STIMULATING THE INTEREST IN THE TEACHING PROFESSION THROUGH THE PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE TRAINING

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Abstract: *The psychopedagogical formation for obtaining the certification for teaching includes theoretical as well as practical aspects. Through the pedagogical practice, the students consolidate their theoretical knowledge and acquire abilities that they will apply in accordance with the specializations they are training in. Pedagogical practice is the activity students carry out in the established schools, where the student practitioner benefits from the support of both a university professor (didactician) and a teacher in the school (mentor). In conformity with the legislation in force, the duration of the Level One stage of pedagogical practice is two semesters, while Level Two lasts a single semester. Given the importance of this dimension which refers to the training and its practical applicability, the pedagogical training was assigned the greatest number of hours (42/semester) of the educational plan of the program for psychopedagogical formation.*

Key words: teaching profession; pedagogical training stage; student practitioner; mentor.

INTRODUCTION

Being a teacher is truly an "art" that is not accessible to just anyone. In this respect, Victor Hugo said that the teaching profession is vast and beautiful and unlike any other, because "one does not leave it at night when taking off one's work clothes. [...] It is rough and pleasant, humble and proud, severe and free; in it, mediocrity is not allowed; for it, exceptional training is merely satisfactory. [...] It is exhausting and invigorating, drives one to despair and exaltation; in it, knowledge means nothing without emotion; in it, love is barren without spiritual power. This profession is at times burdensome, at other times implacable, ingrate and charming". (apud CHIRCEV, DĂSCĂLESCU, SALADE, 1969).

E. Păun (2002) considers that didactic professionalization is "a process whereby a set of competences and skills are formed in a certain field, based on the assimilation of a system of (theoretical and practical) knowledge. This process is deductively controlled by a model of the respective profession".

"No other profession requires from its owner so much competence, dedication and humanity as the one of an educator, because in no other profession do people work with such a precious, complicated and sensitive material as a man in the making. [...] Anchored in the present, having a glimpse of the future and probing the possible dimensions of personality, the teacher ceaselessly instructs, educates, encourages, guides, cultivates and organizes, corrects, improves and assesses the process through which the qualities necessary for tomorrow's adult are formed and perfected" (SALADE, 1997).

Starting with the 2008 – 2009 academic year, based on a number of laws, regulations and government decisions, the psyschopedagogical formation for certifying the competences required in the teaching profession is obtained through specialized structures (***Teacher Training Departments***) within accredited universities. These departments have clear attributions regarding the ***initial*** psychopedagogical, didactic, theoretical and practical ***formation*** of university students and graduates for obtaining the right to exercise the teaching profession.

The initial training is guided by some important principles (IONESCU & CHIȘ, 1992):

- a close link between the specialist training, general knowledge and pedagogical knowledge;
- a dynamic relation between the psychopedagogical training and the practical training;
- the student's contact with competent teachers, mentors with experience behind the teacher's desk;
- the students must be guided and their training must be individualized in accordance with the principle of unity in diversity, keeping into account the personality of each future teacher.

"Separation of the academic specialist training from the psychopedagogical training is contraindicated, as they are intertwined in the practice of this profession" (ibid. p.206)

Teacher training departments, as distinct academic structures for professionalization in the teaching and scientific research career, are empowered to organize activities for **continuous training** and specialty courses for the teaching staff. Therefore, they are accredited to offer specialized programmes regarding professional advancement through the awarding of teaching degrees, as well as specific scientific research activities.

At present, the certification for the competences required in the teaching profession can be obtained at two levels, as follows:

a) *Level I (initial)*: grants university graduates the right to work in pre-school institutions, primary schools and lower-secondary schools, on the condition that the candidates have obtained minimum 30 transferrable credits in the psychopedagogical formation programme (table 1).

b) *Level II (advanced)*: grants university graduates the right to work in upper-secondary, post-secondary and academic institutions, if the candidates satisfy two conditions:
- accumulate 60 transferrable credits in the psychopedagogical formation programme (full attendance of Level I and Level II);
- graduate a master's programme in the field of their university degree (table 2).

The psychoipedagogical study programme is designed and applied in the transferrable credit system, and the curriculum includes three components:
- core curriculum (fundamental psychopedagogical training, as well as specialty didactic training and practice);
- extended curriculum (extended psychopedagogical training and extended specialty didactic training and practice);
- optional curriculum (the students choose two subjects from two packages of optional subjects proposed for Level II)

Table 1

THE CERTIFICATION FOR THE COMPETENCES REQUIRED IN THE TEACHING PROFESSION
- LEVEL 1

No.	Subject	No hours		Grade		Grades	No of credits
		Curs	Seminar	Sem. I	Sem. II		
1.	*Educational Psychology*	28	28		-	E	5
2.	*Pedagogy I (Fundaments of pedagogy + Curriculum theory and methodology)*	28	28	-		E	5
3.	*Pedagogy II (Theory and methodology of training + Theory and methodology of evaluation)*	28	28		-	E	5
4.	*Didactics of Specialty*	28	28	-		E	5
5.	*Computer-assisted instruction*	14	14		-	C	2
6.	*Class management*	14	14	-		E	3
7.	*Teaching practice in the compulsory pre-academic educational system (1)*	-	42		-	C	3
8.	*Teaching practice in the compulsory pre-academic educational system (2)*	-	36	-		C	2
	TOTAL Nivel I	**140**	**218**			**5E+3C**	**30**
	Graduation exam, 1st Level	-	-	-		E	5

Table 2

THE CERTIFICATION FOR THE COMPETENCES REQUIRED IN THE TEACHING PROFESSION
- LEVEL 2

No.	Subject	No hours		Grade		Grades	No of credits
		Curs	Seminar	Sem. I	Sem. II		
9.	*Teenagers', young people's and adults' psycho-pedagogy*	28	14		-	E	5
10.	*Educational programme design and management*	28	14		-	E	5
11.	*Didactics of the field and developments in the didactics of the specialty (high-school, post-high-school, university)*	28	14	-		E	5
12.	*Quality of life and the educational environment*	14	28	-		E	5
13.	*Sociology of education*	14	28		-	E	5
14.	*Teaching practice (in the compulsory pre-academic educational system)*	-	42		-	C	2
	TOTAL Nivel II	**112**	**140**			**5E+1C**	**30**
	Graduation exam, 2nd Level	-	-	-		E	5

DISCUSSIONS

Pedagogical practice is a compulsory educational discipline, which ensures the formation of fundamental competences for teaching. In the pedagogue D. Potolea's opinion, (apud. MOLAN, 2007), the teacher must have the following competences:

✓ didactic competences (designing, leading and assessing the didactic process);
✓ psycho-educational competences;
✓ psycho-social, managerial and socio-educational competences.

The students' pedagogical practice training, an integral part of the core curriculum, is the activity carried out in the practice schools, where the student benefits from the help of the didactician, as well as from the help of the mentor.

In accordance with the legislation in force, the practice stage for Level one lasts for 1 semester, while for Level two it lasts for a single semester. Given its importance, as it focuses on the theoretical training and practical applicability, pedagogical training covers the most hours (42/semester), which places it on the first place in terms of weight in the curriculum of the psychopedagogical formation programme.

In 2001, the National Council for Teacher Training initiated the development of a system of standards for the teaching profession, staring from the idea that formal education is dominated by improvisation and empiricism. The goal for setting these standards was to ensure the future teachers' right to access the best training within specialized institutions. For this purpose, the standards for the teaching profession were designed as an answer to the question "What should a teacher know and do?"

The objectives, the contents and the types of organization of pedagogical practice are established in relation with the specific competences required in the teaching profession. Starting from certain principles that "express the current conception on the specific content of the teaching profession and on the qualities of a good teacher" (GLIGA ET. ALL, 2002), the professional standards for the teaching profession establish five core principles:

- the teacher has good knowledge of the field and of the didactics of the school subject they teach;
- the teacher knows the pupil and helps them in their own development;
- the teacher is a member of the community;
- the teacher has a reflective attitude;
- the teacher promotes a system of values in accordance with the educational ideal.

The pedagogical practice contributes to the formation of the competences needed for a teacher to be able to carry out efficient educational activities. In this sense, during the pedagogical practice, the focus is on (BOACĂ & GAVRILĂ, 2009):

- Getting to know the organization and functioning of a school;
- Analysing the main curriculum documents (curriculum frameworks, school curricula, alternative textbooks), curriculum auxiliaries (methodological guides, support teaching materials, etc.), as well as the analysis of the documents specific for the teacher's didactic design activity planning (calendar planning, teaching units, lesson plans, etc.);
- Knowing the educational activities carried out in the school;
- Participating in demonstration didactic activities carried out by experienced teachers (mentors) in the practice schools;
- Identifying the types of lessons and the stages of a lesson in the dynamics of the lesson they observe;
- Developing the skills to analyse the didactic activity observed;

- Obtaining the capacity to design didactic activity, to elaborate teaching tools (practice portfolio): observation charts for the demonstration lessons, lesson plans for the lessons they teach, work charts with differentiated tasks for the pupils' activity;
- Practicing the algorithm for competence-centred curricular design;
- Getting the skills for designing and constructing teaching materials;
- Building the capacity to use the equipment provided by the school as well as other auxiliary means;
- Forming the practical abilities through "simulation" didactic activities carried out by students under the guidance and in the presence of the mentors in the practice schools;
- The direct participation of students in designing, organizing, carrying out and self-assessing the lessons;
- Studying and getting to know the pupil's personalities;
- A pupil's psychopedagogical characterization.

The stages and activities that are specific for pedagogical practice are as follows (GAVRILĂ & BOACĂ, 2011):

➢ The stages of pedagogical practice:
  - *The initiation stage;*
  - *The stage when the student observes the demonstrative lessons held by the mentor in the practice school;*
  - *Preparing and delivering simulation lessons and the final specialty lesson, as well as the homeroom class.*

➢ The activities that are specific for these stages of pedagogical practice:
  a) *Activities for getting to know the practice school*
    Through this type of activities, the student will get to know:
    - the organizational structure of the school (teachers, pupils, number of classes, school boards, departments);
    - school equipment (offices, laboratories, didactic tools and materials);
    - the timetable for school activities (lessons, homeroom classes, tutoring and guidance time, methodical activities, teacher-parent meetings);
    - types of collaboration between the school and the family and the community;
    - documents for planning and organizing the training and educational activity in school;
    - the main provisions regarding the operation with and the keeping of mark rolls.
  b) *Educational activities of observation* carried out in classrooms, offices, laboratories of the mentors in the practice school;
  c) *Observation of methodical activities of departments, form-teacher boards,* and, if possible, *of cultural-educational activities of the pupils;*
  d) *Making the didactic material* needed for carrying out training and educational activities;
  e) *Preparation and delivery of* simulation lessons, of the final specialty lesson and the homeroom class;
  f) Observation of one pupil and *writing the chart for psychopedagogical characterization* for this particular pupil.

The outcome of the pedagogical practice training is to "put the theoretical knowledge to good use and to create the foundation for practical teaching formation, by providing abilities that are specific for teachers in a modern educational system" (BOCOŞ, 2007).

CONCLUSIONS
The pedagogical practice training:
- is the most important means through which the students get into direct contact with a class of pupils, with all the unpredictable aspects it entails;
- offers to each student the opportunity to practice their pedagogical skills, both in front of their colleagues and in front of the pupils;
- requires "live" assistance and guidance from teachers with experience in the teaching – learning – assessing activity;
- requires one to know how to act (Gavrilă et. all, 2015);
- gives students the possibility to receive practical advice from the day-to-day activity of methodists, mentors, tutors;
- makes the students assume a responsible attitude and prepare seriously and thoroughly for the activity they perform;
- makes students responsible in regards to the way they conduct their didactic activity, by proposing learning tasks in accordance with the school curriculum (Tulbure, 2010);
- gives the opportunity to express creative and self-critical behaviour, sincere and open relations (Mace, 1995);
- increases the students' ability to adapt to the work environment within the practice school;
- familiarizes the future graduates with the bureaucratic aspects of the teaching profession;
- can offer a high degree of success in the process of professional insertion;
- is a precious source for the formation of didactic professionalism, as it provides various types of experiences.

The student who goes through the psychopedagogical formation programme and wants to become a teacher must be interested, on the one hand, in knowing the professional standards for the teaching profession (Law of National Education 1/2011 and The Classification of Occupations in Romania), and on the other hand in accumulating knowledge, skills and abilities that are defining characteristics of a good teacher.

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