

ACQUIRING STATUS TREATMENT TECHNIQUES BY CREATING A LESSON PLAN

Emese K. Nagy

Abstract: The Complex Instruction methodology is a pedagogical intervention that attempts to change the pupils' social class structure during group-work. These changes result in creating new roles for the teachers, as well as the pupils and increase cooperation between them. It results in the harmonious participation of the pupils in different status and improves completion of the task, i.e. the learning activities of small student groups. Our article aims to demonstrate how to prepare students for the technique of writing a lesson plan, how to achieve that they organize their lessons consciously, and how they can motivate and develop efficiently children with lower and higher capabilities. Preparation for the class is a cornerstone, whose tool was a lesson plan based on the Complex Instruction method.

Key words: Complex Instruction teaching method, treatment of status problems, preparation of students, lesson plans

Introduction

Goldhaber and Brewer (2000) found that pupils' performance show a significant correlation with the teachers' readiness and competencies. The teaching methods, techniques and their efficiency in the classroom are significantly impacted by the teacher's competences. Perkes (1967) examined already in the 1960's, how the teachers' preparedness affects the successfulness of the pupils. He found that those teachers, who were able to improve their practical knowledge during their studies, applied the various teaching techniques already at the beginning of their careers more often and more easily than those, who had less such opportunities in the educational institution.

Wenglinsky's (2002) test results show that those schools performed better at the national competence testing (National Assessment of Educational Progress - NAEP), where teachers were prepared to work in a heterogeneous classroom and compile tasks that require multiple intelligence skills. He found that e.g. students who were more familiar in the chemical laboratories, had teachers who had received a more intensive practical training in the higher education institutions. The final conclusion of Wenglinsky's research is that those teachers will be the most successful in their work, who acquired both theoretical and practical knowledge during their teacher training.

The teacher has to think over the execution of the tasks during preparation, and assess the possible barriers and the required tools for the solution of the task. Only those tasks should be selected that build on the pupils' already existing competencies, experiences and knowledge. It is worthwhile to apply different teaching techniques to raise attention and motivate. Various tools should be used to enrich the lesson, considering the pupils' needs (Hammerness et al., 2002).

This study aims to examine how the teacher students' teaching competences can be developed by applying the Complex Instruction method in practice, which method is based on educating heterogeneous classes.

The Complex Instruction method (Complex Instruction Program / CIP) is a teaching method which allows teachers to organize a high-level group work in classes where knowledge gap and expressing

skills among students varies between wide limits, and as a result of the classroom work, low-status students' lag slows down or is even prevented and in the meantime higher performers are facilitated. During education, the cognitive, moral and affective components of the training are equally important, i.e., none of the scientific-intellectual, social-civil or personal development goals, are put more forward than the other. Our work aims at applying a method based on a group-work, which provides the students with real-life experiences and delivers innovative personal experiences during school work (Cohen and Lotan, 1989); K. Nagy, 2012).

Research

Our assumption is that with the help of the lesson plans, the students succeed in understanding the status treating aspects of the Complex Instruction Program; the importance of the pupil groups' cooperation; and the necessity of the open-ended and the individual tasks that they had acquired during the seminar sessions.

In our work we wanted to assess the extent to which students understand the Complex Instruction method, how it treats status problems and how to design open-ended tasks and differentiated individual tasks. To assess this, we examined the ability of compiling an appropriate lesson plan.

After having transferred the theoretical knowledge and watching and analysing the videos that demonstrate a class based on the method, we asked the students to prepare an appropriate lesson plan that meets the principles of the method. Before writing the individual lesson plan, the students were provided with the following steps to be able to perform the task:

- The students participated in a 45-minute class simulation that was based on the Complex Instruction method.
- The students were provided with a lesson plan based on the Complex Instruction method, corresponding to their experiences on the class simulation and on their previously acquired knowledge.
- As a next step, with the help of an instructor and after small-group discussions, they created their first individual lesson plan during the seminar session, meaning that in this case the students provided help to each other in order to be able to complete their task.

The students created their individual lessons plan without the instructor's help only after the above steps. The lesson plans were corrected and analysed and written feedback was given to all students (Table 1.).

Institution	Year of examination	Major	Number of full time students	Number of part-time students	Total
University of	2011	Students majoring in pedagogy	26	19	45
Miskolc	2012	or teacher training	25	25	50
ELTE	2011	Students majoring in developer		37	37
	2012	teaching		36	36
Total			51	117	168

Table 1 Summary of number	of lessons plans based on th	e Complex Instruction method
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The students created the lesson plans at the end of the seminar sessions based on their theoretical knowledge, experiences in the class simulation and the video films. The most important aspect of the assessment was meeting the requirements of the Complex Instruction method, i.e. carefully wording the central topic, the complexity and differentiation of the open-ended tasks, the requirement of applying different skills, the interdependence of the children, but also their individual responsibility, and whether the group and individual tasks were built on each other.

We investigated the ability of the students to compile a lesson plan that contains open ended tasks with more than one possible solution and hence provides opportunities for the pupils of the heterogeneous classroom to find alternative solutions, prove their arguments and debate. They had to compile the complex, multi-dimensional group tasks in a way that their solution requires several intellectual skills, in order to allow pupils to use and develop their talent, knowledge and problem-solving skill, bearing in mind that the more complex a project is, the more pupils have the opportunity to show and develop their intellectual skills. We underline the importance of developing the complex skills, since it is an essential tool in the effective treatment of status problems. It gives students and future teachers the opportunity to develop and shape their perception of competences and their views with regards to what it means "to be a talent" in a class that applies group-work.

While preparing their lesson plans, the students had to take into account that the open-ended tasks that allow several possible solutions and require complex skills, they get the opportunity of raising the pupils' interdependence. This interdependence requires a lot of attention from the pupils during their cooperation and joint decisions.

In a group where the group members depend on each other, there is a greater demand for cooperation and interaction, which is even more significant due to the complexity of the unfamiliar tasks.

The purpose of group work is to maintain and strengthen this common interdependence. We must keep in mind that the larger the opportunity for group work without teacher interference is, the easier it will be to cooperate and develop critical thinking.

The students had to pay attention to the fact that individual reliability is also an important feature of group work. The personal presentations based on the group's work are the most important verbal and written documents of autonomy and individual reliability. Pupils get an excellent opportunity to develop, practice and improve their writing skills, and the presentations also provide an opportunity for the teachers to measure the pupils' individual progress.

We drew the students' attention to the fact that group work is especially effective when the teacher's most important goal is to make the pupils learn the concepts, develop problem-solving skills make the children understand the task. To be able to do this, we need to provide pupils with the opportunity to debate and to clearly word their thoughts. Therefore, a well-organized group work is either built around a central idea or it is looking for an answer to an essential question. Students are also prepared that a well-designed task takes a long time and needs a thorough preparation, theoretical knowledge and legwork from the teacher, meaning that a well-prepared task serves not only the development of the pupils, but also that of the teacher. From the letter of a part-time student:

"...Frankly, we were just talking about lesson plans among us with the other teachers on Friday, at the fancy dress party. (You have a little more time to talk then, while we look at the children.), I said I had to mobilize just as many areas to be able to write a lesson plan, as I do when I write prose. (I have 6 volumes of independent prose, www.hal ...) So for example to correct tests and then prepare for a simple class you don't necessarily have to transsubstantiate from the level of every days, but for the CIP, you do..."

While analysing the self-prepared lesson plans (168 pcs), we discovered a clear distinction between whether the students study in full-time (51 persons); they study at correspondence courses, but not as developer teachers (44 persons), or they study as developer teachers (73 persons). Since the difference is consistent and conspicuous, we make a distinction between these three student groups in our further analysis (Table 2).

Major, department	Number of students
Full-time	51
Part-time	44
Developer teacher	73
Total	168

Table 2. The number of students participating at creating lesson plans, based on major and department

We met the following typical errors while analyzing the lesson plans:

- The group task did not meet the requirement of being open-ended, did not give an opportunity for pupils to discuss;
- Sometimes, when running out of ideas, the teacher gave the same task to each group within the class, creating competition;
- The group tasks were not sufficiently and equally challenging and motivating;
- Teachers underestimated the time required for solving the tasks, the length of the group tasks did not allow enough time for the pupils' differentiated individual development;
- The differentiated individual tasks did not use the results of the group work so pupils did not consider the group work important, since their individual success did not depend on it.

Furthermore, we will analyze these typical mistakes by comparing the performance of the students coming from different majors and departments.

The group tasks did not meet the requirements of being open-ended

The summary of the data shows that neither the group of the full-time, nor the part-time or the developer teacher students was able to completely meet the requirement at first, i.e. the tasks being open-ended and in all cases motivating for all members of the heterogeneous groups. There is only a low proportion of students who can prepare appropriate lesson plans with such a requirement. As a result of this deficiency, there will be no debate and only a limited discussion in the group. The communication will decrease, which ultimately slows down the acquisition of knowledge, since the less students talk about the topic, the less they learn. There were also lesson plans where part of the tasks was open-ended, but part of them was closed - perhaps due to having run out of ideas. These plans are included in the category 'Partially proper tasks'.

While analysing the data, it turned out that the developer teachers understood the essence of openended tasks to the most extent, while part-time students to the least (Table 3, Figure 1). Based on the Chi Square test that was conducted during the analysis, these differences are not significant. Sig > 0,05. A reason for this might be that the sample size is considered to be low even if all students who apply the program, participated in the research.

Major, department	Number of students	Improper open-ended tasks %	Partially proper task %	Proper task %
Full-time	51	73%	13%	14%
Part-time	44	75%	15%	10%
Developer teacher	73	58%	22%	20%
Total	168	-	-	-

Table 3	The pro	nerness of	f open-ende	d tasks	between	the stude	nt groups
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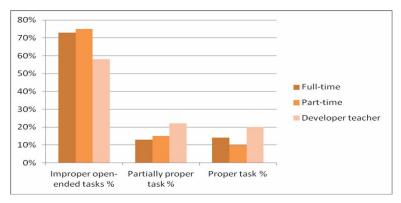


Figure 1. The properness of open-ended tasks between the student groups

The groups were given the same task

If you ask teachers today whether they use group work and cooperative techniques during their lessons, they will all answer affirmatively. However, there are major differences in the frequency and the consciousness of applying them. Teachers applying the Complex Instruction method should be aware that beside the open-ended tasks, giving different tasks to the groups is essential in order to be able to improve the status of the students, manage the ranking of the children and keep up the motivation of the pupils. Its significance lies in the fact that while solving the exactly same task, the group containing the pupil that is most skilful regarding this task, is likely be able to complete the work at a higher level than the other groups. Comparing the group works, children will soon come to the conclusion that it is worth working in the group containing the most skilful pupil(s), since they solve the tasks at the highest level. This creates competition, which has a negative effect on many pupils, especially those who fall behind in terms of learning. Sherif (1956) pays great attention to the processes occurring within the group and between the groups. He presents a theoretical frame that explains the development of competing and conflicting relationships between the groups.

The Complex Instruction lessons, which add up to 10-20% of the total curriculum, are not meant to create a situation described above. Allocating the same tasks to the groups may result from the creator's laziness, but we can also assume that the student did not understand the status treating and motivating essence of the method (Table 4, Figure 2).

The figure shows that the developer teachers were most able to apply the acquired knowledge in their lesson plans, i.e. when all groups receive a different task, there will be no competition between them, which motivates low-performers and those who do not tolerate stress well. We can also see that the part-time students performed worse than full-time students and developer teachers in this case as well. These correlations should not be considered significant either. Chi Square test Sig. > 0.05.

Major, department	Number of students	Same group tasks %	Partially same group tasks %	Different group tasks %
Full-time	51	65%	15%	20%
Part-time	44	70%	18%	12%
Developer teacher	73	48%	25%	27%
Total	168	-	-	-

Table 4. Ratio of assigning the same tasks to the groups between the student groups

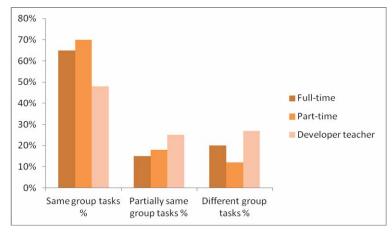


Figure 2. Ratio of assigning the same tasks to the groups between the student groups

Group tasks were not equally challenging and motivating

Even practicing teachers struggle with composing different tasks for the pupils, which are equally interesting, motivating and attention rising for every group. Orlick (1981) emphasises the importance

of the motivating impact of the group tasks in his work. He underlines that well-organized group-work increases sharing behaviours within the group. Complying with this requirement will allow all pupils to be pleased with the task; they will gladly get involved in the work of the group, and will not feel that it would have been better to work in the other group because the task would have been more interesting there. (Table 5. Figure 3).

Major, department	Number of students	Less motivating tasks %	Motivating tasks %
Full-time	51	45%	55%
Part-time	44	28%	72%
Developer teacher	73	28%	72%
Total	168	-	-

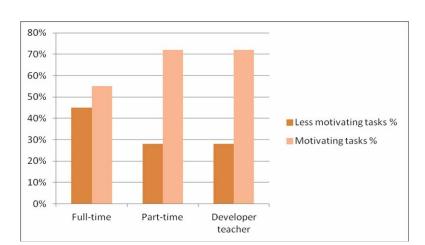


Table 5. Ratio of motivating group tasks between the student groups

Figure 3. Ratio of motivating group tasks between the student groups

We got an exciting yet presupposed result regarding the motivating nature of the compiled tasks. Analysis of the data shows that full-time students have been less able to develop motivating tasks in a proper way. In our opinion, this is due to the lack of experience in compiling tasks and managing the knowledge transfer. It was also found that part-time students and developer teachers were able to create equally challenging and interesting tasks in the same ratio. However, it is visible that every fourth, fifth person, presumably not only as a student but also as a practicing teacher, struggles with compiling motivating tasks for the children. Yet, this is one of the conditions of driving learning. When the task initially arouses the pupils' interest, it will motivate them, and acquiring the knowledge will most likely be successful. The differences of the ratio observed within the qualified groups are not significant. Chi Square test, Sig. > 0,05.

The students oversized the task in terms of the time consumed

It requires a lot of practice to be able to determine whether a group task will fit within the given time interval. It can be estimated to the greatest extent by the practicing teachers experienced in applying the method.

According to our measurements, full-time students oversized the tasks due to the lack of practical experience. We believe that their group tasks would require 2 times 45 minutes classes. The result of the oversized tasks is that (due to lack of time) they do not allow the differentiated individual development of the pupils during a 45-minute class. However, the first half of a Complex Instruction class should contain the completion of tasks by the small groups, while the second half is required for the differentiated individual tasks based on the group task (Table 6, Figure 4).

Major, department	Number of students	Oversized tasks %	Tasks with appropriate length %
Full-time	51	48%	52%
Part-time	44	23%	77%
Developer teacher	73	21%	79%
Total	168	-	-

Table 6. Length of group tasks in the student groups

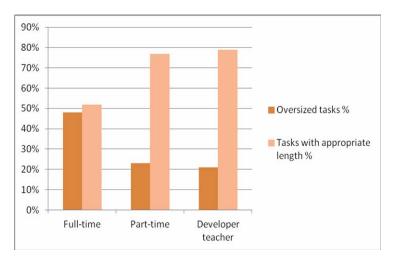


Figure 4. Length of group tasks in the student groups

The level of experience and practice are keys to success. The acquisition of theoretical knowledge and its application in practice is easier for part-time students due to the time having spent as a teacher. As a result of their experience, this group is more able to assess the time required to solve the tasks. There is no significant difference (2%) between part-time students and developer teachers.

There is a significant correlation between the group task's length and size, which made us conclude that these differences occurred due to the difference between the student groups (full-time- or part-time- and developer teachers). Chi Square test, Sig. < 0.05.

The differentiated individual tasks were not built on the resolution of the group task

Developing the pupils' knowledge depends greatly on the individual tasks and on personal, differentiated development. One of the most demanding tasks of the Complex Instruction method is constructing differentiated individual tasks. Not only because it is personal and considers the pupil's already acquired knowledge and skills, i.e. builds on Vygotsky's theory of zone of proximal development (Vigotsky, 1978), but also because it reacts with the pupil's cooperation within the group. A tool for this is to use the result of the group work when it comes to the completion of the individual task, hence individuals will not be able to solve them unless the group task is completed. If we do not make the pupils use the results of the group work anymore. The pupils will realize that their individual tasks can be solved even if they do not participate in the group work, which is an impedimental factor from the point of cooperation in the group. On the contrary, if the individual task is based on the result of the group task, we can make the pupils accept that without the group task, they will not be able to succeed individually. Our aim was to determine whether the students were able to compose individual tasks that were built on the group task and hence develop the children's knowledge and motivate them to work.

We can see large differences among all students in terms of the individual tasks. (Table 7, Figure 5)

Major, department	Number of students	Did not use the result %	Partially used the result %	Did use the result %
Full-time	51	10%	13%	77%
Part-time	44	15%	11%	74%
Developer teacher	73	1%	3%	96%
Total	168	-	-	-

Table 7. Adequacy of differentiated individual tasks between the student groups

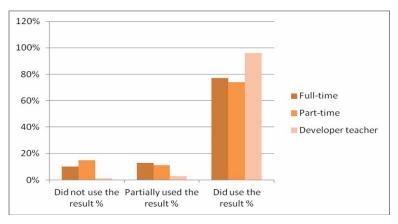


Figure 5. Adequacy of differentiated individual tasks between the student groups

96% of the developer teachers met the criteria of the proper differentiated individual task, which difference is clearly significant. Chi Square test, Sig. < 0,05. Only one of them did not understand the importance of the individual task being built on the group task. Since the primary goal of their role is individual personal development of the children, it is not surprising that all of them compiled the individual tasks according to the integration matrix (K. Nicholson-Nelson, 2007; D. Heacox, 2006).

Lesson plans returned for correction

Overall, there were only a low number of students whose lesson plan fully met the criteria of the Complex Instruction method. Only a few of them were able to build in all the requirements to the lesson plan and use their previous experience. Similar to the above mentioned results, the developer teachers' performance was the best in this regard as well. They understood the criteria of the method to the highest extent and how it is applied in teaching. Only a low ratio of them was asked to rewrite the plan – the lowest among the 3 groups – and this difference between the groups is significant as well. Chi Square test, Sig. < 0,05. However, the values also indicate that there was a significant number of lesson plans given back for correction in terms of each student group (Table 8, Figure 6).

The high ratio of lesson plans returned to the students for correction suggests that it is difficult to change teachers' and future teachers' views about teaching. Both full time and part-time students build on their experiences dated back from their student times. Most of them connect teaching to the verbal presentation of knowledge and a chain of clear and logical explanations. Their ideas do not meet the new requirements of teaching. It is difficult to shift. It is problematic for them to compile complex, multi-dimensional group tasks that require multiple skills to be solved, allowing the children to use and improve their talent, knowledge and problem-solving skills. The more complex the task is, the more the pupils will be able to show and develop their intellectual skills. Developing complex skills has a high importance, since it is an inevitable tool of treating status problems and provides the pupils and teachers with the opportunity to shape and form their views about competences and their idea of what "being talented" means in the classroom.

Major, department	Number of students	Number of returned lesson plans	Returned lesson plans	Correct lesson plans
Full-time	51	48	94%	6%
Part-time	44	43	98%	2%
Developer teacher	73	63	86%	14%
Total	168	158	-	-

Table 8. Lesson plans returned for correction to the student groups

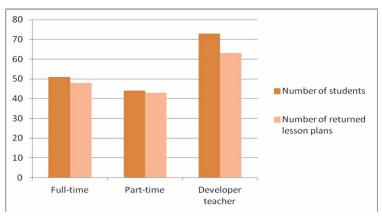


Figure 6. Lesson plans returned for correction to the student groups

Questionnaires assessing the understanding of the Program

We evaluated 168 lesson plans in our investigation and thereafter requested the students to fill in a questionnaire. During the inspection we asked them about the goals and main aspects of the Complex Instruction Program; how to organize the classroom for group-work and how to treat status problems. We wanted to know how much the feedback and the analysis of the classroom work helped them understand group-work. The answers of the questionnaire (Appendix 1) are summarized below:

The goals of applying the Complex Instruction teaching method

168 (100%) teachers identified the intervention to the pupils' hierarchical order and the treatment of status problems as the most important goal of the program. A further 154 (94%) teachers thought that one of the program's important aims is to develop the teachers' professional expertise in organizing group-work. 141 (84%) teachers indicate the development of the teachers' indirect instructive role and 114 (68%) teachers feels that the pupils' ability of making independent decisions and acquiring knowledge are essential (Figure 7.).

The results indicate that each student considers the reorganization of the pupils' status ranking as one of the most important goals of the program. They understand that the status is a place in the ranking, stratification among the pupils where everyone knows that being higher is better than being lower. They are aware that the pupils who are excluded from the community because of social reasons, or those lagging behind in learning, are often reluctant to take part in the common work, and therefore learn less, than those who are more active. If the pupils do not equally take part in the class work, the learning progress will be different. Pupils located at the head of the class ranking will have a greater influence on the group's decision making, they will be asked for help more often, and will have more opportunities to express their views, as those located at the bottom of the ranking, whose views are generally ignored. The method offers a solution for the treatment of this situation.

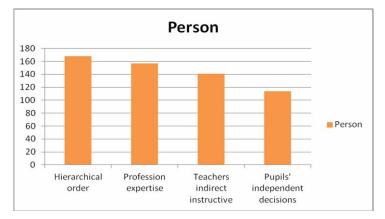


Figure 7. The goals of applying the Complex Instruction method

The main characteristics of the Complex Instruction teaching method

126 (75%) teachers identified recognizing and treating status problems in the classroom as one of the most important characteristics of the method. 121 (72%) teachers thought that during the group sessions pupils are prepared for cooperation in the heterogeneous classroom and 106 (63%) teachers claimed that the method allows the application of multiple skills. 108 (64%) respondents thought that an important feature of the method is to improve the pupils' critical thinking with the help of a central idea and open-ended tasks built around it.

The main characteristics listed by the students provide them with the possibility to build the lesson in a way that it suits the composition of the heterogeneous pupil group, taking each child's skills into account, and that it applies these skills for cooperation. Thus, it is an important tool for developing pupils' critical thinking and communication among each other.

Organizing small groups in the classroom

Most of the responses show that according to the students, the group tasks and the cooperation within the heterogeneous groups create favourable conditions for the education of the community. In their view, cooperation positively influences the personal development of the pupils. They agreed that the common challenges improve the pupils' responsibility towards each other, and the joint problem solving teaches the children to consider and respect each other's ideas. They think that debate positively influences the community and the individuals' activities and promotes active learning.

Treating status problems

135 (80%) students mentioned in the first place, that the roles applied during the group work help the cooperation within the group, the development of respect for each other and the improvement of multiple skills and the treatment of status problems. 77% believed that the hierarchy established within the group can be changed through the tasks that require multiple skills.

The Complex Instruction method is suitable for reorganizing the status ranking among the pupils, which was understood and acquired by the students and considered important based on their answers. The pupils' roles applied during group work has a very important status increasing effect, which was also a very common response by the students.

Summary

Students can be prepared by working with new, tested and proven methods, both during the seminars and their school practice.

We examined whether the acquisition of the status-treating technique can be measured with the quality of the lesson plans created by the students. We measured the students' understanding of the statustreating aspect of the Complex Instruction method and how well they learnt the importance of openended tasks and constructing differentiated individual tasks. To measure it, we tested the lesson plan based on the method's characteristics, created by the students. The most important angle of the evaluation was the compliance with Complex Instruction method's principles, i.e. the careful wording of the central idea; the complexity and differentiation of the open-ended tasks that require multiple skills; the interdependence but individual responsibility of the children; and the synergy of the group task and the individual tasks.

Our assumption that the lesson plans reflect the understanding and interpretation of the Complex Instruction Program's status treating characteristic was proven.

The most important aspect of the evaluation was meeting the requirements of the Complex Instruction method, ie. the careful wording of the central idea; the complexity and differentiation of the openended tasks; the requirement of applying complex skills; the interdependence of the children; the individual responsibility; and the relationship of the group- and individual tasks.

While analysing the lesson plans, we met some typical examples that showed the fields that require more attention when preparing the students.

Although it was not our intention to analyse how well the certain student groups understood the composition of the lesson plan, we discovered that the students majoring in pedagogy performed better at certain areas that we monitored. We found no significant differences between the different student groups in terms of the open-ended group-tasks, the assignment of similar tasks and the motivational impact of the tasks. There is a significant correlation however in the case of the timeliness of the tasks and the success of the group-work, indicating that developer teachers understood best the criteria of the method and how to use them during teaching. We asked the fewest members of this group to rewrite their lesson plans. However, the values also shows that there were significant number of students in each group who had to revise their work.

The high ratio of lesson plans returned to the students for correction suggests that it is difficult to change teachers' and future teachers' views about teaching. Both full time and part-time students build on their experiences dated back to their student times. Most of them connect teaching with the verbal presentation of knowledge and a chain of clear and logical explanations. Their ideas do not meet the new requirements of teaching. It is difficult to shift this culture of teaching. It is problematic for them to compile complex, multi-dimensional group tasks that require multiple skills to be solved, allowing the children to use and improve their talent, knowledge and problem-solving skills. The more complex the task is, the more the pupils will be able to show and develop their intellectual skills. Developing complex skills has a high importance, since it is an inevitable tool of treating status problems and provides the pupils and teachers with the opportunity to shape and form their views about competences and their idea of what "being talented" means in the classroom.

Our assumption was proven, that the quality of the lesson plans reflected how well the students had understood the status treating aspects of the Complex Instruction Program. They realized the importance of group-work within the heterogeneous classroom; the open-ended tasks; the differentiated individual tasks; and their relationship. We believe that the more we prepare the students for the conscious application of the method, the more suitable they become to successfully organize the classes.

We believe that the higher education institutions have to prepare students for being able to apply the method in an understanding way. They should leave the institution by being able to treat heterogeneous classes and organize a successful lesson. The text should be formatted with the style *text*. Please, don't leave blank lines between paragraphs.

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Appendix 1.

Questionnaire for assessing the knowledge of status treatment

1. Please answer the question.

What do you consider the purpose and significance of teacher training?

List at least 3 criteria which you think have the biggest significance in applying the Complex Instruction Program.

What are the aspects of forming a group?

What status treatment techniques do you know?

To what extent did the expertise assistance help your work during class?

2. Mark with an X whichever statement you consider correct.	True	False
Not all pupils have all important skills		
Nobody has all skills.		
All pupils have outstanding intellectual skills		
Some pupils have all intellectual skills		