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The Reflection That Connects Us with Ourselves, with the Present, and with our Future Perspectives²

Abstract.

The Hungarians' history is replete with painful episodes; as a consequence, a certain pessimistic outlook has been embedded into the Hungarian culture. The university is home now to students – future teachers of religion, future pastors – whose parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents lived and worked under the oppressive regime and who (also) for this reason approach the past in a rather negative way. They lived for too long in silent despair, without joy, without sufficient food, in fear of informers who would anonymously give out anybody to the “authorities” in hope of personal advantages and rewards. This generation will probably have a hard time believing that those horrible times can never return. This period is also marked by the fact that these people, in most cases, had mind-numbing, treadmill-like, soul-crushing jobs. In these circumstances, nothing was prompting them to improve their performance, and they sooner or later resigned themselves to only meet the minimal expectations. They were not concerned with the future because they did not hope that with a more purposeful attitude, with more efficient work their lot could be improved. On the other hand, their attitude towards the present had become more and more pessimistic. “Why even try if my life is controlled by forces on which I have no influence whatsoever?”

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² This article was subsidized by the Committee of National Remembrance.

This young generation of teachers/pastors has still heard too often the stories of the painful past and were in many cases eyewitnesses to their parents' and grandparents' daily struggles or saw them surrender their future goals and become disillusioned with the future.

During their training as teachers, the victim experience and pessimistic view-point (unconsciously) inherited from their forefathers quite often show up in the students' decisions, in their reactions to certain professional or life situations, in their conflict management and coping methods.

In this paper, we will first show the ideal attitude towards the past, the present, and the future, based on the theory presented by Philip Zimbardo and John Boyd,³ which leads to a much more balanced and happy life for individuals as well as at the level of nations.

Then we will outline the reflection phase model based on the new insights, with the help of which, in our opinion, the attitude of the students at the Faculty of Reformed Theology towards the past, present, and future can be shaped in a positive direction.

Keywords: teacher training, mindful, future-oriented perspective, progress towards the core, development of the ideal.

Introduction

The Hungarians' history is replete with painful episodes. (Today, most (Transylvanian) Hungarians consider the Trianon Peace Treaty signed in 1920 to be the most painful moment of their history.) According to social psychology studies, brooding over the past can have an impact on the world view of entire nations; the tragedies of the past have caused a certain victim experience and a pessimistic outlook to be embedded into the Hungarian culture.⁴ It is very difficult to change the mentality based on the traumas of the past, passed down through generations; change is most feasible perhaps at the

³ See: ZIMBARDO, Philip – BOYD, John (2012): *Időparadoxon*. Budapest, HVG Books.

⁴ <http://teszt.maszol.ro/kulfold/22028-felmeres-a-vilag-egyik-legboldogtalanabb-nemzete-a-magyar> (last accessed: 03.11.2020).

local level since micro-communities – family, congregation, school – also play an important role in determining what and how is passed down to the younger generation regarding the history of the nation(al minority).⁵

In the education of future religion teachers, we consider it is important for the students to get acquainted with and practise such methods and techniques that, if they apply them, can prevent the intensification of the inherited self-pity or, in certain cases, it can help override it. In most cases (but luckily not in all!), our current students have seen and witnessed in their parents and grandparents the prevalence of the attitude that whatever they tried in the past, it usually ended in failure, in defeat. It is not a coincidence that the feeling of powerlessness, of futility seems to be taking hold in many of them; they are characterized by loss of purpose, and they are seldom willing to make an effort to improve their lot.

Changing the pessimistic attitude towards the past, towards events in the past is necessary for future religion teachers and pastors because, on the one hand, recognizing past grievances and fears and preventing them from guiding and influencing their attitudes towards the present as well as the future can have several positive effects on their professional and personal lives. On the other hand, it is important for future helping professionals to develop a much more mindful and future-oriented perspective because, as educators of the next generations, the role model they represent makes a huge difference. (The attitude towards the past of the Romanian churches and denominations as well as a comparison of the past perspectives of the individual denominations has already been explored and analysed within the *Healing of Memories* project⁶ – our faculty also

⁵ On this subject, see: LUKÁCS, Olga (2020): Az erdélyi magyar egyházak kisebbségi sorsból adódó összefogása az 1918-at követő korszakban, mint történelmi megbékélési forma. In: *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai, Theologia Reformata Transylvanica* 2020/1; FAZAKAS, Sándor (2006): *Emlékezés és megbékélés. A múlttal való szembesülés egyházi és teológiai kritériumai*. Budapest; KLEIN, Cf. Christoph (2003): *Bosszú helyett megbékélés. A megbékélés kultúrájának teológiai alapvetése*. Budapest; Keresztység és nemzeti egység a Kárpát-medencében. A balatonszárszói népfőiskolai konferencián elhangzott előadások 2002. július 22–28, Budapest; GESZTELYI, Tamás (1991): *Egyházak és vallások a mai Magyarországon*. Budapest.

⁶ The *Healing of Memories* project was preceded by an interconfessional and interdisciplinary study and consultation. The study compared the historical perspectives of the churches, denominations, and cultures in Romania. The results of the study are summarized in the following publications:

actively participated in this project –; therefore, in this paper, we focus on the possibilities of the individual.)

In our paper, we summarize the theory on the time perspective of the world-renowned Philip Zimbardo, psychology professor at Stanford University, and we highlight the importance of developing the ideal, balanced time perspective for a healthy self-esteem and a much more fulfilled, successful, happy personal and professional life of future teachers.

Next we will get acquainted with a professional learning method, a process model of the reflection on experiences in which the aim is to “progress towards the core”, but we do not wish to achieve this through a deep analysis of the past experiences of the students; instead, the model provides clues to expressly deal with the present and to concentrate on the future, on the development of the ideal, desired situation and behaviour.

The Importance of Identifying the Time Perspective for Successful Decision Making

Our lives consist of a series of decisions. Some struggle more, some less before making a decision. Teachers are frequently required to make decisions in the course of their professional activity. Sutcliffe and Whitfield⁷ divide the decisions to be made by teachers in two categories: not immediate, longer-term, so-called reflective decisions and

BRANDES, Dieter (2005): Healing of Memories. Eine Aufgabe christlicher Kirchen in Europa. *epd-Dokumentation* 40. 16–25.

LUKÁCS, Olga (2008): Das Versöhnungsprojekt „Healing of Memories“ in Rumänien und die Beziehungen zwischen der Konfessionen aus Siebenbürgen in den 16-17. Jahrhunderten. In: Lakkis, Stephen – Höschele, Stefan – Schardien, Stefanie (eds.): *Ökumene der Zukunft. Hermeneutische Perspektiven und die Suche nach Identität*. Frankfurt am Main, Otto Lembeck. 200–218.

LUKÁCS, Olga (2007): Healing of Memories in Romania. A Protestant Approach to Church. In: BRANDES, Dieter (ed.): *Healing of Memories in Europe. A Study of Reconciliation between Churches, Cultures and Religion*. Leipzig, Evangelische Verlagsanstalt. 86–101.

LUKÁCS, Olga (2020): Az erdélyi egyházak ezeréves együttélésének szinopszisa. L’Harmattan, Budapest.

⁷ FALUS, Iván (ed.) (1998): *Didaktika – Elméletialapok a tanítástanuláshoz*. Budapest, Tankönyvkiadó.

immediate, on-the-spot decisions. In the case of a favourable outcome of our decisions, we feel joy and satisfaction, while if the outcome does not meet our expectations, we can experience remorse and failure. According to Philip Zimbardo,⁸ the key driver of our decisions is our so-called subjective time perspective. These points of view determine our thoughts, our feelings, our actions, and the way in which we assign meaning to events in our lives.⁹ An inadequate sense of time can distort all these and can lead to unsuccessful decisions in various aspects of our lives. This is why it is important to know our own time, be aware of it, and actively shape it.

In his very simple but all the more interesting theory, Philip Zimbardo starts from the idea that time is relative – it has both an objective and a subjective angle.¹⁰ The objective time means the actual passing of time, while the subjective aspect of time perception is the level of the personal experience, influenced by our emotions and our current life situation. Therefore, our attitude towards the past can be positive or negative. When people with past-positive thinking speak about their lives, they highlight primarily the beautiful experiences, joyful events, and often even in case of disappointments they mention their gratitude for being able to take something with them or learn something from that event. On the contrary, past-negative people will mostly mention their failures, their losses, and their lows. In the same way, our attitude towards the present can be of two kinds. Present-hedonistic people experience the joys of the moment, what the “here and now” offers (being careful not to let this essentially positive attitude turn into the opposite), while the present-fatalist attitude is mainly along the lines of “I never succeed in anything, it’s not even worth trying.” Future-oriented people are characterized by setting specific goals and working assiduously towards those goals, while transcendentalists are preparing for their reward in the after-life or for their next life.¹¹

⁸ Zimbardo – Boyd 2012, 15.

⁹ Edith Eva Eger, of Hungarian origin, who survived the Auschwitz concentration camp and then became a psychologist in the United States, provides a wonderful example that even under the most inhuman conditions it is worth looking for things to grasp at and that one can break out from the bondage of fatalism caused by a painful past. The essence of Edith’s decision therapy: to defeat our self-limiting convictions. The past cannot be changed, but everyone decides for themselves how to react to the past. Her book, published in Hungarian language: EGER, Edith Eva (2017): *A döntés*. Budapest, Libri Kiadó.

¹⁰ Zimbardo – Boyd 2012, 135.

¹¹ Op. cit. 338–340.

In the education of future religion teachers, we consider it important to develop a healthy self-esteem in the trainees, and we think that this also requires the past to provide them with roots, to enable them to live the joy of the moment and to have ideas, plans, goals for the future (but without them living in the future), that is, a strong past-positive, a moderate present-hedonistic, and a moderate future-oriented and transcendentalist perspective is what helps them the most in their private and professional lives.

Zimbardo and Boyd developed a questionnaire to assess time perspectives.¹² Individual sections of the questionnaire map the attitudes related to time; this way it identifies whether the person mulls more frequently over the past, the present, or the future and whether the feelings connected to the dominant timeline are rather negative or positive. By filling out the questionnaire, teacher trainees can assess independently the dominant time perspective of their lives, and by knowing this they can efficiently improve their outlook.

*Personal Development towards
a Mindful and Future-Oriented Outlook*

A study on the vision of Hungarian youth finds that it is mainly characterized by insecurity, defeatism, and low propensity for risk-taking.¹³ According to another study, despite their young age, university students have a pessimistic view of the future, most of them are not expecting economic growth in the future, and they have completely lost confidence in the traditional establishment (the leaders and the media). In view of this, it is an interesting correlation that one of their important goals is *for themselves to exert a positive influence on the community and society*¹⁴ (as their leaders will not do that for them).

¹² Op. cit. 136–153.

¹³ https://hvg.hu/itthon/20130529_Elszomorito_kutatas_zavaros_ellentmondaso (last accessed: 17.11.2020)

¹⁴ SZABÓ, Elvira: *Radikálisan új célok és bizalomvesztés, avagy mi van az Y és Z generációfejében.* Available at: https://lelkizona.blog.hu/2019/09/06/radikalis_uj_celok_es_bizalomvesztes_a_mai_fiatal_generaciok_a_szuleikhez_kepest (last accessed: 03.11.2020).

Valér Veres finds in his study¹⁵ that the Hungarian youth in the Carpathian Basin paint a more negative image of the country and the society as a whole than of the evolution of their personal situation. They see the future development of their economic and social status, and especially of their personal situation, as a very positive one.

In the education and training of the young generation, an excellent starting point can be the generational characteristic that they have a much higher social responsibility than the members of earlier generations; therefore, they view self-awareness, self-education, and self-development (besides perceiving their benefit regarding their personal and professional life) as a “social duty” since through their self-development, through the development of their personality they can have a positive influence on their community and on the society at large.¹⁶

*Personal Development Exercises for Raising Awareness of
and Creating the Ideal Time Perspective*

In our Reformed teacher training institution, certain disciplines (vocational development, Christian psychopedagogy, etc.) provide an opportunity for the personal development of the students as well. Without the intention of being exhaustive and serving illustrative purposes only, we provide here a number of personal development exercises which can (also) be used to create the ideal time perspective.

According to Alfred Adler,¹⁷ founder of the school of individual psychology, the first memory a person recalls opens a window onto their entire life. These “introductory” episodes are also revealing with regard to time perspective. Not the objective veracity of the memory but rather the content it carries for the individual is the most important – namely because these influence our thoughts, feelings, and actions, and thereby they retroact on the remembrance of the past. A skewed time perspective can quickly get us into a vicious circle and the inadequate behaviour can become permanent.

¹⁵ VERES, Valér (2014): A kárpát-medencei magyar fiatalok életeseeményei, társadalmi-gazdasági helyzete és közérzete. In: *Erdélyi Társadalom* 2, 2. Available at: https://erdelyitarsadalom.adatbank.transindex.ro/pdfdok/et4_2k4_2_tanulmany_1_2.pdf.

¹⁶ Blumenfeld, Remy: Gen Z at Work. Available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/remyblumenfeld/2019/10/15/gen-z-at-work8-reasons-to-be-afraid/?sh=2f72c94d33a9> (last accessed: 11.05.2020).

¹⁷ ADLER, Alfred (1997): *Emberismeret: Gyakorlati individuálpszichológia*. Budapest, Gönczöl.

We cannot change the past, but we can change our attitude towards it. We can work on this with a very simple “Who am I?” exercise.

Who Am I?

For an active reconstruction of your past, characterize your past self with twenty attributes and then select three life events, but consciously choose events to which negative feelings – anger, fear, guilt, abjection – are attached. Look for a positive lesson related to each event and then think about how you can use these efficiently in the future. In the following two weeks – or possibly even longer – compile a daily gratitude list, that is, write a list of the positive events at the end of each day. After two weeks, repeat the “Who am I?” exercise and then compare it with the previous list of twenty attributes. Notice whether bringing awareness to and thinking through the positive things has changed your outlook and the way you see yourself in your everyday life.¹⁸

Life Path Analysis

The point of the exercise is to identify the positive persons in your past (family members, teachers, mentors, pastor).

Who are the persons who influenced your life, your profession (your career choice)? Mark them on the timeline of your life!

Think for a minute how could you thank them for what you have received from them?

Value Clarification

Where do your values come from? From whom have you learned what to consider important, good, or bad in life? Draw up a list and set an order of importance among the persons on the list. Write “1” next to the most important source, “2” next to the second most important, and so on.

To whom are you most thankful?

Think for a minute how could you thank them for what you have received from them?

¹⁸ Zimbardo– Boyd 2012, 309–310.

I decided that until the latest I will thank what he/she has given me by

Bringing Awareness to and Formulating Future Goals

State the main goal in your life!

The most important goal in my life is:

The achievement of this main goal is related to the following secondary goals: goal no. 1, goal no. 2, goal no. 3, goal no. 4, goal no. 5, etc.

What do I have to do to achieve these goals?

(To achieve goal no. 1, to achieve goal no. 2, to achieve goal no. 3, to achieve goal no. 4, to achieve goal no. 5, etc.)

Identifying Strengths and Weaknesses

Draw up a list of your strengths and weaknesses! Think about how you could turn your weaknesses into strengths.

Based on Daniel Ofman's model,¹⁹ identify your core qualities and notice what strengths are hiding behind your pitfalls.

Achieving the "Here and Now" State of Being in Practice

The notion of here and now became known in the Hungarian language area from the writings of Kabat-Zinn,²⁰ who imagined the "mindful" state as active presence in the "here and now" situation. The person observes with alert consciousness and then releases stimuli from the outside world and from the mind. Learning the method helps

¹⁹ OFMAN, Daniel: *Ofman Core Quality Quadrant*. Available at: <https://www.toolshero.com/communication-skills/core-quality-quadrant/>.

²⁰ Books about mindfulness available in Hungarian language:

KABAT-ZINN, Jon (2015): *Bárhova méz, ott vagy*. Ursus Libris.

SZONDY, Máté (2012): *Megélni a pillanatot. Mindfulness, a tudatos jelenlét pszichológiája*. Budapest, Kulcslyuk.

TEASDALE, J. – WILLIAMS, M. – SEGAL, Z. (2016): *Tudatosjelenlét a gyakorlatban*. Budapest, Kulcslyuk.

to prevent images from the past or future to distract us from the presence: while practising the here and now, the person observes the thoughts, feelings, and other contents that come up but does not pursue them, only labels them and then returns to the present. S/he contemplates the dynamically changing contents of thought and feeling without assigning more importance to one than to the other. Through constant practice, the person will acquire an internal resource, a coping method that can be accessed any time in the everyday life, be it a decision-making or a conflict situation. It helps us stay clear of extremes, control our feelings and emotions as well as improve our ability to concentrate.

From the perspective of the spiritual development of future religion teachers, it is also important to learn the “techniques” needed for the creation of the here and now state of being because during prayer we can get in touch with our true selves and with God only if we “tune out” the outside world. Mindfulness is emphasized, therefore, during prayer.²¹ The effectively lived human life is happening in the presentness, in the reality of here and now. And in the present we experience constant encounters with ourselves, with the other person, and with God. Mindfulness is meant to describe that state of being in which we try to grasp with our attention the situation taking place in the given moment, when we are not recalling events from the past and we are not planning our future. Memories remain from the past, and the future has not yet come. Living in reality means living in the present.

In order for the teacher trainees to find their way, they must pay more attention to the present moment, must live, feel, grow, and change in their own time. By practising mindfulness, by experiencing the present moment, they are handed a great opportunity: the more they succeed to use the present actively, the more deliberate their decisions and actions will be.

The Flow Experience

The flow experience, described by Csíkszentmihályi,²² meaning the total immersion in various activities, can also be linked to mindfulness. Time perception modifies in the flow state, and the person becomes almost oblivious of time, like a child at play. In the

²¹ See: JÁLICS, Ferenc SJ (2014): *Szemlélődő lelkigyakorlat*. Jezsuitakönyvek.

²² CSÍKSZENTMIHÁLYI, Mihály (1997): *Flow: Az áramlat. A tökéletesélménypszichológiája*. Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó.

flow state, we do not focus primarily on the end result of the activity but rather enjoy the process itself that leads to the result. The experience is so liberating that the person forgets even to worry about the effectiveness of the outcome; therefore, the flow is helpful in the most creative activities.

Therefore, besides practising mindfulness, in the training of future religion teachers, we consider it important to introduce structured exercises that strengthen in the students the past-positive feeling that gives them roots. As a central element of self-acceptance, the past – bridging time and space – connects the person to themselves while conveying the sense of continuity of life (it enables the person to stay in contact with their family, their traditions, and their cultural heritage). With the help of the future perspective, students can envisage a much more hopeful, optimistic, and powerful future for themselves.

Besides the structured exercises, we attach great importance in the education of religion teacher trainees to the so-called core reflection phase model, by the practice of which a much deeper reflection can be achieved, drawing on the present situation and concentrating on the ideal future situation, so that the (negative) events of the past are only touched upon in order to bring awareness to essential elements that are relevant for the reflection.

*Core Reflection – Focusing on the Strengths, on the Ideals
Instead of the Negative Occurrences of the Past*

In order to process the successes and failures experienced during teacher training and in the first years of their career while practising their profession and to reflect on them, an experienced instructor, a tutor is by all means necessary to guide the reflection process and give support regarding the content of the reflection. This is so because during the practice the experience to reflect on may refer to the environment (what has the student encountered?), the behaviour (what has he done?), the competences (what is the student competent in?), beliefs, ideas (pedagogical convictions), but much deeper levels can also be subject to reflection, such as the calling (Who am I in my work?), the mission (What inspires me?), or the level of religious spirituality (What is my relationship with God like? What image of God lives within me?).²³

²³ GORBAI, Gabriella (2013): A mélyreflexió alkalmazási lehetőségei a vallástanárjelöltek tevékenységének optimalizálásában. Cluj-Napoca, Egyetemi Műhely Kiadó. 83.

In the case of future religion teachers, we have considered it important to allow for the reflection of the specific religious spirituality. Therefore, we have inserted an internal layer into the onion model of the reflection content, which, placed with optimal efficiency over the layers of professional calling and mission, in our opinion, provides the addition that religion teachers need for a professional and spiritual fulfilment. We defined this layer as the layer of religious spirituality, which overlays the innermost layer of the onion model, the mission layer, and further enriches the content of the religion teacher's reflection. Ideally (but not in every case!), the work of the religion teacher has spiritual dimensions as well: their mission originates from God and the aim of their work is the "introduction of the Gospel and of God's actions towards the redemption of the sinful humankind".²⁴

At the level of religious spirituality, trainees can reflect on questions that preoccupy them, such as: What is my relationship with God like? What image of God lives within me?²⁵

By building into the study curriculum the reflective processing of the students' own experiences (touching on the inner layers of the personality as well), it becomes possible for the students to become aware of the role of their own personalities in their professional activity. Thereby we help them to be open to requesting supervisory assistance in case of difficulties and blockages in the course of their careers, to getting to know themselves more deeply, to increasing their professional consciousness, and to development and positive change.

Core Reflection as a Possibility for Growth

When teachers and instructors first hear about core reflection – which considers the connection to the deeper layers of the professional's *person* to be the cornerstone of professional efficiency and effectiveness –, they are often anxious about its therapeutic tinge. Their main reason for concern is that most people associate "digging deeper" with the analysis of shocking situations and problems.

²⁴ SZABO, Lajos: *Teológiaés praxis*. Available at: <http://nyitotttegyetem.phil-inst.hu/teol/szabo.htm> (last accessed: 12.11.2009).

²⁵ Gorbai 2013, 83.

One of the fundamental principles of positive psychology, which provides the basis for core reflection, is that focusing on the problems, the “there is an illness that needs to be brought under control” mentality of traditional psychology is not at all efficient with respect to human growth.²⁶ Through the method of core reflection, we become acquainted with a professional learning method, the aim of which is indeed to “go deeper” but not focusing on negative emotions (like negative feelings associated with childhood trauma). It is a fact that in the course of core reflection we often inevitably touch the sphere behind the professional area. Such core qualities as self-confidence, courage, purposefulness, etc. play a role not only in the professional activity of the teacher but also in their private lives. The inhibitory, limiting factors like “I am not important enough” or “I am sure they will not like me” are very likely to limit more than their ability to teach. In other words, it is impossible to draw a sharp line to separate essential professional traits and personal biographical aspects.

In the course of practising core reflection, instructors are frequently anxious that looking behind professional issues could cause trouble; therefore, they strictly separate the students’ personal and professional personas, and in the reflection process they stick exclusively to professional issues. However, by so doing, they miss the opportunity to discover the power of the levels of calling, religious spirituality, and mission in the professional development of the teacher trainees.²⁷

Korthagen’s²⁸ core reflection method is rather an alternative solution to perceive a problem situation or a crisis. A crisis can be viewed as a problematic thing, the solution of which falls into the competence of a therapist, but we can also view it (and this is the purpose of core reflection) as an opportunity for growth. If the tutor or instructor facilitating the reflection of the teacher trainees possesses some supervisory skills, they can use the method as a stimulus to help the students get in touch with their inner potentials.

Core reflection is, therefore, not psychotherapy; however, as we will see below, it builds on psychotherapy in many things. It is owing to the psychotherapist, among others, the recognition that not only people in crisis may need advice but also those persons

²⁶ See: PLÉH, Csaba (2004): A pozitív pszichológiai hagyományok Európában. In: *Iskolakultúra* 5. 57–61.

²⁷ Gorbai 2013, 85.

²⁸ KORTHAGEN, Fred –VASALOS, Angelo (2010): From Reflection to Presence and Mindfulness: 30 Years of Developments concerning the Concept of Reflection in Teacher Education. In: Lyons, N. (ed.): *Handbook of Reflection and Reflective Inquiry*. New York, Spring.

who would like to make the most of themselves, who wish to be more successful, more content in any aspect of their lives. The authors of the core reflection method *aim to achieve this goal not by processing the injuries suffered by the individual in the past but by specifically dealing with the present and concentrating on the future*²⁹ without attempting a deep analysis of past influences.

*Justification of the Use of Core Reflection for the Professional Development
of Future Religion Teachers*

Although core reflection deals with the present and focuses on the future, it is recommended to be used in the training of future religion teachers because it also provides a formal framework for the trainee to reflect on the level of religious spirituality. In the course of core reflection, the religion teacher trainee can be connected with core qualities like love (on a deeper level), sacredness, meditation, or anticipation, qualities that, in our opinion, can be localized at the level of religious spirituality.

On the other hand, we consider that the tutor–religion teacher trainee relationship in which core reflection takes place is an assisting relationship as well, wherefore we consider that all those stated by Gábor Hézsér regarding the pastoral carer–client relationship are valid for the tutor–religion teacher trainee relationship as well:

“Spirituality enables people to organize the mass of their everyday experiences into a coherent, meaningful whole. It allows an interpretation of reality that provides a frame of reference for life, and thereby it is a conserving force. The longing for a fulfilled life finds a framework. This is one of the crucial conditions for a balanced life... The helping practice always has a latent or overt spiritual dimension. This may manifest in the explicit or perceptible but unuttered questions of the assisted person. And it manifests in the spiritual habitus of the carer – since Mihály Bálint we know how significantly the carer’s personality, wherein spirituality or the lack of it is also a constituent part, influences the helping process. It is not just a phrase, it is a fact that the doctor, the carer is (one of) the best medicines.”³⁰

²⁹ KORTHAGEN, Fred –VASALOS, Angelo (2005): Levels in Reflection: Core Reflection as a Means to Enhance Professional Development. In: *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice* 11, 1.

³⁰ HÉZSER, Gábor (2008): A spiritualitásról – gondolatok nem csak protestánsoknak... In: *Studia Universitatis Babeş–Bolyai, Theologia Reformata Transylvanica* 2008/1–2. 209.

Based on our experience in the past years, it is a certainty that in the course of teaching practice, in the selection of the instructors, it is an essential point of view for the students to learn from teachers who represent role models of vocation, of commitment to the profession as well as of religious spirituality and sense of mission.

The Core Reflection Phase Model

People are generally inclined to meditate on what did not go well in their work instead of rejoicing at their successes. It is true for almost all reflection-based approaches that the experience to be reflected on usually identifies with a “problem situation”, but as a side-effect this feeds the feeling of inadequacy. On the contrary, the fundamental idea of positive psychology is that people have to harness their personal abilities, their core qualities in order to behave in an optimal manner,³¹ and thereby their actions will be more efficient on the one hand, and the fulfilment of core qualities will also fulfil the persons themselves on the other.

The representatives of positive psychology³² state that focusing on the weaknesses and deficiencies leads to a narrowing of the repertoire of possible actions of the individual, and as a result of this, through negative emotions about their experiences, people tend to move into a kind of a “tunnel thinking”, that is, they tend to think within the boundaries of a problematic framework.

This finding was the starting-point for Korthagen when he formulated the core reflection phase model.³³ The process model does not force the reflecting person to reflect exclusively on positive situations. Teacher trainees may reflect on either positive or negative experiences, the point is that the instructor will help them to get in touch with their core qualities. *The essence of core reflection is precisely that instead of the negative experiences it focuses on the successes, i.e. instead of the problematic situation, it focuses on the core qualities existing in the person as well as on the ideal situation that can be obtained due to these qualities.*³⁴ This can be a way to avoid the development and strengthening

³¹ OLÁH, Artilla (2004): Mi a pozitívuma a pozitív pszichológiának? In: *Iskolakultúra* 14, 11.

³² SELIGMAN, Martin – CSÍKSZENTMIHÁLYI, Mihály (2000): Positive Psychology: An Introduction. In: *American Psychologist* 55, 1. 5–14; FREDRICKSON, Barbara (2002): Positive Emotions. In: Snyder, C. R. – Lopez, S. J. (eds.): *Handbook of Positive Psychology*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

³³ See: Korthagen – Vasalos 2005, 9.

³⁴ Op. cit. 10.

of the past-negative time perspective in the trainees and rather to encourage them to stay in the here and now and formulate a much more positive future perspective.

Besides this, another important merit of this core reflection is that it helps teacher trainees or practising teachers to actualize their personal strengths, called *core qualities* in core reflection.

Based on his research, Martin Seligman³⁵ found that our *work* can be much more fulfilling if we are able to make it more sensible by the frequent use of our core qualities. According to him, in order to maximize our satisfaction, we should preferably use our characteristic strengths, our core qualities every day in our work. If we give meaning to our work by using our strengths, our core qualities, then not only our tasks will become more enjoyable but even routine work or a settled career can become a vocation. (The frequent “flow” experiences arising from the work performed this way will soon replace the role of material reward as the primary reason for carrying out the work.)

By moving the focus in core reflection from weaknesses to possibilities, or strengths, teacher trainees can get in touch with their core strengths, which leads to the development of the optimal operating state, the so-called flow state.³⁶

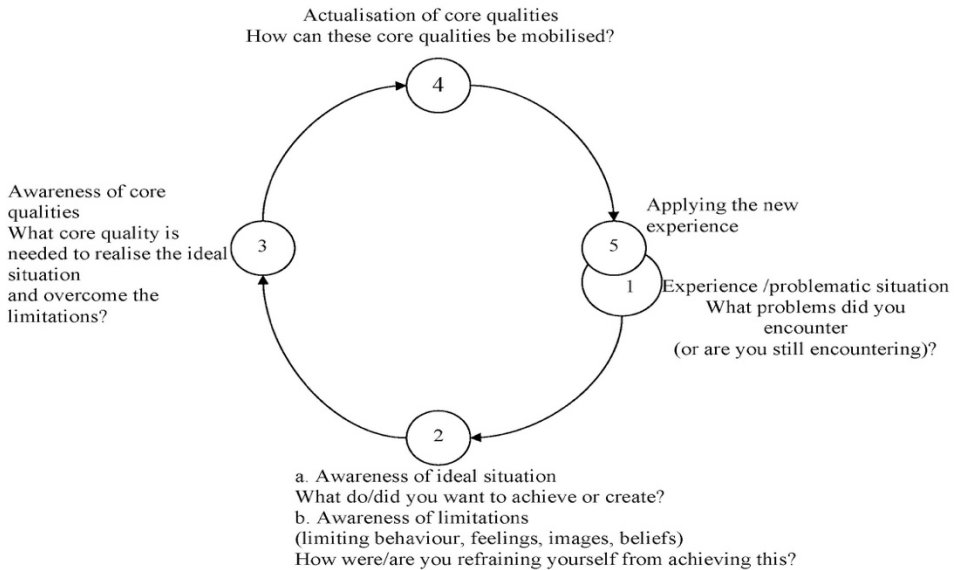
The *initial phase* of the core reflection process is identical to what usually characterizes reflective approaches: there is an experience within a concrete situation, which provides a basis for reflection. As a rule, the reflection is induced by something that constantly preoccupies the teacher’s mind. This can be dissatisfaction with a previous class or a casual event which influenced the teacher’s relationship with the pupils. Of course, the reflection model cannot force us to reflect on negative situations alone.³⁷ We can also reflect on positive experiences, and an important way to help people get in touch with their core qualities is just that: to focus on successes rather than on negative experiences. It is not necessary, therefore, to insist upon an analysis of what went wrong (retrospection into the past, recalling and reliving negative events from the past, etc.), especially if we notice that the reflection process also comprises the *anticipation*: phase four focuses on developing more successful lines of activity. This includes the fact that in the course of the reflection process the person drafts mentally an ideal situation, which the person will try to achieve in the fifth phase.

³⁵ SELIGMAN, Martin (2007): *Autentikus életöröm – A teljes élet titka*. Budapest, Laurus. 121.

³⁶ Korthagen–Vasalos 2010, 11.

³⁷ Op. cit. 58.

*The Core Reflection Phase Model*³⁸



The phase model of Core Reflection
(Korthagen, F.; Vasalos, A. 2008)

In the *second phase* of the core reflection phase model, the main goal is not the comprehensive analysis of the problematic situation, as in the case of other reflective approaches, since the essence of core reflection is the connection to the inner levels of the individual by exploring the core qualities, and the utilization of the new possibilities arising from these. Accordingly, the following questions can be of use:

- 1. What is the ideal situation that you want/wanted to create?
- 2. What are the limiting factors that prevent the achievement of the ideal situation?

The fundamental idea of core reflection that one must focus more on the ideal situation has caused a breakthrough in reflective approaches. Korthagen et al.³⁹ realized that it is not always necessary to make at first an in-depth analysis of the problematic

³⁸ KORTHAGEN –VASALOS 2005, 57.

³⁹ Op. cit. 13.

factors of a situation in order to get to the notion of the ideal situation. Reflecting on someone's ideal is a very efficient method to understand the essence of the problem that the individual has faced. If success is regarded as a situation that is close to the individual's ideal, then, instead of the problematic situations, it is more expedient to look at successes or ideals as the starting-point of the reflection process.

Based on their findings, Meijer, Korthagen, and Vasalos⁴⁰ stated that such an approach brings people closer to *positive feelings*, and this agrees with Fredrickson's empirical discovery that positive feelings promote creative problem-solving.⁴¹

“Positive feelings arise in circumstances that are not threatening, when quick decision-making is not necessary, that is, the momentary thought and action inventory of the person is not narrowed down. These positive feelings can actually prompt individuals to abandon their well-trying behavioural schemes, their automatic everyday routines, and apply new, creative and spontaneous ways of thinking and acting.”⁴²

Based on his research, Fredrickson concluded that positive feelings expand the capacity for attention and the sensitivity to details – compared to negative and even neutral feelings. And the expanded attention focus contributes to the strengthening of cognitive processes by increasing the probability of recalling available information.⁴³ This outcome must be taken into account in the learning process of teacher trainees.

Thus, in the second phase of the core reflection model, the first question refers to an ideal situation, the creation of which is the aim of the teacher, and therefore it is closely connected to the levels of identity and vocation. In the process of awareness raising, it is often revealed that the difficulty of the teacher trainee in reaching this goal is not just a problem related to the current situation, but it crops up in other situations as well. In this case, a comprehensive analysis of the problem is recommended, i.e. the *identification of the possible limiting factors*.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ MEIJER, P. C. – KORTHAGEN, F. A. J. – VASALOS, A. (2002): Supporting Presence in Teacher Education: The Connection between the Personal and Professional Aspects of Teaching. In: *Teaching & Teacher Education* 25, 2. 297–308.

⁴¹ Fredrickson 2002, 125.

⁴² Op. cit. 128.

⁴³ Op. cit. 131.

⁴⁴ Korthagen –Vasalos 2005, 58.

Generally, these factors are triggered in the teacher trainee by the specific environment (e.g. a problematic class); at the same time, the limitations that manifest themselves in a concrete situation are often found to be beliefs and ideas that also influence the individual's (professional and personal) life in general. The limiting factors can appear in many forms:

- *limiting behaviour*: e.g. fear of confrontation,
- *limiting feelings*: e.g. "I feel myself weak.",
- *limiting ideas*: e.g. "This is a disorderly class.",
- *limiting beliefs (obsessions)*: "I cannot influence what is happening within the class."⁴⁵

By becoming aware of the ideal situation and of the limiting factors, the teacher trainee may experience a kind of internal tension, a contradiction. Let us look at the teacher trainee who wishes to feel safe in the role of teacher (ideal situation: self-confident behaviour in class) but is convinced that s/he – as a teacher trainee – does not yet possess the abilities of an experienced leader (limiting belief).

At this point, it is more relevant to make the teacher trainee aware that it is up to him/her whether or not s/he lets these limiting factors influence his/her behaviour. According to Sheldon,⁴⁶ becoming aware that the choice is in their hands is the most fundamental factor in the personal and professional development of teacher trainees as this contributes to the development of personal autonomy.

Defining the tension arising while experiencing the ideal situation and the limitations is often enough to enable teacher trainees to formulate their actual issues, which can be the root of numerous other problems. Starting from the example mentioned before, the teacher trainee has become aware of the tension between the desired situation – feeling self-confident and calm in the classroom – and his/her limiting belief that this is something that only very experienced teachers can achieve. In the course of this awakening, the teacher trainee gradually realizes that the nervousness s/he feels in class, the small conflicts s/he has experienced as well as the uninspiring tasks given to the pupils are all related to the underlying tension. S/he would have liked to act with self-confidence and calm, but s/he was held back by his/her belief that the achievement of this

⁴⁵ Op. cit. 57.

⁴⁶ SHELDON, K.M.–WILLIAMS, G. –JOINER, T.(2003): *Self-Determination Theory in the Clinic: Motivating Psychical and Mental Health*. New Haven, CT, Yale University Press.87.

must be “saved for a later time”, and therefore s/he could not mobilize his/her self-confidence as a core quality.

In the next, *third phase* of the core reflection process model, the aim is to become aware of the core qualities. In this phase, teacher trainees determine what internal characteristics (core qualities) are needed to achieve the ideal situation and overstep the limitations.

The particularity of the core reflection method is that it directs the attention to raising awareness about such existing core qualities as creativity, confidence, care, courage, sensitivity, firmness, spontaneity, commitment, flexibility, empathy, compassion, love, or even spirituality and transcendence.

When applying core reflection, it often happens that the teacher trainees are able to identify their core qualities after the second phase. If this is not the case, there are a few strategies through which the tutor leading the practice can help the teacher trainees become aware of their core qualities. One such strategy is to encourage the trainee to recall relevant past experiences when the trainee was able to achieve the desired situation. For instance, the trainee who did not succeed in acting self-confidently and calmly in class can try to recall situations in which he did indeed act with self-confidence and calm. The recalled experience can be connected to a completely different environment – maybe these abilities were felt while coaching a pupil at home. Drawing inspiration from this past experience, the trainee can become aware that it does not require a great effort to appear spontaneous, self-confident, and independent. Now s/he starts to understand that s/he already possesses the core qualities needed, but, more importantly, by recalling the positive experience, s/he can relive and feel these core qualities and s/he can resolve to mobilize these qualities (again). After taking that decision, the trainee will try to find an answer to the question: how to build on the core qualities in the next class to influence his/her behaviour as a teacher.⁴⁷

This question, however, will be answered at the *fourth level* of the phase model. This phase of the core reflection model regards the realization of the core qualities, i.e. the ways in which these inner qualities can be mobilized.

The *fifth phase* of the process model consists of trying out the new experience, followed again by reflection.

⁴⁷ See: Korthagen –Vasalos 2005, 65–71.

Core reflection stresses that when someone is connected to a core quality, it is important to support the person in taking the steps towards realizing that quality. In this process, it is important to harness the core qualities hidden in the individual and to establish an effective personal behaviour. In order to achieve this goal, it is indispensable for the reflecting persons not only to perceive but to connect emotionally as well to their core qualities, to take the step that leads to deliberate decisions about using their core qualities and then to carry out those decisions. Usually this requires supervision, but with enough practice the teacher trainees and experienced teachers will be able to steer their learning process by taking into account the levels of identity, vocation, and mission.⁴⁸

This process model makes a more fundamental and deeper reflection possible compared to those in which reflection only touches the levels of behaviour, abilities, and beliefs.

The reflection on a classroom event can even lead to the reformulation of the professional identity or the mission (vocation). For instance, the teacher trainee in the example did not consider him-/herself a self-confident teacher, but this changed after the core reflection; moreover, s/he became more self-confident than before in all aspects of life. This is proof that it is impossible to draw a sharp line to separate essential professional traits and personal biographical aspects. A characteristic of the core qualities is that they have a high translational value, i.e. if students succeed in mobilizing them in connection with one situation, they will very probably be able to realize those in other areas of life, as well. Through the realization of core qualities, the person can enjoy several flow experiences, and the positive emotions brought to the surface by these will contribute to a much happier, healthier, and more satisfied life.

Conclusions

“It is a common perception that pessimism is characteristic to Hungarians, that it is part of our stereotypes about ourselves. Obviously, the stereotype is not equally valid for everyone, but the way they think about the country determines their attitude towards the nation, it may influence the individual’s mentality and behaviour, and from

⁴⁸ Korthagen –Vasalos 2005, 63.

this point of view it is not that important whether or not it has a basis in reality”, says Lilla Koltói.⁴⁹

Based on Zimbardo’s subjective time perspective, she characterized the Hungarian nation as having a past-negative, present-fatalistic attitude without future-orientation. Besides presenting the time perspectives in the study, we also highlighted the possibility that with assiduous work we can change our attitudes towards the events in our lives in order to live much more harmonious, healthier lives. If we can transform to a certain extent the unfavourable time perspective that is generally characteristic in our nation by working on our inner selves, we have already made a giant leap towards our personal development and towards a much more positive characterization of our nation.

Of course, it would be too ambitious an undertaking to promise that by learning a few methods and techniques we can open the path for individuals and nations to learn a more mindful and future-oriented outlook and that by applying these we will be able to embellish our past, to look at past events as resources that give us wings, but we believe that if these attempts are successful on the local level, global changes may follow.

According to the WHO, objective factors such as generosity or attentiveness (love?) are the underlying elements of life satisfaction. These qualities are called core qualities in core reflection, and in the model the aim of the reflection is to discover and mobilize the core qualities. Thus, these core qualities, besides fulfilling the individual and having an important role in the achievement of the flow state, can also enhance life satisfaction. The process model helping teacher trainees’ reflection sets our attitude to past events a perspective that is different from previous reflection models; instead of a detailed dissection of mostly negative past experiences, it touches on the past event only inasmuch as it provides a starting-point to allow them to live the present much more consciously and formulate more clearly their future ideals, i.e. the desired situation.

In our opinion, by the systematic application of core reflection, the ideal time perspective of the individuals – a past-positive, moderately present-hedonistic, and future-oriented perspective – can be achieved in time. “Be the change you wish to see in the world”, writes Mahatma Gandhi. We believe that changes brought about at the level of individuals can also have a positive effect on the appreciation of our nation.

⁴⁹ KOVÁCS, Rebeka: *Miért pesszimisták a magyarok? Íme a magyarázat*. Available at: <https://www.life.hu/életmod/20200414-miert-pesszimistak-a-magyarok-ime-a-magyarazat.html> (last accessed: 30.10.2020).

The translations of all non-English quotations are my own throughout the article.

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