

DEVELOPMENT OF SPECIALIZED CONTINUATION TRAININGS USING THE TOOLS OF MIXED TRAINING MODES

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ABSTRACT

External and internal circumstances forced the Faculty of Teachers Training at Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church (Károli Gáspár Református Egyetem – KRE) to revisit the faculty's training system regarding the continuation training preparing practicing pedagogues for their specializing qualification examination, and to simplify the faculty's training portfolio. Taking the characteristics and values of the content of already existing specializations in consideration, we simplified our structure to keep all important content elements and professional- or educational innovations, creating an easily understandable training system that provides a wide range of knowledge at the same time.

Carefully weighing all of the above, we found that the initial two semesters of the training (fundamentals) are best conducted through distance learning (e-learning and blended learning). In addition to listing the circumstances shaping this training, this paper also provides a review of the characteristics and faculty practice of mixed training arrangements.

INTRODUCTION

Inherent in its mission, KRE's Faculty of Teachers Training takes particular ownership of not only the basic teachers' training curricula, but also, organization of specialized trainings continuously renewing pedagogues' competences and preparing practicing teachers for their qualification exams in their chosen specializations. Based on the results of continuous internal monitoring of our specialized teachers' trainings, a peculiar dichotomy became apparent in the last period in terms of students' demands for the training.

EXTERNAL DETERMINANTS

The popularity of practicing pedagogues' specialized qualification examination can mostly be attributed to the legislation environment, i.e. the career advancement requirement system. In public education, pedagogues' specialized qualification examination is part of their career advancement system. Starting in the 90s, in addition to expectations of professional knowledge and commitment, there has been an increasing demand for a knowledge of the systemic processes of public education, the social functions of the institutional system, the administration and the lawful and efficient operation of the system. Specialized qualification examinations can be taken upon completion of a specialized continuation training organized by a higher education institute, and upon which, a diploma is awarded. Completion of this continuation training is a prerequisite of the individual ratings within pedagogues' career, of filling managerial mandates and of supervising student practices. [1].

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On the other hand, there is an increasing need in teachers for self-study to gain a deeper understanding of topics not or barely covered in the basic teachers' training. This need is particularly experienced in courses for special needs teachers, talent management- and community development curricula.

However, it cannot be denied that there are factors that generate a significant drop in the demand on the market for pedagogues' postgraduate trainings.

One of these factors is the system of government-owned institute management, which fails to provide for an earmarked budget to statutorily cover pedagogues' continuation trainings, as opposed to having to provide for such trainings on the level of institutions, merely based on leaders' decisions. Although **Section 62 (1) k) of Act CXC of 2011** on National Public Education (Public Education Act) requires pedagogues to participate in continuation trainings set forth for them and to conduct continuous self-study, this requirement is mostly met by teachers by completing shorter (characteristically 30-60 hours long) free courses, mostly financed by tenders. In many cases, awarding financial development resources for institutions is conditioned on continuation trainings for staff, as a result of which, most pedagogues meet their training requirements through their institution's commitment.

The second is the increase in the number of compulsory classes teachers should administer, and the growing shortage of teachers at the same time. Due to these circumstances, many employers do not allow absence for continuation training.

INTERNAL CHALLENGES

In addition to these nationwide limitations, the specialized continuation training organized by KRE's Faculty of Teachers Training had to face two further challenges in the past few years.

One of these challenges is a highly fragmented training structure - the faculty alone offers 9 specializations for the pedagogues' continuation training preparing for the specialized qualification examination², and other faculties on the same university also offer pedagogues' specialized examination trainings (Faculty of Law³; Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences⁴). This portfolio is complemented by further specializations: as of 31 July 2020, due to the reorganization of the national higher education, John von Neumann University's Faculty of Teachers' Training has severed from the parent institute and merged into the organization of Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church. From the training portfolio of Neumann János University, 5 pedagogues' qualification examination trainings⁵ ended up in the portfolio of KRE Teachers Training Faculty.

The other challenge is that the Synod of the Hungarian Reformed Church, i.e. the operator of the institute has adopted the resolution No. Zs.46/2019.11.20. conditioning the appointment to a director position of reformed public education institutes on a qualification obtained in a protestant public education manager training, within the framework of a specialized

² Organization of School Leisure Programs; Preventive and Corrective (Special Needs) Pedagogical Psychology; Talent Management and Talent Development; School Education and Social Psychology; Theory and Practice of Preservation and Development of Mental and Physical Health at School; Family- and Child Protection; Subject-pedagogical Issues in School Practice; Student Teacher Practice Supervisor - Kindergarten Teacher; Student Teacher Practice Supervisor- Elementary School Teacher

³ Specialized continuation training preparing for the public education legal manager pedagogue qualification

⁴ Mentor specialization; Bibliotherapy specialization

⁵ Traditions; Museum Pedagogy; Language- and Speech Developer; Drama-based Pedagogy; development- and differentiating specializations

qualification examination. Based on the operator's provisions, this training is to be organized by the Károli Gáspár University.

CHANGING THE COURSE CONTENT

These reasons together have led to the review of the system of continuation trainings preparing for practicing pedagogues' specialized qualification examination and the provision of a simplified training portfolio. Taking the characteristics and values of the content of the already existing specializations in consideration, we simplified our structure to keep all important content elements and professional- or educational innovations, and at the same time creating an easily understandable training system that provides a wide range of knowledge. To this end, following a careful preparation, the Faculty has published five specializations in total for the academic year 2021/2022 ⁶, out of which, two is still overlapping, with a modular branching curriculum to cover the differences of sub-specializations (Student Teacher Practice Supervisor specializations for kindergarten teachers and for elementary school teachers).

Upon completion of the content amendments, the training's organizational circumstances were also revisited. Until this time, training sessions took place five times in each semester, on Saturdays, at the Nagykovács campus of the Faculty, from 09:00 AM to 08:00 PM. In changing the training structure, we considered the following factors:

- instructors' and training organizers' experiences gained during classroom sessions;
- analyzing the theory of e-learning and blended learning applied in higher education and the corresponding experiences so far;
- reduction of the number of travels for students (time- and cost effectiveness);
- maintaining classroom sessions for contents necessitating personal presence and interaction.

CHANGES OF TRAINING ARRANGEMENTS

Given that the target audience of such trainings consists of graduates and practicing teachers, there is reason to assume that their learning methodology knowledge, self-developing learning management and motivation are stronger than that of the average student population, so introduction of this new system entails a lower professional risk than introducing innovative learning arrangements for full-time students.

During the development, we have taken into account that the desire for adult continuation education or a career change has created a new clientele with new demands for educational institutions. Our experience also shows that students participating in our teacher training courses fit learning, work and leisure in their lives; their needs and learning habits that are different from those of full-time students. Widening learning opportunities must align with the consideration of their individual expectations and aspirations. Motivation can be enhanced through adequate changes in attitudes and approaches, along with teaching and learning methods and tools, so that learning can become a joyful and fruitful activity. In the new learning culture, the role of instructors and teachers will change significantly [2].

Taking all this into account, we have found that distance learning (e-learning and blended learning) is primarily justified in the first two semesters of general training. The specialized courses in the 3rd and 4th semesters are only effective with a smaller number of participants and with a training content that requires more personal involvement and experience sharing, mainly through interactive training methods.

⁶ Student Teacher Practice Supervisor for Kindergarten Teachers; Student Teacher Practice Supervisor for Elementary School Teachers; Talent Management- and Development; Special Needs- and Differentiating Pedagogy; Protestant Public Education Manager

METHODS OF WORK

The main task of the the initial stages of the development was to clearly define the types of training that could be considered while changing the training arrangements. Based on the professional discourse and our own practices of training organization and teaching/training, we aimed to have a *mixed training organization* keeping the personal and community-like nature of the courses, and at the same time, managing teachers' and students' resources efficiently. We plan and hope that this system will give rise to the positive elements of online education without losing direct student-student and student-teacher relations. Blended learning combines online delivery of educational content and the best features of classroom interaction and live training sessions in a way to personalize learning without alienating from the student community and to leverage the synergies of peer learning [3].

In this blended learning, we have identified the following forms of knowledge acquisition:

Classroom sessions: classes held in person, at the Faculty campuses.

E-sessions: a lecture with simultaneous presence of students and teacher, delivered in virtual space on a digital platform, also known as a "virtual classroom". This method allows teachers and students to participate in the training from different locations. The topics covered are similar to those of a live classroom session, provided they are not too complex or controversial [4].

E-learning: a form of training accessible via a computer network, which is not affected by geographical- or temporal limitations. It organizes the learning process by providing efficient and optimal knowledge transfer and learning methods. It integrates the learning material and learning resources, the teacher-student communication and a computer-based interactive teaching software into a single framework accessible to students[5]. This training method is supported by tutors' assistance. A tutor is allocated to each subject, who will monitor the students' progress throughout the course, supporting students' effective preparation for the exercises and examinations. Tutoring is conducted in an organized form to meet the needs of the students.

Blended learning: e-learning elements complemented by sessions with personal, face-to-face presence, with group- or individual discussions, and traditional forms of adult learning built on teacher-student encounters [6]. Professional discourse estimates the efficiency and quality of blended learning as twice as good as traditional teaching methods, from both learner's and the teacher's perspective. Experience shows that the number of drop-outs is reduced when blended learning is used, and that students' grades also improve. Blending of online and traditional activities proves to be much more effective than online only instruction [7].

Since, in addition to traditional classroom sessions, both tutors and students have gained extensive experience with e-sessions during the Covid-19 emergency, we placed the focus of our development on the last two types of training (e-learning, blended learning).

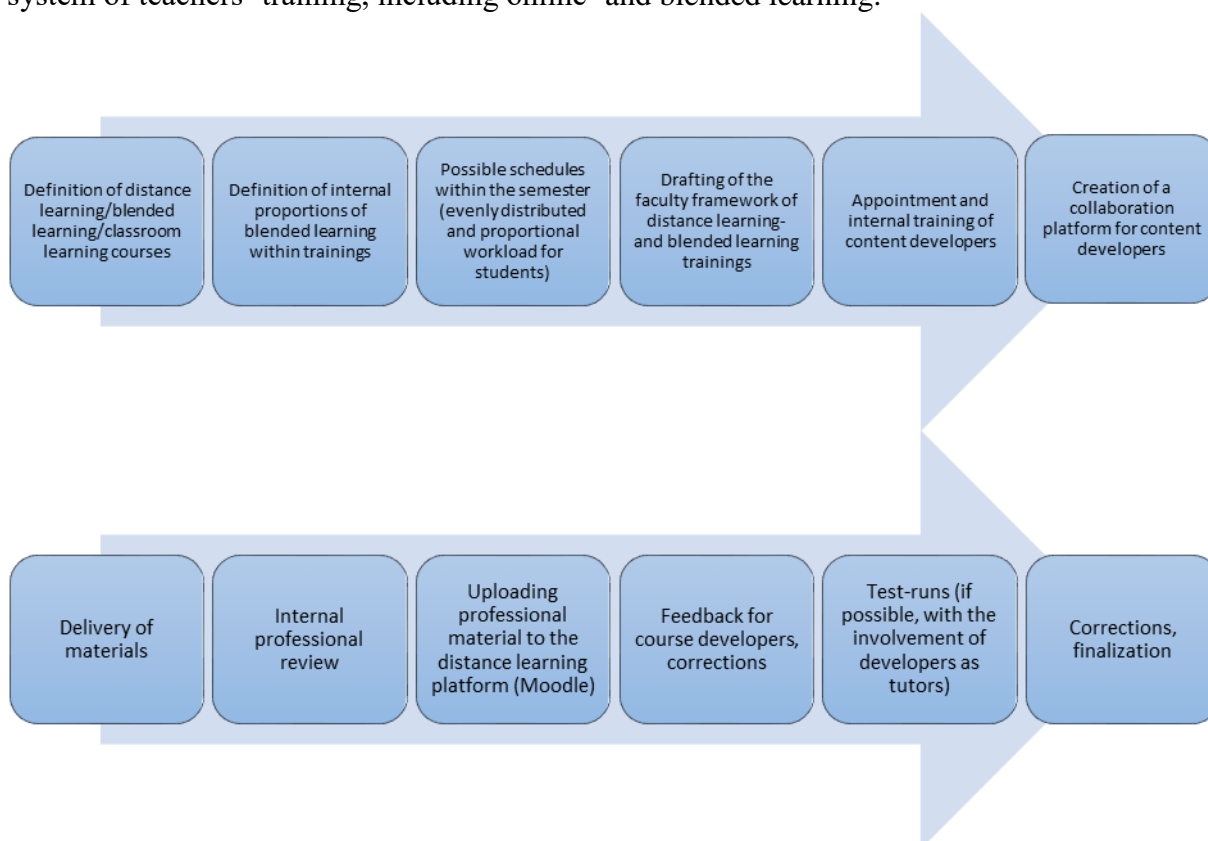
Blended learning can take several forms in terms of timetables (see Figure 1).

1	C	E	
2	C		E
3	C	E	C
4	E	C	
5	E		C
6	E	C	E

1. Figure 1: Types of blended learning broken down by classroom- and e-learning sessions

Considering the possibility to schedule classroom sessions, our training offered content developers the options of models 1, 3 and 5. Thus, looking at the learning material of the first two semesters as a single unit, our curriculum is based on the theory of rotation model of learning[8], wherein students acquire knowledge using different learning modes. The rotation of learning modes follows a predefined sequence within the training.

On this basis, the faculty management and the specialization management have set a timeline for the restructuring of the training as shown in Figure 2. As a professional partner and the pedagogical-professional service provider of the Reformed public education network, the Reformed Pedagogical Institute was also involved in the development of the courses. Their involvement was primarily justified by their considerable experience and familiarity with the system of teachers' training, including online- and blended learning.



2. *Figure 2 Timeline for the development of specialized continuation training preparing for practicing pedagogues' specialized qualification examination*

SUBJECT STRUCTURE

In the session matrix of the first two semesters of the specialized continuation training preparing for pedagogues' specialized rating examination, the training modes are defined as shown in Table 1. This distribution is not final yet, and may be subject to partial modification in the light of the experiences of the implementation phase.

1. *Courses and forms of training in semesters I-II*

Subject	Training mode
Administration and Law	E-session
Educational Administration	E-session
Organizational Development, Management Theory, School Marketing	E-session
Institutional Conflict Handling	Classroom session
Measurement and Evaluation in Education, Measurement Methodology, Measuring the Efficiency of Teaching	E-learning
Alternatives and Innovations in Public Education Institutes	E-learning
Teachers' Career Advancement and Appraisal System	E-learning
Case Discussions between Institute and Pedagogue	Blended
Teachers' roles, Teachers' Ethics	E-learning
Teacher' Mental Health	Classroom session
Introduction to Reading the Bible	Classroom session
The System of Church-run Institutes	E-learning
Theory and Practice of Talent Management, Case Study	Blended
Integration and Segregation, Multicultural Education	E-learning
Romology (Romani students in Hungarian public education)	E-learning
Fundamentals of Compensatory Pedagogy and Differentiated Instruction	Classroom session
Case Study and Discussion (Differentiation)	Blended
Family and Child Protection	Classroom session
Art and Education	
Drama-based Pedagogy	
<i>Or any other optional subject</i>	

TRAINING ORGANIZATION

Based on the above, students' training obligations can be fulfilled by participation in 2 classroom sessions and 1 e-session per semester, while additional units can be completed independently.

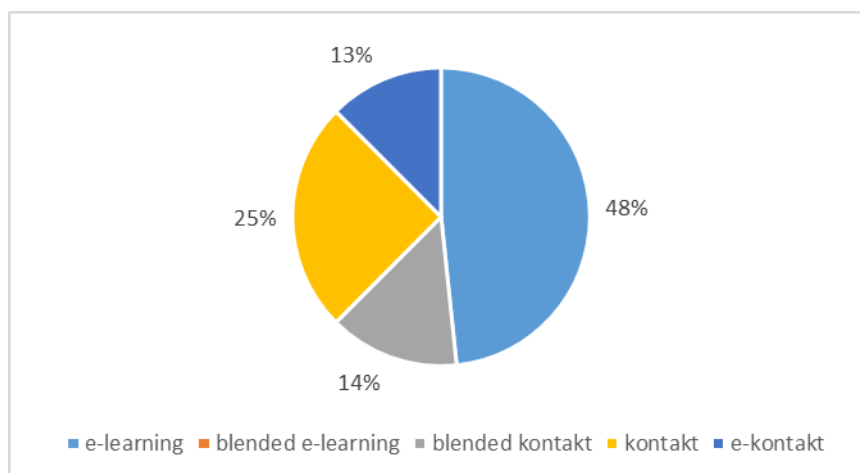


Figure 3. Proportion of training modes in semesters I-II of the specialized continuation training for pedagogues' specializing qualification

Upon establishment of the framework, the scope of professional documents to be produced for each training mode was defined. These are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Mandatory documents to be produced for each training mode

Training mode	Documents to be prepared
Classroom session	Subject description Course description
E-session	Subject description Description of communication Digital platform used
Blended	Subject description Course description student handbook*
E-learning	Subject description Course description Student Handbook

*= If the blended training starts with a classroom session block, it's optional, otherwise compulsory

To support developers' document creation, the Specialization Owner has created templates. Of these templates, this paper highlights the key structural elements of the Course Description and the Student Handbook.

Structure of the Course Description:

1. Objective
2. Platform
3. Competences to be developed during the course
4. Student activities required for the course
5. Output requirements
6. Credit value
7. Topics and timeline
8. Proposed course timeline (weekly breakdown)

9. Required reading (only materials available on the Internet or through the distance learning platform)
10. Recommended reading

Chapter structure of the Student Handbook:

1. Objective
2. By thematic blocks
 - 2.1. Detailed description of student activities
 - 2.2. Self-tests
 - 2.3. Required and recommended reading for the thematic block
3. Description of the end-of-course test
4. Description of tutorial assistance

Based on the above, the documents of our pilot program were prepared and internally reviewed by experts from the Reformed Pedagogical Institute and the Károli Gáspár University.

CONCLUSIONS

In the recent past, we have seen that the difficulties of a pandemic can also become opportunities. With our development, we tried to shape the experience of compulsory distance learning into a renewal.

We will be able to report on the impact of the development and possible areas for further improvements (changing the training proportions, expanding e-learning and blended forms of training within the framework the specialized qualification or possibly other training courses, etc.) after the second semester of the academic year 2021/2022.

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