

THE DEVELOPMENT OF PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCES AT FUTURE TEACHERS

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Abstract: *In this article, we want to reveal the importance of developing professional competences at future teachers. The students, attending the Programme Pedagogy of Primary and Pre-school Education are of different ages, some of them have already passed the age of an average student and therefore, we want to emphasize that initial training, the one carried on at undergraduate should take into consideration the highest standards, but personalized, according to the level of students` prior education. Mature students come from the educational system, they are pre-school or primary school teachers with psycho-pedagogic training and experience in the didactic career. They want to complete their university education and we want to show the determinant factors for their choice. We also want to emphasize the most viable directions in the training for a didactic career.*

Keywords: *foresight, didactic career, competence, education*

1. The Education in a society of reforms

The specialists in foresight predict the future of schools as very difficult and in constant change. They also anticipate that it is in our power to create a desirable future, as presented in the vision on higher education from Romania in 2025 “*the society will be centred on the individual and his needs that will become more and more complex and varied. Diversity, equality of chances, creativity, flexibility, the ecological spirit and transparency will persist as important values of the society from the predictable future.*”² Education, as main promotor for the development of the society, is asked to search for the best solutions to support the sociocultural progress of humanity. The target is building a better future for the human being. Starting with the strategies

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developed in Lisbon in 2000 and improved in Stockholm, specialists have outlined the perspectives for the development of a knowledge-based society, capable of dynamizing economy in a multidimensional and multicultural society. In this respect, it is necessary for the youngsters that carry on a productive activity in a globalized and multicultural society, to possess certain abilities that make him performant. Only the competitive one can succeed in a knowledge-based society, the ones that can easily adapt to changes, those that possess basic competences for a good professional in a certain field, but also general competences necessary for an easy adjustment to changes. In the past 20 years, the Romanian educational system has undergone major changes; the integration in the European Community has brought about new dimensions for the development and reformation of the educational system. The adherence to the European Community brings profound changes of mentality and vision as far as the educational system, on all its levels, is concerned. The institutional and content reforms try to rally to the requirements of the European education. These reforms create numerous factual and conceptual transformations that lead to a reorganization and restructuring of traditional ways of thinking and acting (that oppose resistance) and to the adoption of new orientations that are not always easily accepted. Reform implies sustained efforts from all involved factors, either subjects or beneficiaries of education. Any change is regarded with reluctance and anxiety because it involves changing a model of thinking and handling.

In Romania, after the adherences to the European Community and after the national educational policies have been rallied to the requirements of European education, the educational reform has brought about big changes. For instance, the higher education has undergone an evaluation process that divided universities into different performance levels: education centred universities (that offer only undergraduate studies), education centred and research universities or education and art centred universities (that offer undergraduate and Master's degree programmes) and universities of advanced research and education (that offer undergraduate, Master's degree and Doctoral studies). Each programme of studies has been hierarchized based on European quality standards, released by The Association of European Universities. The evaluations was made "*according to the quality of teaching and learning in universities, scientific research, the relationship between the external environment and universities and the institution's ability to*

reach its objectives and ability to modernize and change". The evaluation was meant to be a „tool on behalf of the universities, so that they can centre better their activity", as declared by the Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sport. According to this evaluation and hierarchization, each university has to revise its mission and offers for the society, so that it put its resources at the disposal of the community. The university's mission is to create economic, social, spiritual culture. On the other hand, it has to prepare specialists for different social fields; it has to comply with the local and regional labour market demands. The faculties or departments, after the new organization, have to improve their course offer, according to the labour market's needs, to the European curricular standards and according to the National Qualification Framework from the Higher Education. In this respect, the curriculum has to be compatible with the national qualification framework standards. When revising the curriculum, a special attention should be given to the transfer of knowledge through the equilibrium between core, field-related and internship disciplines.

2. Professionalizing the didactic career

The professionalization of didactic career has become a necessity that demands the reconsideration of certain concepts related to becoming a teacher. In this respect, the concerns of educational policies are oriented towards the way teachers' initial training is performed and then lifelong training. *The Faculty for Educational Sciences, Psychology and Social Assistance* with „Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad, through its undergraduate programme *Pedagogy of Primary and Pre-school Education* prepares teachers for primary and pre-school education. An efficient initial training is a primary objective of the faculty's policy. Initial training cannot stop at undergraduate studies, the three year long undergraduate studies have become insufficient for a good training of future teachers. Therefore, undergraduate studies must be followed by a Master's Degree that go thoroughly into primary and pre-schools teachers initial training. Students that have chosen at *The Faculty for Educational Sciences, Psychology and Social Assistance*, the study programme *Pedagogy of Primary and Pre-school Education* are of different ages, not just young students. A considerable part of students enrolled in the 1st year are already integrated in the educational system, but have only high-school studies. Their desire is to complete their education and obtain a university degree. Social constraints

determine the need for professional training in all fields. The competitiveness on the labour market, determined by different causes like: decrease in the number of school age children, school restructuring, advanced standards at employment bring about a revision of training for didactic career. So, teachers (pre-school and primary school) with length of service (some of them 1st degree teachers) feel threatened of losing their job. Therefore, among our students we have people already part of the educational system and have a long didactic career behind them. They chose to continue their studies in order to obtain a degree in university studies.

3. Applied study

In the study that we have carried on, we have analysed the factors that have determined pre-school and primary school teachers, already working in the educational system, to enrol in a university. We have undergone the experiment on the 1st year of study 2008-2011 (100 students) that was composed of 50 % students at the average student age and 50% mature students. We have given the mature students a questionnaire to fill in which we have named *Determinant factors in choosing to continue studies*. The questionnaire is listed below:

1. What has determined you to continue your studies?

Current professional training does not fit to the demands of the job?

I. in very little extend;

II. in little extend;

III. in certain extend;

IV. in high extend;

V. in very high extend.

2. In which of the following fields do you think you should develop your competences?

I. in the field of the speciality;

II. in the field of pedagogy and educational psycho - pedagogy;

III. in the field of didacticism/field didacticism;

IV. in the field of information and communication techniques applied in the educational process;

V. in inter and trans - disciplinary fields aiming at educational alternative strategies;

3. How important is for you to update your professional training?

- I. in very little extend;
- II. in little extend;
- III. in certain extend;
- IV. in high extend;
- V. in very high extend.

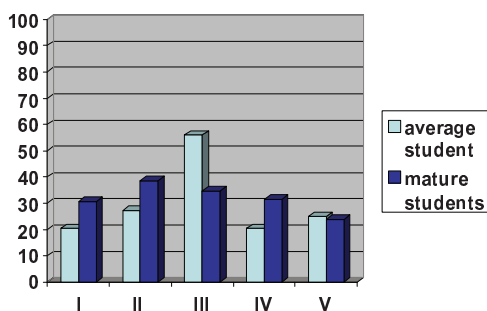
4. Do you give yourselves time for professional training?

- I. in very little extend;
- II. in little extend;
- III. in certain extend;
- IV. in high extend;
- V. in very high extend.

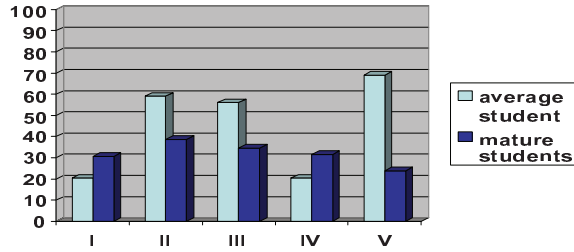
5. What are your expectations from the university courses?

- I. better results in the didactic activity;
- II. performing innovations in the pedagogic field;
- III. elaboration of curricular auxiliaries;
- IV. promotion in a management position;
- V. certification of professional competences.

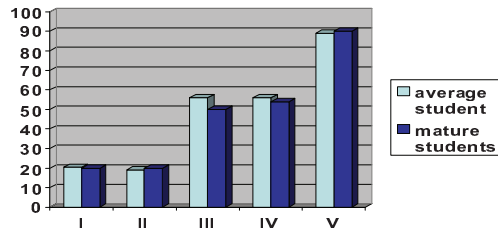
1. What has determined you to continue your studies? Current professional training does not fit to the demands of the job?



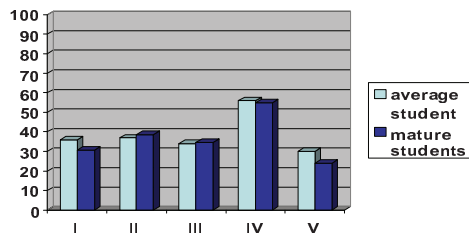
In which of the following fields do you think you should develop your competences?



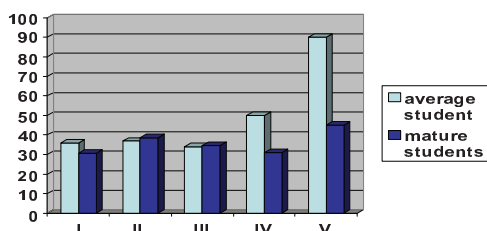
3. How important is for you to update your professional training?



4. Do you give yourselves time for professional training?



5. What are your expectations from the university courses?



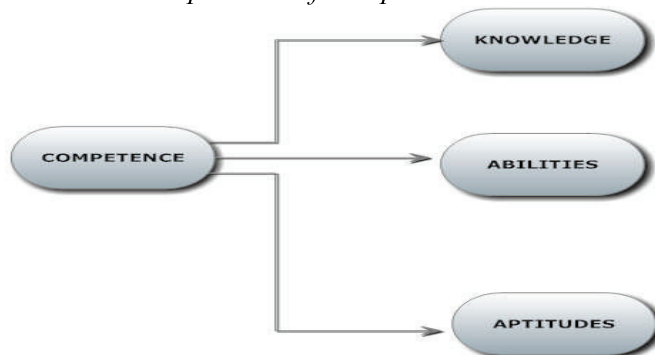
As we saw in the tables behind, the answers are different from item to item, the mature students are more vocational interest, they want to learn more, to become better teachers and there wish are to improve their didactic methodologies, performances and academic results of their students.

4. Discussion

The diversity of students demands a need to personalize the response the university systems gives to their needs. The diversity is determined by real needs for training. Young students that come from different high-schools require a special training, a complex one, while the students that already work in the system (pre-school and primary school teachers) and have initial psycho-pedagogic training, require specific training. The faculty has to respond to the training demands, without insisting on redundant elements. Even if the curriculum is common for all students, the need to personalize learning is a sine qua non condition. Undergraduate studies involve initial training, namely a complex process of building competences that allow the teacher to act flexibly and creatively in the didactic field. For teachers that already work in the educational system, we cannot talk about *initial training*; it is more like a special feature that we call *lifelong learning*. It is actually an integration of initial training and lifelong learning, based on the fact that these students possess psycho-pedagogic training and continue their studies. We observe from the analysis of the responses given by the students from the experimental group, their tendency to train themselves from the perspective of the education's need to be permanent. This

training, the mature students enrol to, is known under the notion of *permanent/lifelong learning*, an activity with pedagogic and social content, which is designed, carried on and developed within the educational process with the aim to develop professional competences at a highly referential level. The competence is *the capacity, the recognized ability of a person to work and decide based on a thorough knowledge in the fields where s/he works.*³ Competence⁴ *sums up an integrated assembly of knowledge, abilities and aptitudes that the subject has to possess in order to successfully deal with a category of situations, which involves adaptability, prompt problem and project handling, correct decision making.* The concept of competence is considered a contextualization of *acquisitions on a performative level* (knowledge, skills and abilities, see Figure no 1), all being used in a certain context, namely a competent person is authorized to carry on a certain activity due to her/his level of performance in a specific field, certified by a competent authority.

Figure no1. *The components of competence*



Competence means performance, namely knowing how to do something properly, designates an applied *savoir-faire*. But competence involves among other characteristics, also a mobilization of heuristic type⁵. Being competent involves the capacity to transfer, which entitles us to state that a competence should be regarded also from a transversal perspective.

³ <http://www.larousse.com/competences>

⁴ Bernaerdt, Delory, G. Leroy, Paquay, Rey, Romainville, Wolfs. *A ceux qui s'interrogent sur les compétences et sur leur évaluation. Forum*, mars 1997, 21-27.

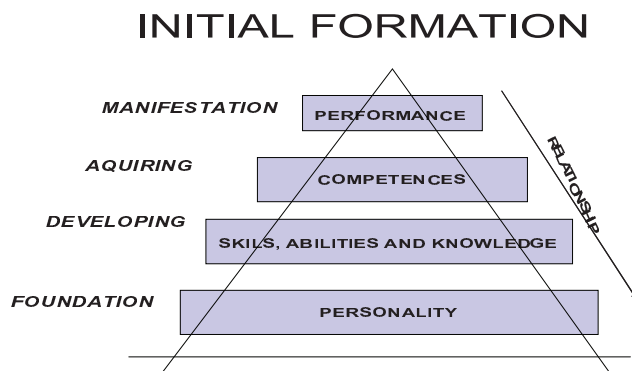
⁵ Tardif, J. (2006). *L'évaluation des compétences. Documenter le parcours de développement*. Montréal: Chenelière Éducation.

For the profession of teacher for primary school and kindergarten, students should acquire the following:

- ❖ general competences;
- ❖ field-related competences, psycho-pedagogic competences specific for their field of study;
- ❖ methodological competences;
- ❖ communication and relating competences;
- ❖ management competences.

Below, we present a hierarchy of student acquired competences during the initial training.

Figure no 2. *Hierarchy of students` initial acquisitions*



Developing these acquisitions depends on many factors: the level of students` prior training, intellectual level, pedagogic skills of the teaching academic body, but also their attendance at lectures and seminars. Under curricular aspect, psycho-pedagogic competences are assured by a cumulus of field-related disciplines of theoretical and practical training, spread in three years of undergraduate studies, then studied thoroughly at the Master`s Degree, all of them compatible to European systems.

It is therefore required to centre the development of competences suitable for the didactic career on the following directions:

A. Field of study:

- up-to-date field-related knowledge;
- cognitive and functional-actioning competences in the field of study;
- the ability to take action/carry on/innovate/research in the field of study;
- the ability to identify and access documentation sources in the field of study
- the ability to use the computer and access communication networks;
- the ability to develop interpersonal and group communication

B. The field of projection, fulfilment and assessment of the educational process

- planning, projecting and assessing the pupil centred learning activities;
- optimal fulfilment of learning activities;
- revaluating of digital means available in the classroom;
- implementation of new strategies and modern learning methods;
- promoting the complementary assessment methods.

Training for didactic profession aims at acquiring those competences that assure the teaching staff the possibility to continue the lifelong learning considering the fact that he himself is a trainer for future generations. Therefore, s/he should be able to change constantly according to social changes, but especially to be always fresh in the eyes of the trainees. Thus, his professional activity is an optimal one. From foresight perspective in 2025 „*more and more people will approach their life in a creative manner*” because society will impose various constraints, from changing the job to changing the location (the country) where s/he works. Thus, people will need education more than that have needed ever before. The number of mature students will definitely increase because the border between „*career, personal development and free time will blur*”, in a new social context that promotes the ability to communicate, flexibility, creativity, but also mobility.

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