

# CAREER PERSPECTIVES AND REALITY FOR PEDAGOGY GRADUATES IN 2012 USING THE EXAMPLE OF THE STUDENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WROCLAW MAJORING IN REHABILITATION

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## ABSTRACT

The subject of the article is the issue of career development of students that have graduated from 5-years pedagogy studies with the master diploma at the University of Wrocław in 2011. The article is supposed to confront the assumed profile of the pedagogy graduates placed on the university website with the reality on the job market. The essential assumption of the article is the attempt to receive the most possible comprehensive picture of the former students' career perspectives and the reality they encounter on the basis of their relation, not only the statistics available. The article will also cover the analysis of the qualifications gained during the studies but also all other factors that turned out to be helpful to find an employment consistent with their expectations.

**Key words:** career development of graduates, factors helpful in getting the actual employment, job market, additional forms of education, employment of graduates University of Wrocław

Nowadays, the job market sets higher and higher requirements for those looking for a job. The candidates have to not only to present their qualifications on paper but also show many personal qualifications supported by achieved experience. Despite the fact it is widely known that "looking for a job is a hard job" there are enterprises where, due to few vacancies and many candidates, it seems particularly difficult. Pedagogy, with many graduates applying for one position, seems to be a visible source of unemployed. One may think that it is fate that plays a key role here. But is it really so? What is the current situation of pedagogy graduates with selected major subjects that left school in 2011. What factors, in respondents opinions, could help them to find a job? To have a closer look at these issues, the author of this article will present the results of her own research proceeded with the brief analysis of selected aspects of the situation for graduates on the job market, which will create the appropriate context for gathered data presentation.

## THE GRADUATE AND THE JOB MARKET - THE GENERAL CONTEXT

As indicated by Rennie Jonhston and Ulrich Beck the dominant feature of contemporary society is a constant uncertainty and the risk that appears in different spheres of a daily life (Johnston 2003, p. 11). The uncertainty and the risk is noticeable mainly in the difficulty of foreseeing the consequences of decisions made, which depend not

only on the individual but on external factors that change rapidly. An example of the uncertainty related to the lack of guarantee of achieving established goals despite attempts and efforts made, is the process of looking for a job by high school graduates. In the past, the master's degree meant a social and financial promotion (Bialecki 1998, p. 84). At present, the significant decrease of the value of a master's degree on the job market caused by the excessive number of graduates in some business branches gives no guarantee for a decent (financial) life after studies<sup>1</sup>.

To meet the requirements of the current economic and political situation the structure of the university has to undergo appropriate evolution; from the idea of a student - teacher community aiming to know the truth, through the university as a bureaucratic organisation with the main focus on personnel and its hierarchy to, finally, the idea of a university as an enterprise open to its clients needs and requirements. According to what W. Wróblewska claims, the changes in the form of university teaching are related to the transfer of general university focus from becoming clever and receiving the knowledge as a goal in itself to gaining specific skills needed in the job market (Wróblewska 2003, p. 191). However, evaluating the knowledge in terms of its consumer usefulness in the market place does not seem to be in accordance with basic university canons. As R. Johnston claims the university should not only be involved in scientific research far beyond teaching and not only involved in converting the knowledge into goods. In this situation, the most beneficial role of the university seems to be the attitude between extremely utilitarian and devoted to current market demands on one hand and an attitude completely separated from social and economic realities on the other hand. There are opinions persuading the preservation of constitutional features, such as: getting and aiming to know the truth and teaching individuals to be able to think and explore on their own as well as simultaneously strengthening relationships between the university and other outside companies and organisations (Zakowicz 2011, p. 16). However, implementing the appropriate procedures aiming to improve the relationships between the university and the job market will require an enormous amount of work and effort. By the time this process is complete, each year there will be more and more graduates aiming to find employment in the area of their competences. From this perspective, we need to find out ways the university might prepare its future graduates for starting jobs and, first of all, what the role of graduates themselves is in the process of employment.

## PEDAGOGY STUDIES GRADUATES AND THE REALITY AT THE END OF STUDIES

As mentioned in the introduction to this article, pedagogy students are in particularly difficult situation compared to general unemployment problems in Poland<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Among the ones that have graduated from a university and are below 27 there was 1594 unemployed graduates registered in the voivodship of Lower Silesia of May 30th, 2012 (The Lower Silesia Voivodship Labour Office, *Informacja o sytuacji na rynku pracy w województwie dolnośląskim w maju 2012 r.*, p. 8).

<sup>2</sup> In Poland in May 2012 the unemployment rate was 12,6%; in the voivodship of Lower Silesia at the end of May 2012 the unemployment rate was 12,8 % and in the suburbs of Wrocław there was 12,2% (The Lower Silesia Labour Office, *Informacja o sytuacji na rynku pracy w województwie dolnośląskim w maju 2012 r.*, p. 17-18).

- the number of unemployed pedagogy graduates in the Lower Silesian voivodship was 803 (The Lower Silesia Voivodship Labour Office, *Ranking zawodów deficytowych i nadwyżkowych w województwie dolnośląskim w 2011 roku*, p. 12) people in December 2011. It is not a secret that pedagogy is one of those branches where finding a job is particularly difficult - the occupation of educationalist (pedagogy graduates) belongs to the group of occupations "in excess" "[...] occupations, when there is less market demand than the number of those looking these positions" (The Lower Silesia Voivodship Labour Office, *Ranking zawodów deficytowych i nadwyżkowych w województwie dolnośląskim w 2011 roku*, p. 3). Moreover, educationalists constitute a group of "specialists" where there was a fivefold higher influx of unemployed than the job vacancies being advertised (The Lower Silesia Voivodship Labour Office, *Ranking zawodów deficytowych i nadwyżkowych w województwie dolnośląskim w 2011 roku*, p. 33). With the establishment of the curriculum of the University of Wrocław the tendency of joining practical and theoretical classes is noticeable. The profile of the pedagogy graduates (in reference to the one present on the home site of the Institute of Pedagogy) assumes that the student "possesses decent theoretical background within different fields and is prepared to conduct scientific research, noticing and solving theoretical and practical problems on their own. Moreover, one receives relevant job qualifications in the field of selected major subjects" (*Sylwetka absolwenta*). The question as to which degree these assumptions are realised by the university professors and if students are involved in the process of acquiring the knowledge is an open issue and requires further discussion, which is not the subject of this article.

The important thing is that the graduates obtain the master's title in the field of general pedagogy, which entitles them to work in the following institutions: "Learning Disabilities Service", Human Resources agencies and departments, human-resources consulting agencies, Social Assistance Services, Labour Offices, educational and parental institutions, continuing education agencies, career offices, police, army, penal institutions, foundations, associations and family counseling agencies (Marusiak 2012, p. 5).

Worth mentioning is also the fact that on the masters' degree diploma there is no information about the chosen major subjects and the related qualifications granted. This information appears only in the diploma supplement which is not usually verified by employers.

On the one hand the range of schools and institutions in which to look for a job becomes wider, on the other hand it imposes some limits on the educationalists in the eyes of the employers according to the famous saying that somebody able to do everything is in fact able to do nothing. Then such a diploma becomes only an entitlement to start more specific postgraduate studies or other language or occupational courses.

Another very alarming phenomenon is the fact that usually the jobs are granted for those having some contacts, especially for the more prestigious positions.

An excess number of similarly qualified graduates against the current vacancies - devaluation of master diploma significance - causes students and graduates to take more effort to increase their qualifications and chances to achieve

professional success. They get involved in the unpaid practices and probations or become voluntary workers. More and more often, full time students start the job, not because they want to earn some money, but with full understanding of how important work experience is nowadays. Below, the author of this paper will present the research results on the employment situation in May and June, 2012 of pedagogy graduates of chosen major subjects.

### THE ASSUMPTIONS OF THE RESEARCH: THE METHOD, AIM AND THE GROUP TESTED

The research was conducted in May and June, 2012. To get to know the employment situation of the pedagogy graduates with majors in rehabilitation the author of this paper used a questionnaire composed of ten questions (i.e. six open, two half-open and two closed). The questions were concerned mainly with the current employment position (including the branch and institution, full and part-time jobs, contract type and the position occupied, question no. 2), its accordance with the candidate's studies (question no. 3), additional forms of education (question no. 4) and their role in getting the job (question no. 5 and 6), the actions taken by the interviewees during their studies that could influence their getting of the job (question no. 7) and other factors that could also play a role (question no. 8), future graduates' plans related to their education field (question no. 9) and the thoughts of the questioned people on their education and its relevance in the process of looking for a job (question no. 10). The questionnaire, as a specific type of interview (Pilch, Bauman 2001, p. 96), is used as a device "to get to know the qualities of the community, facts, opinions on events and data expressed in figures" (Pilch, Bauman 2001, p. 87). The goal of this method is to gather data within the specific and limited area of exploration or the wider one but divided into parts. That is why the main aim of the actual research was to acquire information about the current employment of former pedagogy master's diploma holders (obtained in 2011) at the University of Wrocław with the major in rehabilitation. Another important aspect was to gather data on actions taken by those graduates during their studies, other forms of education and other factors that played a role in getting the job in the opinion of the students. Additionally, a certain enrichment to the data mentioned above, are the interviewee's thoughts and opinions on the studies they graduated from, their process of looking for a job and the way they see their career. Despite the fact, that the pedagogy students had different options to choose their majors in 2011, the group tested consisted only of rehabilitation graduates in order to exclude the possibility of differences in the knowledge and skills acquired between those graduates - differences that could influence the results of their looking for a job. The questionnaires were sent out to the former full-time students of the University of Wrocław majoring in rehabilitation. Replies were received from 26 out of 28 such students (the author of this paper did not manage to get in contact with two of them). Three of them have still not received their masters' diploma, that is why their replies have not been

taken into consideration in the present research. To sum up, the group tested included 23 participants, that got their masters' thesis in pedagogy with a major in rehabilitation in 2011.

## THE RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

### The place of employment, the position occupied

While analysing the replies to questions numbers 1 and 2 concerned with the place of living and the position occupied the interviewees can be divided into three groups. The first group consists of graduates that are currently working in accordance with the studies they graduated in, i.e. in accordance with the diploma title. Thus, this wide category includes those working as educators regardless the age and specificity of the people they are educating and bringing up in the institutions mentioned above: "Learning Disabilities Service", Human Resources agencies and departments, human-resources consulting agencies, Social Assistance Services, Labour Offices, educational and parental institutions, continuing education agencies, career offices, police, army, penal institutions, foundations, associations and family counseling agencies" (Marusiak 2012, p. 5) and the ones working within the area of pedagogy with major in rehabilitation i.e. "the ones working in special education centres, reformatory institutions for the underaged and any others that deal with people not adjusted socially or supporting dysfunctional families" (*Supplement to the diploma of Master of Pedagogy*, p. 5). The second group consists of people employed outside their type of studies. The third group consists of unemployed people.

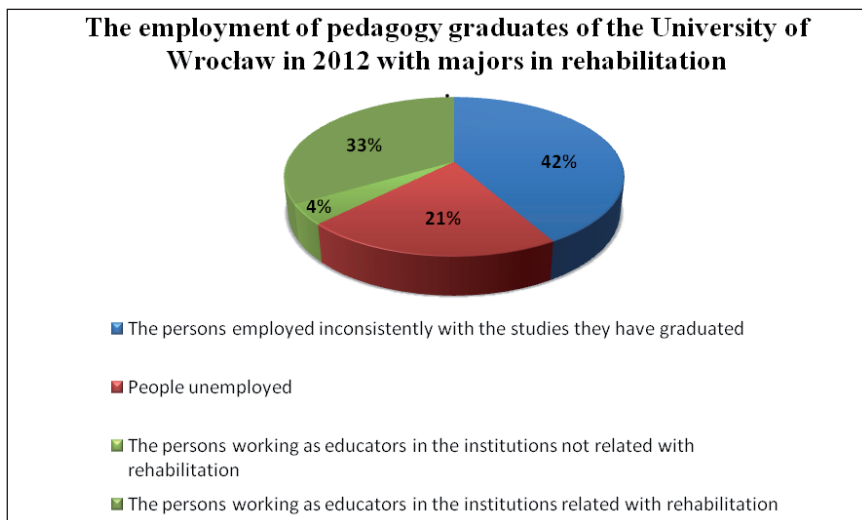
The number of people qualified in the **first group** is 8 which is approximately 34,8 % of the group tested. Seven of them, which is about 30,4% of interviewees, works within the rehabilitation area and one person works as a career and instructor in a non-related institution (4,35% of all questioned). The institutions, in which questioned graduates, got their jobs are (positions shown in brackets); social common room (1 - educator, 1 - head of the common room), sociotherapy institution (2 - educators), penal institution (1 - educator), culture centre for children and youngsters (1 - babysitter, instructor), district Court (1 - probation officer), City and County Social Assistance Centre (1- family assistant).

The second group consists of employed people in on a different position from that of the studies graduated. The number of people in this category is 10. This group constitutes about 43,5% of all interviewed. The positions of employment in this group are as follows: primary school (1 - class teacher year 1-3), kindergarten (1 - head assistant of the group), factory (physical worker), Office (1 - secretary), shop (1 - shop assistant, 1 - assistant manager), IT company (1 - documentalist), internet service (1 - marketing worker), furniture company (HR employee), optician's office (1 - management assistant).

The third group, to which unemployed people have been qualified, consists of 5 people - 21,7% of all interviewed.

The data is presented in a graphic way in the form of a pie chart:

**Fig. 1. The employment situation of pedagogy graduates of University of Wroclaw with majors in rehabilitation in 2012**



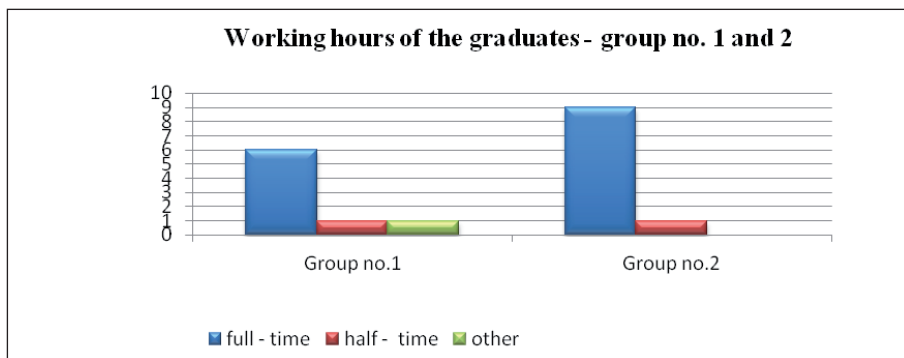
Source: Author

**Full and part time jobs, types of employment contracts**

To present the structure of employment of the questioned graduates it is essential to mention their working hours and the type of contract they have.

In the group of graduates employed within their area of studies the vast majority of them (6 people) work full-time, one of them has a part-time job and one of them works depending on the orders he/she receives (in the chart marked as “others”) and his/her working hours are flexible every week. In terms of type of contract, 6 of them have signed a contract of mandate, one of them is on probation (arranged by the Labour Office) and one has an employment contract for an indefinite time.

**Fig. 2. Working hours of graduates from group 1 and group 2**

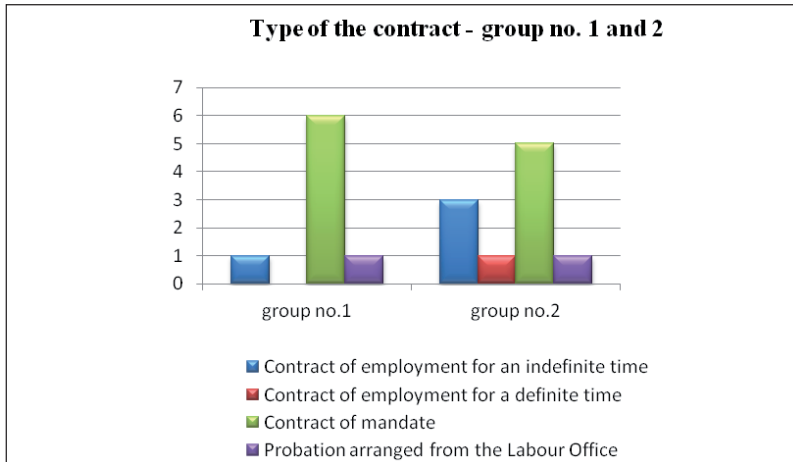


Source: Author

In the second group, 9 persons have full-time and one has a part-time job. Employment contracts for an indefinite time have been signed by three of them, the fixed-term contract by one of them, contract of mandate by five of them and the last one is on probation arranged by Labour Office.

The data described above are presented graphically (Fig. 2 and 3).

**Fig. 3. Contract type of graduates of group 1 and 2**

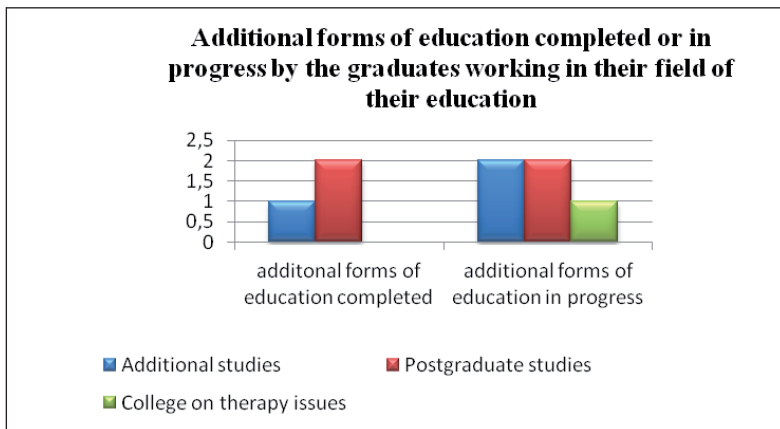


Source: Author

**Additional forms of education**

In the first group the vast majority (7 persons) have started additional forms of education. One of them has gained a bachelor’s degree in different field and two of them are undertaking their second studies but these factors did not influence getting

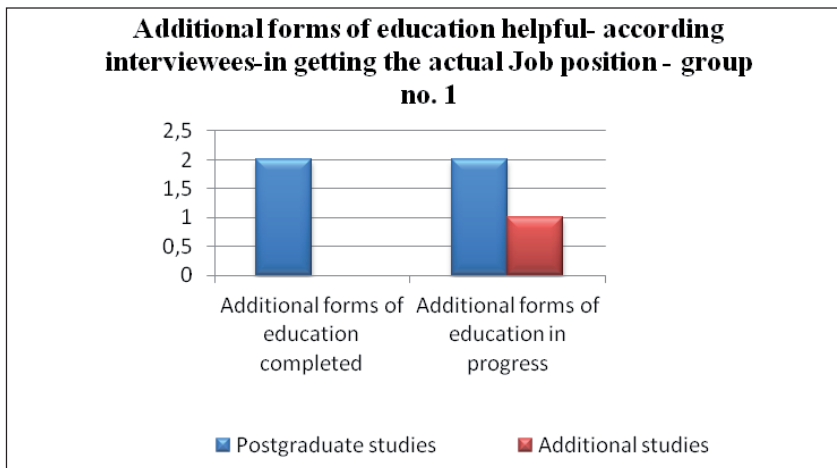
**Fig. 4. Additional forms of education finished and already taken by the pedagogy graduates working “within their studies field”**



Source: Author

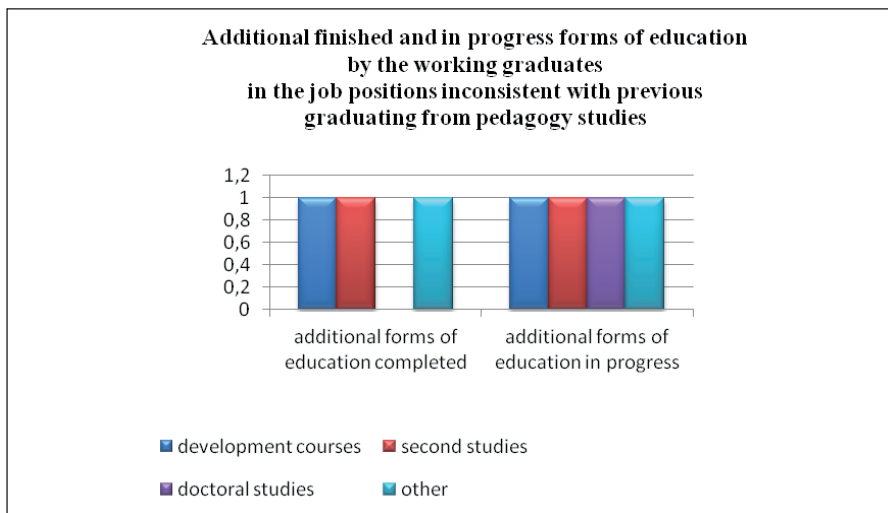
their second job. Two of them have finished their postgraduate studies and two of them are in process of doing so - and according to interviewees these factors turned out to be extremely essential in getting the job (i.e. they would not have got these positions if they had not started their current postgraduate studies). One person has finished a sign language course, which did not help them to get their current job. The chart below presents additional forms of education taken by the pedagogy graduates.

**Fig. 5. Additional helpful forms of education - according to interviewees opinion - group no. 1**



Source: Author

**Fig. 6. Additional forms of education finished and already taken by the pedagogy graduates working in the occupations inconsistent with their studies in the field of pedagogy**

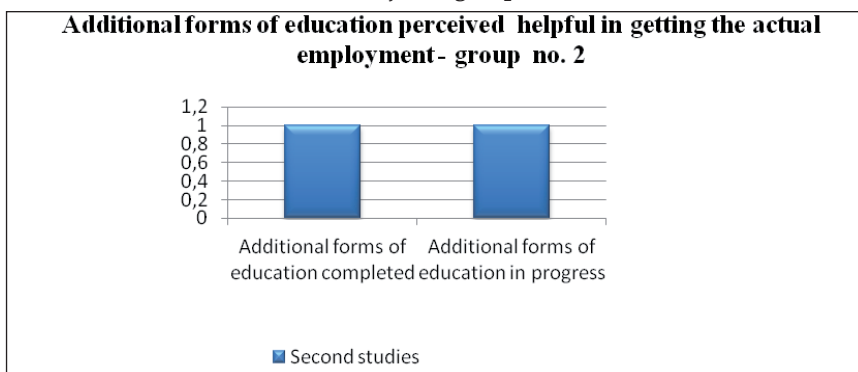


Source: Author



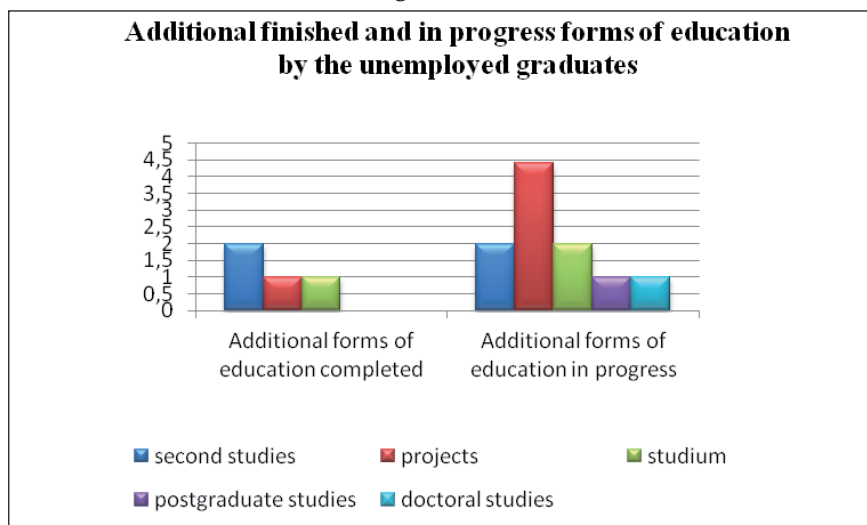
In the second group one person has started postgraduate studies in the field of pedagogy as an additional form of education. In this group one person has started development courses, one person has started the sign language course and one is doing his/her specific business courses. However, these mentioned above did not help in finding the current job. One person is in his/her second line of studies, one has already completed his/her second set of studies and those additional forms of education turned out to be helpful in getting the actual employment position. Others have not taken or are not currently taking any additional form of education. The additional forms of education taken by group two graduates is presented in Fig. 6.

**Fig. 7. Additional forms of education, which turned out to be helpful in finding their current jobs - group no. 2**



Source: Author

**Fig. 8. Additional forms of education- finished and currently taken by the unemployed graduates**



Source: Author

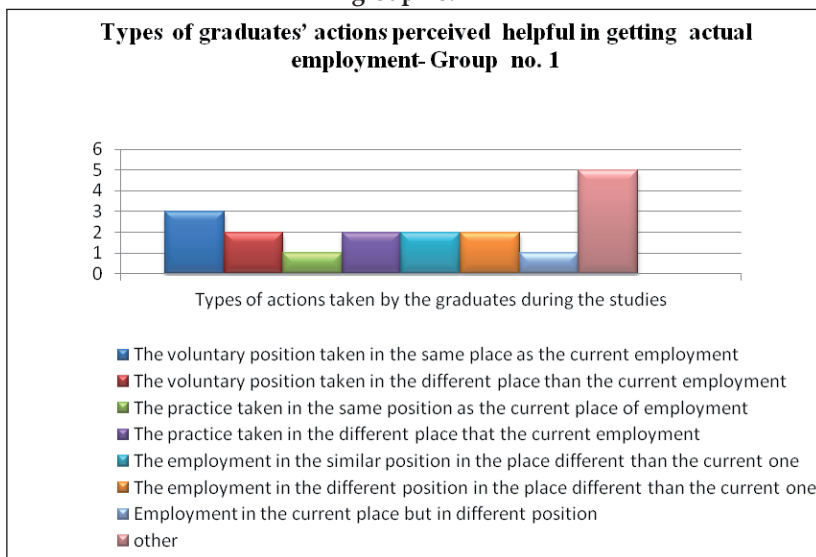
In terms of additional forms of education, in the third group, one person has graduated in postgraduate studies, two persons have graduated in a second field of studies (one has not presented his/her thesis yet), two persons are already taking their second studies, one has already finished a mediation course in college and one has started postgraduate studies in the field of pedagogy. The Fig. 8 presents the additional forms of education taken by group 1.

**The actions that influence finding a job in graduates’ opinion**

All persons in group 1 (eight people) – in their questionnaire marked additional actions that turned out to be helpful in finding a job. Three of them found their present job, related with what they have studied, working on a voluntary basis for the given company first. Two others found working on a voluntary basis useful in different places than currently employed. As far as the unpaid work was concerned, two of them indicated doing it in a different place of work from the current one. One person did the unpaid work in the company where he/she is now working. According to one of the interviewees the previous work in the company where he/she is currently working (but in different position) turned out to be helpful. For two of them previous experience in a similar position (but in a different company) turned out to be helpful. Two of them found useful experience gained in a different company and position.

In the “other” group there are responses related to the position of social worker/probation officer (4) and artistic project participation (1). It is worth underlining that usually one person marked more than one additional form of action - the average number of actions, which help the interviewees of that major to get a job in the field of their study was 2.12 per person. The actions of all of them are presented in the Fig. 9.

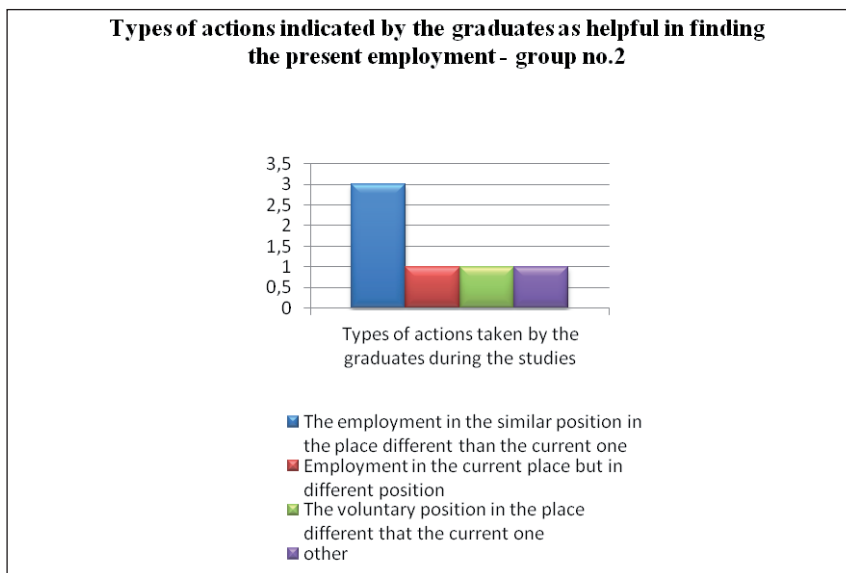
**Fig. 9. The types of actions indicated as helpful in finding their current employment - group no. 1**



Source: Author

Among the actions, which turned out to be helpful in finding a job in the second group (ten people) the interviewees indicated: work different from the current one in the similar position (three people), probation officer work (one person - in the "other" category of the chart). The volunteer position in different places of work than the actual one was indicated by one person - work in the same company but different position was also indicated by one interviewee. The average number of actions, which helped the questioned to find their jobs is 1.7. The actions of all members of group 1 is presented in Fig. 10.

**Fig. 10. The types of actions indicated as helpful in finding their current employment - group no. 2**



Source: Author

### **Other useful factors in getting the job**

Among other useful factors the interviewees listed: the experience of work with a group, constant learning, acquaintances, personality, determination, persistence, ability to communicate with others and the knowledge of foreign languages.

### **Future career plans of the graduates questioned**

In **group no. 1**, the number of people who would like to proceed with their current job or have a different job within their education field is seven. One person, in his/her thoughts expressed disappointment with the job market realities, mainly because of the reduced possibility of career opportunities.

**Group no. 2** is more diverse in terms of its future career plans. Mostly, the interviewees plan to realize their potential in a pedagogy-related field but rather as an extra activity and not a principal employment source.

Some of the questioned graduates, plan to start their own business or leave the country. Others do not want to go much ahead with their future career and so far have no clearly established plans and goals.

**In group no. 3**, on the other hand all persons (5) would like to work in the pedagogy or psychology area (not necessarily in the field of rehabilitation like e.g. work in Human Resources department).

### **Graduates' thoughts**

The graduates' thoughts about their studies, looking for a job and job opportunities after studies seems to be precious information. Despite the fact that the author of this paper does not intend to mention the issue of qualifications acquired during the studies, the problem consistently appeared in the graduates' replies. Taking this into consideration we can divide the replies into two basic attitudes. The first one states that the studies have not provided the relevant knowledge and "devices" to work in the area of their studies i.e. information about the specific ways of acting in the particular situations in relation to educating and bringing up children. According to this group of questioned students the curriculum of the studies consisted of too few practical classes with e.g. simulations that one can encounter while educating others on during a study case. Others questioned are of opinion that, despite the fact they had had greater expectations, the studies taught them to observe the world and peoples' problems more widely; as mentioned by one questioned student: "[...] I learned reflective ways to each issue, action and person". Another controversial issue mentioned during filling in the questionnaire was the issue of work practice. And here we can again indicate two separate attitudes on the matter. Most of the questioned claimed that during the studies there was too little practice, and a major part of the subject due to theoretical specificity seems to be redundant looking from the perspective of the job market requirements. Other graduates mention that one can apply for unpaid work or voluntary work on their own. As written by one of interviewed: "[...] I think there was much time during the studies that one could devote time to realising personal passions or working as on a voluntary basis - which was something the employers referred to. That is why I find the allegation that there was not enough practice baseless, as those who wanted to could work as voluntaries". Almost all questioned paid attention to how difficult it is to find oneself in the job market where the main requirement is to have some experience in the field of pedagogy. There were also some other opinions indicating that a key factor to find a job is having appropriate contacts, not qualifications.

### **Summary of questionnaire results**

The main aim of the research was to gather information about the current employment situation for pedagogy graduates with majors in rehabilitation of the University of Wrocław that gained the master's title in 2011. As we may see from the research analysis, in May and June 2012 about 37 of the interviewed people worked consistently with the qualifications and permissions they received studying general pedagogy. Quite a big subgroup of that consists of people working in penal institutions (places where young criminals are educated to be "normal people") - approximately 33% (7 persons) of all questioned. However, most of them work a contract of mandate which, as is widely known, is less beneficial for the employee than a contract of employment for an unspecified time (such agreement has been concluded only by one person). Most of the interviewees from this group work in full-time jobs. The number of graduates that work in the fields other than pedagogy is approximately 10 (42%), and 5 are cur-

rently unemployed (21%). In the second group there are also more of those employed by the form of contract of mandate (5), the contract of employment is in second position (4 persons). Most of them work in full-time jobs (9), only one person has part-time job. Among additional forms of education, that influenced their finding a job "consistent with their field of studies" the questioned people mention: postgraduate studies (4) and another/second studies (2). Within the group of people that work in the field different from the studies graduated, the additional form of education was not something that helped. Those that do not work currently mention that they chose to start their second studies as an additional form of education (4). In reference to the action taken during studies, worth underlining is the fact that the questions in the questionnaire dealt only with the additional forms of education that helped in finding a job. That is why analyzing the results of the research one may not infer that the graduates of a specific group were more or less active than those from any other group. Something which can be inferred is the type and number of actions that turned out to be helpful in finding/getting a job. Thus, the most frequent type of action that was helpful to find a job in group one was a voluntary position (5 times). The average number of actions helpful in getting a job was 2.12 per person. In the second group the action that helped in finding the current job was working in a different company but in a similar position (3 markings). The average number of actions in this group - according to interviewees - that helped in finding a job was 1.7. The vast majority of questioned graduates plan to work in the field of their studies (about 74 of all questioned), despite the fact they realise what kind of inconveniences they might encounter while looking for a job.

The above presented summary of the results points to a few interesting conclusions.

First of all, the majority of pedagogy students do not work within their field of study (about 63% of all questioned - see fig. 1). On the other hand, despite the fact that the number of graduates working in their field of studies is not satisfactory (even limiting them to only rehabilitation group), finding a job in the area of pedagogy, though difficult, is possible. The conclusion seems to be obvious but there are many people that looking at the statistics have their doubts assuming in advance that finding a job in the field of pedagogy is not possible. Secondly, the research shows that getting a job in the position intended for pedagogy graduates involves the need for further education and an active attitude in the area by the students. Actually, as the interviewees show working on a voluntary basis or doing an unpaid job or other forms of gaining experience or studying is currently becoming an obligatory requirement to get a job in the field of one's studies, even for those qualified up to or higher than the master's degree in general pedagogy.

Thirdly, the fact that there is a significant number of graduates, who looking for a job encountered many difficulties, and still want to work in the field of pedagogy might mean that the decision about looking for a job relevant to their studies is already "fixed" in their minds.

## CONCLUSIONS

Taking the results of the current research, one may infer a further conclusion that in reality the big excess of graduates of some studies and the devaluation of diplomas, such diplomas have different significance than in the past. Usually the

graduation certificate/ diploma is only the initial formal requirement - personal card for the employer - that he/she is dealing with an educated person, but that it is the amount and quality of additional work experience gained by the graduate that is of crucial significance for the employer. That is why to achieve their goals graduates should "knock on different doors", undergo many additional actions beyond studies and be open to new challenges. The present world carries the feeling of uncertainty, that is why it is always better to try new solutions so that the experience gathered this way might indicate where to look for a job. At present, the characteristics that are mostly expected are flexibility, creativeness and the will to act. However, this is not about egoistic actions, characteristic for the present *homo oeconomicus* (Potulicka 2005, p. 37) but about active attitude with deep reflection on the world and based mainly on a thorough academic knowledge. That is why the author of the paper thinks, that a certain solution for a student who has to struggle with the demands of the job market is the attitude of joining the skill of reflective looking at the human condition with the active and independent job decision making.

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