

GENUINE AND DECLARATIVE FOR EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING. PROFESSIONAL OF EDUCATION AS RESEARCHER – VERSUS RESEARCHER AS A PROFESSIONAL

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Abstract: *In the academic world, a kind of Hamlet's type question has become almost obsessive: a scholar/ academic staff should be or should not be more a professional of teaching activity, or more a researcher.*

*The paper presents the coordinates of a long-term and thorny debate about the topic of the balance between teaching and research in the context of academic staff status. This presentation is based, on one side, on the analysis of the different opinions expressed on wide geographical areas of the academic world; on the other side a research about the topic within Romanian context is announced and presented. The methods of collecting opinions were investigation based on questionnaires, focus groups organized and run in different contexts and on different occasions and managed observation on a wider category of teachers, beyond the academic world, in pre-university system. The reason of extended the area of observation is that the manner of the entire teaching staff assessment tends to be focused more and more on **the proofs** of research and less and less on the teaching **performance** reflected by the students' performances.*

A clear distinction between the professor as a researcher and the professional researcher, as a defined status, is argued. The conclusion of this investigation is put into the context of the worldwide opinion on this topic.

Keywords: *teacher as a researcher and professional researcher; balance between teaching and research in education*

1. Great dilemmas of contemporary world

Nowadays when the 5G symbols of progress or the robots habitat extension knock at the gate of the human modern world, a set of big questions arose into education. They are focused on the specificity of the new generations of students, on the challenges of the future world they will be confronted with as adults or on the appropriate type of teaching staff for these new generations.

Within this context, the educational research and the teaching activity are two important issues that imply huge concerns. The question is how the proper answers to these two aspects have to be balanced, aiming to obtain a genuine quality in education. It seems to be a real danger to obtain faked results, buried in diplomas, certificates and impressive numbers of credits as proofs of *almost nothing*.

Our research has as roots an impressive number of complaints appeared mostly within informal contexts about the manner of assessment and promotion of the teaching staff in Romania and in other parts of the world, firstly on the academic level and during the last decade also in the pre-university educational system.

The essence of these complains was the reason for a documentary research about the explicitly expressed worldwide opinion on the issue. An important number of researches and published papers are focused on the balance between teaching & research has been found. They come from the East of the Earth (Australia, New Zealand), Europe (a consistent number

of countries) and The West of the World (the especially USA and Canada). The opinions have different nuances, depending on the period they have been expressed and the type of staff investigated.

2. Teaching and research – two components of the activity within the educational system

The question of the need to rethink the teaching-research report appears on all the meridians of the globe. A number of ideas are milestones in the area.

Firstly, there are voices that claim the necessity to consider the research in education as a priority, not only declared but visible and well understood. These voices seem to be the expression of a new "fashion" in the education of nowadays. They claim that the education must be mainly assessed through the performances in research of all the representatives of the teaching staff. It is the reality of nowadays.

But, even if this trend seems to be enough strong, some voices consider that the research tasks of the academic staff was absolutized/ maximized, without a rational distinction between research and the educational activity itself. They highlight the idea that education, expressed generically by teaching, remains the very essence of the educational system, the very purpose of the educational institution. Consequently, the performances of the teaching process, expressed mainly by the quality of the graduates' competencies, should be the milestone of the higher education quality.

Speaking metaphorically, it seems as if one asks the forester to investigate how to improve the life of the forest, or asks the gardener to increase the yield and beauty of his garden, while they themselves manage and implement the practical activity in the forest and in the garden. Both the Forester and the gardener do their own research, they make improvements, as a request of even their practical and productive work. They are not robots, they need to be creative. In the same way, the teaching staff is not formed by robots. They must teach in a creative manner, answering constantly to the changing needs of their students.

On the other side, these practitioners must receive and above all, apply the research results to those who, by profession and daily main activity search for optimization paths, the professional researchers.

The distinction between the professionals of research in any area of knowledge and the practitioners with open-minded and permanent inquiring attitudes of these areas must be clearly done. Just like Ying and Yang, the work of the two categories must be matched.

This because the foresters, the gardeners, or the teachers themselves if neglect the trees, the flowers or the students focusing their attention on how would be better to do their works the results cannot be good. A professional is strongly solicited in the area of the activity (research or implementation of research) so that a twenty-four hours day must be rationally used. Otherwise, the old saying according to which one running after two rabbits doesn't find finally anyone is fully proved.

This truth is expressed in different ways in different papers. I selected only some few examples from the literature as an introduction to my own reflections based on inquiry and observation while a long-term controlled observation (within informal and formal contexts).

The papers focused on the delicate relation between teaching and research highlight some other important issues. A selection of them is further presented.

Mohammad Ayub Khan (2017:342) put three important questions which, explicitly or only implicitly, are found in all the papers focused on the issue of the rapport between teaching and research. These questions are concerned about: (1) the importance for the higher education institutions to bring the teaching and research activities together as an effective strategy for the quality education; (2) the necessity of an optimal integration between these

teaching & research, considered as different but interrelated education components; (3) the potential implications associated with the integration of teaching and research activities for the institutions of higher education.

A consistent number of papers appeared, trying to find possible answers for these questions or others derived from them. The answers are based on reflections, observations or intended research.

A first issue arose from the investigation of different opinions. It stresses the increasing complexity of academic teaching staffs' activity, with both positive and negative consequences.

Turk Marko, Ledić Jasminka (2016) shows that an academic teaching staff has some core fields of activity: teaching, researching, and community engagement. But these three areas are completed with some others as project preparation and management, collecting research funds, application of new teaching methods based on pedagogical research (unvalued at a proper level), recognizing and using new opportunities, taking initiative, effective networking etc. One can find here the extension of the field of action for the representatives of teaching staff in university. But, the first two places are covered by **teaching and research**.

Khan Mohammad Ayub (2017:342) shows some similarities and differences between teaching activity and the research activity. Thus, the author considers (quoting Gibbs.G.2002) that both of them (teaching & research) "require dedication, motivation, and resources to be performed. Both have tangible and intangible benefits for the educational institutions, teachers, and students. To be a good teacher is as much important as to be a good researcher". Between similarities is highlighted that a research paper at a conference giving public speeches on scientific research outcomes requires exactly the same level of knowledge and skills as required by teaching a lesson at school/ university. Also, the course management functions (planning, delivery, and evaluation) demand many of the knowledge and skills of research planning, development, and assessment of a research activity. But "however, there are some specific differences and similarities between these two important components of higher education programs and services" highlights Khan Mohammad Ayub (2017:342). The author presents a synthesis of the ideas coming from other authors from specialty literature (Hattie J., Marsh H. W. 1996; Marsh H. W., Hattie J, 2002; Khan M. A. et al. 2015) stressing that these similarities and differences gravitate around the following issues: (1) The objectives of and needs for teaching and/or research; (2) The process required to carry out teaching and/or research activities; (3) Resources needed to carry out teaching and/or research activities; (4) The impact of teaching and research on the educational institutions; (5) Qualification (knowledge, abilities) needed to perform either teaching or research; (6) The importance and benefits of teaching or research for the teacher or researcher. A relationship of mutual dependence and the idea that they should be complimentary are underlined.

Another important issue what is coming out of the mentioned literature papers is that of the teaching staff's opinion regarding the balance between teaching and research. This balance is analyzed firstly from the point of view of chances for genuine performance in both of them, secondly, from the point of view of its effects especially upon the teachers' motivation for work etc; and, finally from the point of view of its implication for selection, payment and promotion in both in the academic world and in a pre-university system.

A study made in Croatia (1996 quoted by Turk Marko, Ledić Jasminka, 2016:95) started from the idea to analyze the balance between the arguments of those who advocate the synergy of research and teaching as components of educational activity (Brew & Boud, 1995; Jenkins, 2000; Neumann, 1993) and those who advocate their mutual independence (Hattie & Marsh, 1996; Ramsden & Moses, 1992).

The same paper (Turk Marko, Ledić Jasminka. 2016:103) presents several quoted opinions of members of teaching staff, that appear to contain a very often heard truth coming both from teachers and academic teaching staff as well belonging to very different educational systems. The merit of this paper is that these opinions are obtained in the context of a research based on structured interviews. Usually, especially during the last period, these kinds of opinion are strongly expressed only in informal contexts. The promotion in career done with a direct connection to this over-evaluation of the research has produced deep negative feelings mainly between the professional with a high respect for the genuine quality of their work. But, unfortunately, the teaching staff I interacted with seems to have not enough courage to openly express these negative feelings in a formal context. I can say that opinions, as the quoted by the mentioned papers (presented below) have been often heard in informal context during my long-term inquiry.

Thus, an Associate Professor, NI, S&H says (Turk Marko, Ledić Jasminka. 2016:103)

*“As a teacher, in our conditions, it is very **difficult to be a researcher**. There are not enough funds for any larger research. I’ve been in the system only for the past five years (...). As soon as I arrived, I noticed how things are, and that **I can’t engage in serious research if I want to be a good teacher, considering I have around 600 students annually (...). Only to glance at every one of those 600 students and write their grade in five places takes full time engagement**”.*

Full Professors say (Turk Marko, Ledić Jasminka. 2016:103)

“Still, I see myself as primarily a teacher simply because that’s a duty, part of my job that is ongoing, that takes a specific amount of time, so you mustn’t fail. (...) teaching implies a much bigger workload – to prepare in time, to teach properly, then there’s the evaluation of students, and it’s not like you don’t care whether you’re a good or bad teacher. (...) In time, you simply end up feeling more as a teacher, less as a researcher” (Full Professor, S&H).

“Investment” in teaching, which is the result of the need to satisfy new teaching programmes and the large number of students, is also connected with the participants seeing themselves primarily as teachers: “(...) since I’ve introduced a lot of new courses, I’ve spent the last few years investing a lot of time in preparation for class and for those courses, so I’ve probably concentrated more on that than on research” (Full Professor, PI, N&T).

Three core ideas are highlighted by these opinions: (1) the complexity of teaching activity that requires a lot of time and effort in order to be properly done; (2) the time as a inevitable restricted resource which cannot be effectively distributed if the workload for a member of teaching staff is not rationally considered; (3) the funds for teaching and research which are not enough for doing both on an effective level.

The essence of these ideas can be easily found in any discussions one has with professionals of the university. They are completed by others, as the quoted paper presents further: (1) *“I’m mostly engaged in research, but I personally prefer my role as a teacher”* (Associate Professor, NI, S&H, Turk Marko, Ledić Jasminka. 2016:104) or (2) *“Because of my personal scientific appeal propensities, always as a teacher, my whole life. (...) in that context, when I think about the positioning of our university, which is unambiguously research oriented, with this [teaching] dimension being rather weak, I personally don’t feel good”* (Full Professor, PI, S&H, 2016:104).

The taste of frustration (present in the statements above) and its motivational consequences on the results of teaching and research, should determine a serious concern about what can mean genuine quality in education, for all the decision-making factors in higher education worldwide.

These presented opinions, coming from an organized research are in perfect consensus with all the opinions collected through informal discussions at different conferences along the years since the issue of the balance between teaching and research became a more and more important aspect of the teaching staff concern (at the beginning only at the academic level and then, step by step becoming a pre-university issue as well). A selection of conferences where deliberately our colleagues' opinions regarding this issue have been collected according to an intended observation based on some aspects specifically inquired is presented: (a) EDULEARN16, organized in Barcelona 2016 by IATED; (b) International Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies. International Conference in Ottawa 2015; (c) 3rd World Conference on Learning, Teaching and Educational Leadership (WCLTA-2012); (d) 1st World Congress of Administrative & Political Sciences (ADPOL-2012), Antalia, Turkey; (e) International conference ESREA Network on Adult Educators & Trainers, Thessaloniki, Greece, November 2009; (f) International Conference, RIFEFF, Guadeloupe, 2007.

An interesting idea must be highlighted. There is a stronger opposition to an overstatement of research, especially for full professors who no longer have the issue of career advancement as a preoccupation, compared with younger staff. Young people's representatives have two types of attitudes: (1) are retained to express an opinion, even in an informal setting but to unknown persons; (2) it seems to be bold to declare themselves as supporters of the dominant researcher's status, as long as the officials consider research to be a priority criterion. This happens even though, among their friends, they express different opinions, often similar to the full professors' ones.

3. Selection, assessment, and promotion in the educational system

The yearly assessment in both levels (academic and lately even in the pre-university educational system), and especially the promotion in career are intimately connected to the balance between teaching and research.

And yet, the reality shows an increase in the share of research in the promotion process. The research itself is differently assessed.

When it is about promotion in the academic world, only the specific scientific or technological areas of research are considered as important. The research focused on the teaching and learning process was not enough value. Even when the criteria for promotion contains reference about teaching activities the wording of presentation are vague enough so that they are difficult to become operational.

The Report presented by Cashmore A., Cane C.& Cane R, p. 6 underlines that: *"Commonly, teaching and learning was considered of secondary importance to subjectspecific research, and in some institutions there were no policies to utilize teachingand learning activity in promotion criteria whatsoever. (...) Clearly, improving the quality of teaching in higher education is now high on the agenda (Department for Business Industry and Skills, 2011; National Union of Students, 2012; Million+ Group 2012), but without appropriate recognition and reward for those involved in teaching this will be hard to achieve."*

This is another example of statements existing in official documents without proper echoes in the real world.

The mentioned paper (Cashmore A., Cane C.& Cane R., w.y) presents (pp.17-19) a research done on a number of institutions of higher education (with statistic results considered

less representative), but which made possible to be established a Structure of Promotion Pathways despite the wide diversity of the used criteria for promotion. Three manners of promotion have been identified: (a) three-track pathway; (b) two-track pathway; (c) single-track pathway. Each of them has specific criteria. (Fig.1)

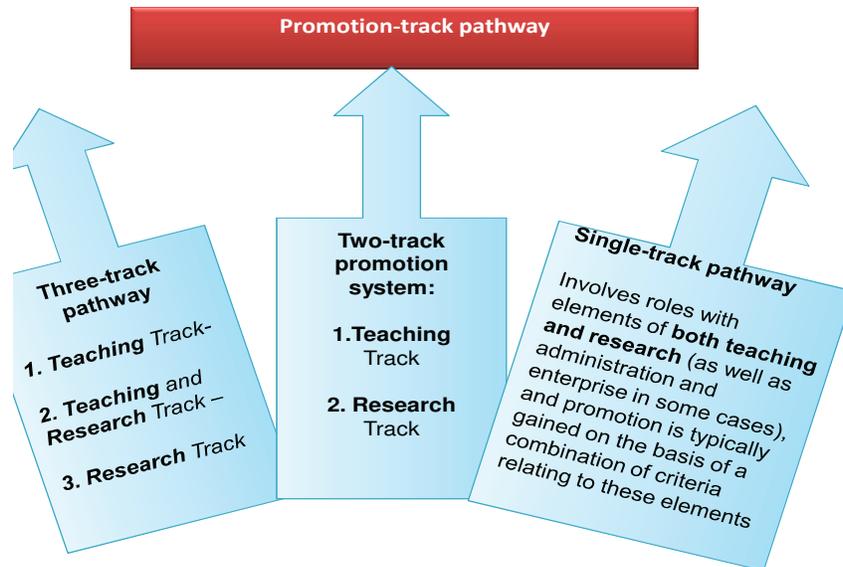


Fig. 1. Structure of Promotion Pathways

The authors consider that the most common model is the first one which “includes three distinct tracks for career advancement. (...) these promotion policies allow for academic career progression to be focused along either a research route, a teaching route (frequently referred to as ‘teaching and scholarship’), or a teaching and research route. Some policies of this type have these distinct routes for promotion all the way to the most senior levels (professorial level). Other policies contain distinct tracks that come together at a senior level (normally professor, but in a limited number of cases senior lecturer), with a single set of criteria within which teaching or research (or even enterprise or administration, which are included by some institutions) can be emphasized as part of the case for promotion” (Cashmore A., Cane C.& Cane R (w.y),p.17).

The second model seems to be less among the policies examined for this report. It „contains structures for career progression that are based on two pathways with separate role profiles and promotion criteria for each. In some policies, these pathways clearly separate research-focused positions and teaching-focused positions, while others include a ‘teaching and research’ track and either a ‘teaching’ track or a ‘research’ track. Where a ‘teaching and research’ track is included, the balance between teaching and research varies, with some flexibility allowed. In particular, where the other track is ‘research’, the research involved in the ‘teaching and research’ track can often be pedagogic. (Cashmore A., Cane C.& Cane R .w.y,p.18).

The third model „involves roles with elements of teaching and research (as well as administration and enterprise in some cases), and promotion is typically gained on the basis of a combination of criteria relating to these elements. In most of the policies examined, this combination of criteria is sufficiently flexible to allow for academic careers with different foci.

For example, promotion might be reliant on three criteria (teaching, research and enterprise) with 'sufficient' performance being necessary in two and 'outstanding' performance in the other" Cashmore A., Cane C.& Cane R .w.y.p.19).

The presentation of these three models has been done by quoting because the specificity of the UK analysis was intended to be caught with accuracy.

4. Some conclusions of a Romanian investigation in the area

The issue of the balance between research and teaching became a real concern in Romania as well. This is the reason for an attentive analysis of what our colleagues think and declare in different formal or informal context regarding the mentioned topic. I have investigated the topic along the last decade firstly because the criteria of the promotion have been changed significantly and the bureaucratic aspects of the teaching activity appeared to suffocate the staff.

The methods of collecting opinions were: investigation based on questionnaires, focus groups organized and run in different contexts and on different occasions. A considerable number of teaching staff has been involved; the most recent investigation of the topic has been done within the context of a workshop run at the International Conference "Competence", Brasov, Romania, 2018).

The gathered results were connected to the conclusions of a long-term managed observation on a wider category of teachers, beyond the academic world, in the pre-university system. The reason of extended the area of observation is that the manner of the entire teaching staff assessment tends to be focused more and more on *the proofs* of research and less and less on the teaching performance reflected by the students' performances. This paper doesn't intend to present quantitative data, but some interesting conclusions may be highlighted.

First of all, a significant difference between the answers given within a formal context and in an informal context by both academic staff and pre-university teachers must be stressed. Usually, within the formal context (questionnaires or formal focus groups) the answers are not very conclusive, many subjects declaring that it is normal to consider research as an important area of activity and criterion for promotion, probably because this type of answers is considered as suitable. I present this statement because the same persons express opposite opinions within informal contexts. They appear not only in the academic world but in pre-university context as well, even if the meaning of research is understood differentiated from person to person. Thus, it is interesting and symptomatic for the authenticity of responses that often the same subjects who within the formal context express these kinds of opinions, within informal contexts are among the strongest challengers against research as a priority promotion criterion in their careers.

Another interesting aspect is that the quantitative research is placed on a socle even in areas where measurement and quantitative approach are not only hard but less significant.

A considerable number of teachers and academic staff consider that the research activity is important for education but as a source of updating the information to be taught and as an activity of the teaching staff focused on developing and improving the teaching activity itself, not as the most important criterion for promotion.

The difficulties for a genuine research, especially within the didactic area are often highlighted by a significant part of the subjects.

Connecting these opinions with what the previous subchapter has presented, one can say that the same ideas can be found on all the meridians of the world. Maybe a serious research on this topic, using effective instruments and serious observations in the field, connected to the research of other important aspects of the school/ university life (motivation

for teaching, motivation for learning in students' case, wellbeing of the educational communities, the real results of the institutions of education expressed by their graduates' competencies) should be the focus of the research activity for the professionals of research aiming to solve in a better manner this thorny issue of the balance between teaching and research, for the benefit of the society as a whole.

5. Proposal for partial integration without affecting the status of the university

University as an educational institution has as essence the training of specialized professionals for different areas of activity. It is true that this top educational institution as representative of the tertiary level education has to be concern about the research issues but for sure the balance between teaching and research should be carefully considered.

Ramsden and Moses (1992) show three possibilities to conceptualize the teaching-research relationship: (1). *completely integrated*, starting from the idea that if one wants to be an active researcher the starting point should be being a good teacher; (2). *independent*; even if a relationship between them is considered but they are, finally, mutually independent

(3). *partly integrated*, which is based on the understanding that research work and teaching need to be interrelated, not on an individual level, but on an institutional level (division/department). (Turk Marko, Ledić Jasminka (2016). *Between Teaching and Research: Challenges of the Academic Profession in Croatia*).

Having as a starting point this last alternative, an institutional integration can be prefigured, taking into account the possibilities, the competences of each scholar and the needs of the university to integrate optimally among those conducting teaching and research activity. The figure nr. 2 presents a possible structure of a university where this integration ensures a balance between research and teaching activity in the benefit both of each member of the staff, and the university as a whole.

The figure highlights two tracks:

- the track of the faculties (with their departments) where are active two kinds of teaching staff: one focused only on teaching, another one focused on teaching and research, mainly but not exclusively research on the didactic area.
- the track of the academic institute of research where are active professional researchers: some focused on only on research according to their specialties, others having the possibility to teach as part-time of their work.

The promotion should be ensured according to the specific activity of each category of staff, based on defined specific criteria.

Thus, professional educators can have as their priority to make education better, using their accumulated experience and sometimes research activities, but not forgetting their purpose: to rain new professional for the requested fields by society.

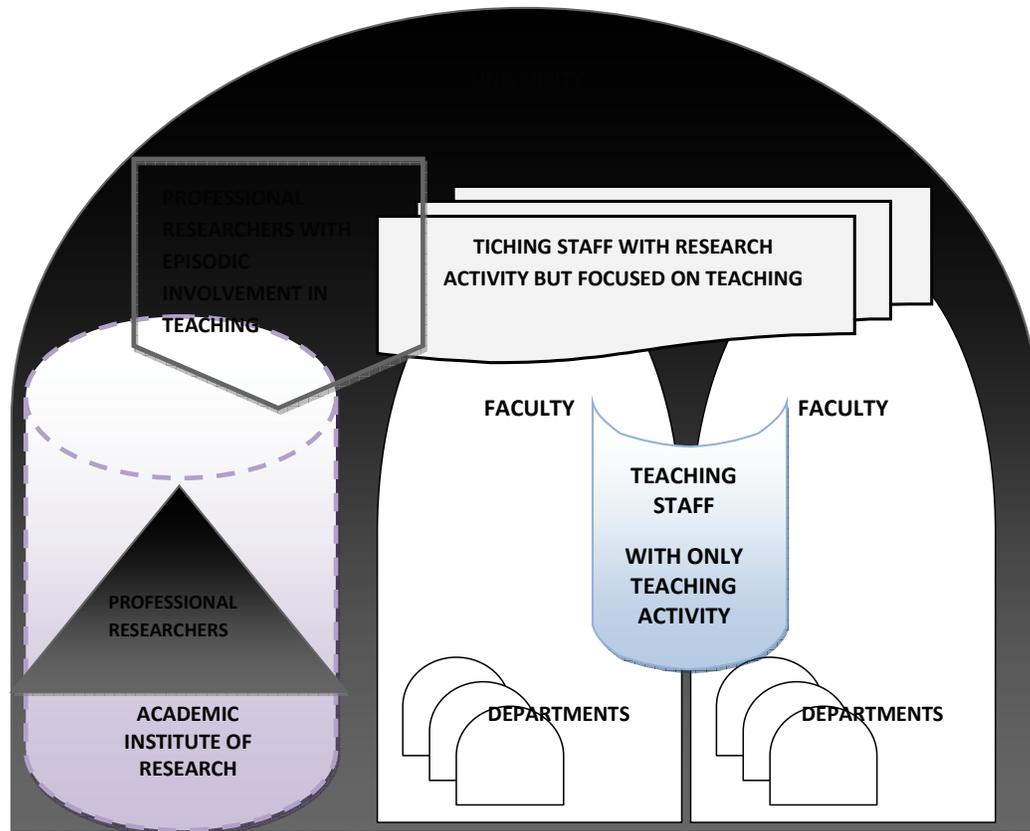


Fig. 2. The structure of a university with defined tracks for teaching and research and a combined area

There are also researchers working in the university. Their priority is the research activity. Their experimental field may be specific areas of sciences, social, political, medical or other types of activities, but also the education as a determinant of the quality of all the people in the society.

The quality of the specific work of these defined categories of scholars (focused on teaching, research or both) should be the mirror of the quality for each university, the source of a genuine prestige.

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