trainers (n=36) are no. 10, 11, and 5, that is, *construction of approaches to educational research*, *the challenges of the information and knowledge society*, and *development of methodological strategies* [See Appendix B, Table 1]. Comparing the results gained in 2009 with the research findings of the study conducted in 2006 the following similarities

were founded: competencies no.5 and 10 (*development of methodological strategies; construction of approaches to educational research*) are most important in both studies in 2009 as well as in 2006.

On the other hand, as the three least important competencies the Latvian participants rank-ordered no. 4, 6, and 2, that is *tutorial competency*, *design and implementation of didactic materials to foster students*, and *choice and organisation of scientific content* [See Appendix B, Table 1]. Taking into consideration the results of the empirical research in 2006 we expected positive changes of the importance evaluating of tutorial competency, because in 2006 the answers of younger professors showed a tendency – although not statistically significant – towards higher rankings of *tutorial competency* (no. 4) than their older colleagues' questionnaire rankings. But our forecast was not justified. But in 2009 the answers of younger professors showed another tendency – although not statistically significant – towards higher rankings of *didactic innovations* (no. 9) and *evaluation of teaching-learning processes* (no. 7) than their older colleagues' rankings [see Appendix B, Table 2]. There is no significant difference between younger professors' and older professors' rankings of the future oriented competencies priority [see Appendix B, Table 3].

As regards differences between male and female professors, we found one significant result (p=0.020) showing that the female professors rate the importance of *construction of approaches to educational research* (no. 10) lower than male professors [see Appendix B, Table 4, 5]. In 2009 the answers of female professors showed a tendency – although not statistically significant – towards higher rankings of *acquisition of professional identity* (no. 1), *language competencies* (no. 3), *tutorial competency* (no. 4) and *development of methodological strategies* (no. 5) than their male colleagues' rankings [see Appendix B, Table 4], probably because male professors are more oriented to communication, support and augment social relationships among people by fostering a sense of connectedness among them.

There is a significant difference between professors' rankings of the future oriented competencies priority that depends on continuing education programme for professional training. We found three significant results (p=0.051; p=0.042; p=0.008) showing that the professors of the programme "Educational Treatment of Diversity" rate the need for *design and implementation of didactic materials to foster students* (no. 6), *evaluation of teaching-learning processes* (no. 7) and *didactic innovations* (no. 9) lower than the professors from other programmes. Probably because the professors of the programme "Educational Treatment of Diversity" have more opportunities for development of their future oriented competencies. On the other hand, the professors of the programme "Educational Treatment of Diversity" rate the importance of *the challenges of the information and knowledge society* (no. 11) higher than the professors from other programmes [see Appendix B, Table 6, 7]. Probably because the professors of the programme "Educational Treatment of Diversity" have more needs of support to meet the challenges of the information and knowledge society.

The interuniversity Master's programme "Educational Treatment of Diversity" (Gento, 2007) is developed and implemented by four European universities: National University of Distance Education (Spain), Ludwigsburg University of Education (Germany), Karls-University Prague (Czech Republic), and University of Latvia. The academic staff work experience and continuing education are integrated in this programme (learning in the work place). The main focus of the programme is to initiate and extend the use of telecommunication by computer and audiovisual technology, by using e-platform, to facilitate mutual intercommunication between students and academic staff and among students themselves; to facilitate the students' and professors' mobility into different countries helping to understand the paradigms of higher education in the context of European common education space.

The general conclusion on the basis of analyzing the interuniversity programme „Educational Treatment of Diversity" e-platform, especially discussion forums, could be the following that the academic staff initially participated rather seldom in the general forum (September, October 2008). It is mainly the head of the programme and her assistants, who answer to students' questions, get involved in the forum discussions, suggest topics for the forum. The academic staff gradually gets involved – mainly, it happens with the beginning of their

modules. If initially the academic staff solves the situations that are connected with the organization of learning in a new study form for them (e-learning: audio- and videoconferences, chats, discussion forums, e-mails, Skype…) then the key issues of the study forums in the 2nd term (February-May 2009) are related to the content of the studies, its critical analysis, the evocation of discussions, sharing of experience, providing suggestions on additional reading.

The situation concerning the starting stage of implementing the programme is precisely described by the university professor D. who writes in the Forum on November 12, 2008 at 12:17:

"We, the academic staff, too, are in the learning process and starting the work on this new programme, we, too, have many unclear things. Certainly, that refers to me, personally. It could be said that one can observe even some kind of frustration. How to overcome it? Here we have to remember what professor M. has always said – to speak. To speak very openly and to ask questions. To speak with the colleagues and the academic staff. Because when someone else feels like I do, it gets easier for me, I understand that I am not so very "unique" in my feelings. The idea that this is a possibility to learn something new that differs from what I have done before, that this is a new learning experience helps me."

This statement characterizes the competent social action of the academic staff in the conditions of the society challenges (no. 11). The main focus of tutoring is to clarify students needs, to help them solved their doubts and problems and to orientate them to obtain the necessary successful results. For this reason, tutoring sessions are not imparted as lectures, but as intercommunicative opportunities where students can directly and flexibly speak to the academic staff and receive their specific and concrete answer to the put forward questions (no. 4, 11).

The university professor L. writes in the forum on January 12, 2009 at 23:50:

"Thank you to all for active and interested participation in the examination! All the sent in works are of high quality: they include analysis, applying the course material, the personal experience and other sources as well as offer innovative solutions in the context of Latvia. I read your works with great interest and joy. Each work of the examination is something special and I could learn some interesting possibility to improve the solution of the problem from each of them. I evaluated the works according to the previously suggested criteria- answers to 3 questions, which were formulated before the examination assignment. I will gladly cooperate with you also in future! Believe in yourselves and I wish you success also in the coming examinations."

This quote characterizes competent evaluation of the study process (teaching/learning process) and its results done by the university professor (no. 7).

Students receive not only the assessment in the form of a mark but also the university professor's human satisfaction, the evaluation of the joint cooperation, especially with the emphasis that the university professor, too, has benefited from this cooperation (no. 4). Besides, the students' answers in the forum prove that such attitude from the professors encourages them to overcome the possible difficulties connected with further studying.

The team of the university professors delivering one of the modules in the 2nd term writes the following on May 19, 2009 at 10:42:

"We are glad that you have successfully completed module 11. The group work and the cooperation process within the module showed that you are very good at completing such tasks. Module 12 gives you a possibility to develop your highly developed self-organization competences. Let the process be optimal for you, the others and the learning results of all (both the students and the academic staff) be significant. Let's be successful! The university professors' team that is proud of their students."

These sentences, to our mind, prove that in the age of modern technologies also using such learning forms as e-learning, further education, the person-to-person relations, mutual support, which in their turn, are also learning, are indispensable (no.5, 9). Besides, the university

professors inspire their students for the studies both with the example of their professional activity and the attitude to students (no.1, 4).

The university professor R, writes on February 26, 2009 at 23:29:

"Good evening! I am glad for the well-performed tasks. This proves your learning competence! I see that you don't have much need for me. Therefore I suggest that tomorrow you use the face-to-face meeting time for the consultation with professor H. We can meet any other time both face-to-face and electronically but the professor is in Latvia only at this moment."

This characterizes the professor's competence in organizing the students' learning, in selecting the learning resources and media (no. 2, 6). This is a sample of the university professor's flexible action in the modern changeable social conditions to find and use the possibilities in the study process, which have not been initially planned (no. 11). This serves as an expression of creative organization of the studies, which promotes the learning (no. 5, 6).

The thoughts expressed by the academic staff in the forum vividly show that learning is not only the students' issue but also the university professors learn together with the students and from the students (no. 1). The academic staff can become aware of that only in the pedagogical process. For instance, the university professor I. writes to students on October 21, 2008 at 12:35:

"When analyzing documents, literature and other sources, it is desirable to pay attention to the common and different in the experience of several countries when evaluating them in the context of Latvia and their applicability in your own work. Try to concentrate because the material is bulky: see the aim, material structure of Module 2, look for the main in the chapters, and make analytical notes for your own professional activities. Let us not try to remember all; it will be better if we devote attention to understanding. In case of need, don't hesitate to ask questions. I will willingly see also your benefits in order to learn what I do not know. Be successful in your work!"

Moreover, if the university professor repeats these words once or even several times in the study rooms, students tend to forget them with time. The forum of the study programme „Educational Treatment of Diversity" gives the possibility to read them several times also later when the student's experience has already enriched; when he/she can look at them as if "through different eyes". This is an example of the everyday learning process.

7. Conclusion and Discussion

Delphi studies are useful for acquiring expert opinions on various topics. For this study we made every effort to identify and involve individuals who had extensive experience in various aspects of academic staff continuing education for the development of future oriented competencies. Our participants were able to provide diverse perspectives. Nevertheless, our response rate was low (only 22 %) and it is possible that the final report of the study might have differed with the involvement of nonrespondents or a different group of experts.

The findings from our study must be seen within the limited context of Latvia. The main findings of the study are the following:
- competencies no.5 and 10 (*development of methodological strategies* and *construction of approaches to educational research*) are most important in both studies in 2009 as well as in 2006;
- taking into consideration the results of the empirical research in 2006 we expected positive changes of the importance evaluating of tutorial competency, because in 2006 the answers of younger professors showed a tendency – although not statistically significant – towards higher

rankings of *tutorial competency* (no. 4) than their older colleagues' survey rankings. But our forecast was not justified;

- in 2009 the answers of younger professors showed another tendency – although not statistically significant – towards higher rankings of *didactic innovations* (no. 9) and *evaluation of teaching-learning processes* (no. 7) than their older colleagues' rankings;
- in 2009 we found one significant result (p=0.020) showing that the female professors rate the importance of *construction of approaches to educational research* (no. 10) lower than male professors. In 2009 the answers of female professors showed a tendency – although not statistically significant – towards higher rankings of *acquisition of professional identity* (no. 1), *language competencies* (no. 3), *tutorial competency* (no. 4) and *development of methodological strategies* (no. 5) than their male colleagues' rankings, probably because male professors are more oriented to communication, support and augment social relationships among people by fostering a sense of connectedness among them;
- in 2009 we found three significant results (p=0.051; p=0.042; p=0.008) showing that the professors of the programme "Educational Treatment of Diversity" rate the need for *design and implementation of didactic materials to foster students* (no. 6), *evaluation of teaching-learning processes* (no. 7) and *didactic innovations* (no. 9) lower than the professors from other programmes. Probably because the professors of the programme "Educational Treatment of Diversity" have more opportunities for development of their future oriented competencies. On the other hand, the professors of the programme "Educational Treatment of Diversity" rate the importance of *the challenges of the information and knowledge society* (no. 11) higher than the professors from other programmes. Probably because the professors of the programme "Educational Treatment of Diversity" have more needs of support to meet the challenges of the information and knowledge society.

The findings presented here illustrate that, in general, the continuing education programmes for professional training meet topical needs of promoting university professors' future oriented competencies. By our mind, the programmes in which the academic staff work experience and continuing education are integrated (learning in the work place) more intensive promote the development of the university professors' future oriented competencies.

The research findings confirm that study organization forms and methods for study realization have an impact on the development of the professors' as teacher trainers' competencies. In order to promote the learning of the students as future teachers and university professors as teacher trainers and to develop their future oriented competencies there is a need to improve not only the content of the continuing education programmes but also the study organization forms and methods for these programmes' realization providing the opportunities for learning in the work place.

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Appendix A

The results of the research conducted in 2006 in Latvia

Table 1
Mann-Whitney Test

Ranks

	work experience	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
1. Acquisition of professional identity	younger professor	29	41,31	1198,00
	older professor	65	50,26	3267,00
	Total	94		
2. Choise and organisation of scientific content	younger professor	28	50,18	1405,00
	older professor	61	42,62	2600,00
	Total	89		
3. Language competencies	younger professor	29	39,00	1131,00
	older professor	64	50,63	3240,00
	Total	93		
4. Tutorial competency	younger professor	27	52,13	1407,50
	older professor	63	42,66	2687,50
	Total	90		
5. Development of methodological strategies	younger professor	21	38,31	804,50
	older professor	52	36,47	1896,50
	Total	73		
6. Design and implementation of didactic materials to foster students	younger professor	28	46,84	1311,50
	older professor	64	46,35	2966,50
	Total	92		
7. Evaluation of teaching-learning processes	younger professor	28	44,43	1244,00
	older professor	61	45,26	2761,00
	Total	89		
8. Application of principles oriented to the model of the European space of higher education	younger professor	29	42,19	1223,50
	older professor	64	49,18	3147,50
	Total	93		
9. Didactic innovations	younger professor	28	46,38	1298,50
	older professor	62	45,10	2796,50
	Total	90		
10. Construction of approaches to educational research	younger professor	29	40,81	1183,50
	older professor	63	49,12	3094,50
	Total	92		
11. The challenges of the information and knowledge society	younger professor	29	53,93	1564,00
	older professor	63	43,08	2714,00
	Total	92		

Table 2
Test Statistics

	1. Acquisition of professional identity	2. Choise and organisation of scientific content	3. Language competencies	4. Tutorial competency	5. Development of methodological strategies	6. Design and implementation of didactic materials to foster students	7. Evaluation of teaching-learning processes	8. Application of principles oriented to the model of the European space of higher education	9. Didactic innovations	10. Construction of approaches to educational research	11. The challenges of the information and knowledge society
Mann-Whitney U	763,000	709,000	696,000	671,500	518,500	886,500	838,000	788,500	843,500	748,500	698,000
Wilcoxon W	1198,000	2600,000	1131,000	2687,500	1896,500	2966,500	1244,000	1223,500	2796,500	1183,500	2714,000
Z	-1,620	-1,333	-1,985	-1,659	-,353	-,084	-,149	-1,203	-,222	-1,437	-1,871
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	,105	,182	,047	,097	,724	,933	,882	,229	,824	,151	,061

a Grouping Variable: work experience

Appendix B

The results of the research conducted in 2009 in Latvia

Table 1
Frequencies

Statistics

	1. Acquisition of professional identity	2. Choise and organisation of scientific content	3. Language competencies	4. Tutorial competency	5. Development of methodological strategies	6. Design and implementation of didactic materials to foster students	7. Evaluation of teaching-learning processes	8. Application of principles oriented to the model of the European space of higher education	9. Didactic innovations	10. Construction of approaches to educational research	11. The challenges of the information and knowledge society
N Valid	35	36	36	35	36	36	36	36	36	36	35
Missing	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Mean	7,34	6,33	7,25	7,11	7,67	7,08	7,56	7,19	7,17	8,03	8,00
Std. Error of Mean	,648	,627	,482	,616	,562	,492	,391	,459	,474	,535	,533
Median	9,00	8,00	8,00	8,00	9,00	7,00	7,50	7,50	8,00	9,00	9,00
Mode	10	11	8	11	11	10	10	5	8	11	10
Minimum	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1
Maximum	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11

Table 2
Mann-Whitney Test

Ranks

	work experience	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
1. Acquisition of professional identity	younger professor	14	14,96	209,50
	older professor	21	20,02	420,50
	Total	35		
2. Choise and organisation of scientific content	younger professor	14	16,75	234,50
	older professor	22	19,61	431,50
	Total	36		
3. Language competencies	younger professor	14	17,75	248,50
	older professor	22	18,98	417,50
	Total	36		
4. Tutorial competency	younger professor	14	15,57	218,00
	older professor	21	19,62	412,00
	Total	35		
5. Development of methodological strategies	younger professor	14	17,68	247,50
	older professor	22	19,02	418,50
	Total	36		
6. Design and implementation of didactic materials to foster students	younger professor	14	16,57	232,00
	older professor	22	19,73	434,00
	Total	36		
7. Evaluation of teaching-learning processes	younger professor	14	18,71	262,00
	older professor	22	18,36	404,00
	Total	36		
8. Application of principles oriented to the model of the European space of higher education	younger professor	14	18,29	256,00
	older professor	22	18,64	410,00
	Total	36		
9. Didactic innovations	younger professor	14	18,61	260,50
	older professor	22	18,43	405,50
	Total	36		
10. Construction of approaches to educational research	younger professor	14	16,36	229,00
	older professor	22	19,86	437,00
	Total	36		
11. The challenges of the information and knowledge society	younger professor	14	16,00	224,00
	older professor	21	19,33	406,00
	Total	35		

Table3
Test Statistics

	1. Acquisition of professional identity	2. Choise and organisation of scientific content	3. Language competencies	4. Tutorial competency	5. Development of methodological strategies	6. Design and implementation of didactic materials to foster students	7. Evaluation of teaching-learning processes	8. Application of principles oriented to the model of the European space of higher education	9. Didactic innovations	10. Construction of approaches to educational research	11. The challenges of the information and knowledge society
Mann-Whitney U	104,500	129,500	143,500	113,000	142,500	127,000	151,000	151,000	152,500	124,000	119,000
Wilcoxon W	209,500	234,500	248,500	218,000	247,500	232,000	404,000	256,000	405,500	229,000	224,000
Z	-1,455	-,802	-,344	-1,162	-,380	-,883	-,098	-,098	-,049	-,988	-,957
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	,146	,422	,731	,245	,704	,377	,922	,922	,961	,323	,339

a Grouping Variable: work experience

Table 4
Mann-Whitney Test

Ranks

	gender	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
1. Acquisition of professional identity	male	6	12,08	72,50
	female	29	19,22	557,50
	Total	35		
2. Choise and organisation of scientific content	male	6	19,17	115,00
	female	30	18,37	551,00
	Total	36		
3. Language competencies	male	6	14,92	89,50
	female	30	19,22	576,50
	Total	36		
4. Tutorial competency	male	6	16,50	99,00
	female	29	18,31	531,00
	Total	35		
5. Development of methodological strategies	male	6	17,33	104,00
	female	30	18,73	562,00
	Total	36		
6. Design and implementation of didactic materials to foster students	male	6	23,00	138,00
	female	30	17,60	528,00
	Total	36		
7. Evaluation of teaching-learning processes	male	6	20,17	121,00
	female	30	18,17	545,00
	Total	36		
8. Application of principles oriented to the model of the European space of higher education	male	6	22,58	135,50
	female	30	17,68	530,50
	Total	36		
9. Didactic innovations	male	6	20,00	120,00
	female	30	18,20	546,00
	Total	36		
10. Construction of approaches to educational research	male	6	27,50	165,00
	female	30	16,70	501,00
	Total	36		
11. The challenges of the information and knowledge society	male	5	19,00	95,00
	female	30	17,83	535,00
	Total	35		

Table 5
Test Statistics

	1. Acquisition of professional identity	2. Choise and organisation of scientific content	3. Language competencies	4. Tutorial competency	5. Development of methodological strategies	6. Design and implementation of didactic materials to foster students	7. Evaluation of teaching-learning processes	8. Application of principles oriented to the model of the European space of higher education	9. Didactic innovations	10. Construction of approaches to educational research	11. The challenges of the information and knowledge society
Mann-Whitney U	51,500	86,000	68,500	78,000	83,000	63,000	80,000	65,500	81,000	36,000	70,000
Wilcoxon W	72,500	551,000	89,500	99,000	104,000	528,000	545,000	530,500	546,000	501,000	535,000
Z	-1,579	-,171	-,920	-,400	-,303	-1,155	-,429	-1,048	-,387	-2,327	-,239
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	,114	,864	,358	,689	,762	,248	,668	,295	,699	,020	,811

a Grouping Variable: gender

Table 6
Kruskal-Wallis Test

Ranks

	Programme for professional training	N	Mean Rank
1. Acquisition of professional identity	programme "Educational Treatment of Diversity"	6	16,83
	other programme	18	18,36
	no information about programme	11	18,05
	Total	35	
2. Choise and organisation of scientific content	programme "Educational Treatment of Diversity"	6	14,50
	other programme	19	18,53
	no information about programme	11	20,64
	Total	36	
3. Language competencies	programme "Educational Treatment of Diversity"	6	12,50
	other programme	19	21,66
	no information about programme	11	16,32
	Total	36	
4. Tutorial competency	programme "Educational Treatment of Diversity"	5	14,20
	other programme	19	17,63
	no information about programme	11	20,36
	Total	35	
5. Development of methodological strategies	programme "Educational Treatment of Diversity"	6	15,67
	other programme	19	17,76
	no information about programme	11	21,32
	Total	36	
6. Design and implementation of didactic materials to foster students	programme "Educational Treatment of Diversity"	6	10,33
	other programme	19	18,32
	no information about programme	11	23,27
	Total	36	
7. Evaluation of teaching-learning processes	programme "Educational Treatment of Diversity"	6	9,33
	other programme	19	19,05
	no information about programme	11	22,55
	Total	36	
8. Application of principles oriented to the model of the European space of higher education	programme "Educational Treatment of Diversity"	6	14,08
	other programme	19	19,11
	no information about programme	11	19,86
	Total	36	
9. Didactic innovations	programme "Educational Treatment of Diversity"	6	7,67
	other programme	19	18,63
	no information about programme	11	24,18
	Total	36	
10. Construction of approaches to educational	programme "Educational Treatment of Diversity"	6	15,25

research			
	other programme	19	18,97
	no information about programme	11	19,45
	Total	36	
11. The challenges of the information and knowledge society	programme "Educational Treatment of Diversity"	6	18,08
	other programme	19	17,42
	no information about programme	10	19,05
	Total	35	

Table 7
Test Statistics(a,b)

	1. Acquisition of professional identity	2. Choise and organisation of scientific content	3. Language competencies	4. Tutorial competency	5. Development of methodological strategies	6. Design and implementation of didactic materials to foster students	7. Evaluation of teaching-learning processes	8. Application of principles oriented to the model of the European space of higher education	9. Didactic innovations	10. Construction of approaches to educational research	11. The challenges of the information and knowledge society
Chi-Square	,104	1,342	4,193	1,336	1,362	5,956	6,353	1,321	9,776	,721	,171
df	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Asymp. Sig.	,949	,511	,123	,513	,506	,051	,042	,517	,008	,697	,918

a Kruskal Wallis Test
b Grouping Variable: Programme for professional training