

WHAT STUDENTS IN PRESCHOOL AND PRIMARY EDUCATION THINK ABOUT LEARNING TO LEARN?!

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ABSTRACT

Quality of Learning and Lifelong Learning remain a necessity for society, for each individual and a challenge for all teachers. The quality of education depends on the level of development and harmonization of general competencies and transversal competences. From the eight Key Competences, common to many occupations (approved by CNFPA Resolution No. 86/24.06.2008 and recognized at European Level) „learning to learn” competence is central for this study. The research is part of the observational phase of a larger study on the development and counselling of „learning to learn” competence in the Romanian University System.

This research in the Romanian space joins the European trend where, since 2008 the EU Council Report has encouraged the development of indicators and the development of research of „learning to learn” competence.

The objectives of this qualitative research are: to identify the dimensions of "learning to learn" competence from the perspective of students in Preschool and Primary Education from the current Romanian Education System, to assess students' perception upon the place and role of "learning to learn" competence and to emphasize successful ways/strategies in strengthening and developing "learning to learn". In order to achieve the objectives for this research we have used Focus Group method applied to three groups of students.

The results show that most students place this competence in the first place or at least in top three of the Key Competences. They also are able to name the dimensions of learning to learn as the speciality literature describes. The strategies indicated for developing and counselling learning to learn are a valuable guide for teachers.

KEYWORDS: transversal competences, 'learning to learn' abilities, students, Romanian education, focus group.

1. WHAT MEANS LEARNING TO LEARN?!

The expansion of the formal education (as time dedicated to formal learning) and the requirements for specialized training influences the relationship between education and labour market. European and world's standards ask for individuals increasingly competitive and better prepared. Therefore, the quality of specialist's preparation depends on the quality of the

education - general level of skills and in particular, the powers of transferable competences. Of the eight key skills, common to several occupations (approved by the National Council for Adult Professional Training (CNFP) No 86/24.06.2008 and recognized at European level)[1]: communication in the mother tongue; the communication in foreign languages; mathematics skills and core competencies in science and technology; skills of information and communication technologies; to learn how to learn; civic and interpersonal skills; entrepreneurial activities; and cultural expression we consider that learning to learn competence is very important and influences the development of others competences.

Changes implemented in the higher education system, especially after the Bologna Process, along with the many decisions legislative and at the level of educational policy of which recall only a few more representative of research procedure proposed: Quality concerns for higher education (introduction Romanian Agency for quality assurance in higher education - ARACIS), the introduction of European Qualifications Framework (EQF), The National Framework of Qualifications and Learning centred on the student and have the competent generated new requirements and challenges in academic practice.

At European level “learning to learn” is defined as the ability to pursue and persist in learning, to organize one's own learning, including through effective management of time and information, both individually and in groups. This competence includes awareness of one's learning process and needs, identifying available opportunities, and the ability to overcome obstacles in order to learn successfully. This competence means gaining, processing and assimilating new knowledge and skills as well as seeking and making use of guidance. Learning to learn engages learners to build on prior learning and life experiences in order to use and apply knowledge and skills in a variety of contexts: at home, at work, in education and training. Motivation and confidence are crucial to an individual's competence [2]. According to researchers Hoskins and Fredriksson, U. (2008, p 29) learning to learn competence have three dimensions: affective, cognitive and meta-cognitive [3], with specific indicators for each dimension separately.

2. RESEARCH DESIGN

The research is part of the observational phase of a larger study on the development and counselling of „learning to learn" competence in the Romanian University System.

2.1 Research objectives

The objectives of this qualitative research were:

- to identify the dimensions of "learning to learn" competence from the perspective of students in Pedagogy of Preschool and

Primary Education from the current Romanian Education System;

- ☑ to establish the place (in students opinion) that learning to learn competence take between the eight Key Competence;
- ☑ to assess students' perception upon the self-development of "learning to learn" competence;
- ☑ to emphasis successful ways/strategies in strengthening and developing "learning to learn".

2.2. Participants

The participants of the three focus groups sums 21 female students (seven students in each group) from the “Transilvania” University of Braşov, Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences, first year in Pedagogy of Preschool and Primary Education specialization. The selection criteria for the participation at focus group session were willingness and availability.

2.3. Research methodology

In order to achieve the objectives for this research we have used Focus Group method applied to three groups of students. These sessions was guided by an Interview protocol realised in order to respond to the research objectives, described above.

The Focus Groups activity was audio recorded and noted (for each student there was another student that observe and write down on an observation protocol). The recorded files were also transcribed and analysed.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS

For the first objective, definition and the dimensions of "learning to learn" competence, students in Pedagogy of Preschool and Primary Education have mentioned the following:

- ✓ Group 1: „styles”, „conditions”, „rhythm”, „time management”, „motivation”, „experience”, „learning efficiency”, „quick learning techniques”.
- ✓ Group 2: „to find ways to learn to learn”, „some read more, others use schemes to remember better”.
- ✓ Group 3: „learning to learn involves some steps in learning”, „learning schemes”, „strategies and techniques for learning to learn means to accumulate information and knowledge easier, „to develop skills and competencies to learn”, „knowledge and skills to implement knowledge”.

Analysing the three group’s responses about what is learning to learn we discover that the phrase is well known by the students, in the common meaning.

About the place learning to learn competence take between the eight European Key Competence (second objective) students have similar opinions. Some students consider that it is on the first or second place. There are students that are undecided – consider that all the key competences are important.

Asking for a self-evaluation of the learning to learn competence the students ranks between 5,5 and 9, as it can be seen in Fig 1.

The average for the first group is 6,07 for the second 7,57 and for the third is 8. This means a total average of 7,21. It is interesting that in the same group the differences between the ranks were smaller than between groups. This could be explained by the reciprocal influence. We also remarked that no student considered the rank 10 and they all agreed that learning to learn is a competence in continuing development.

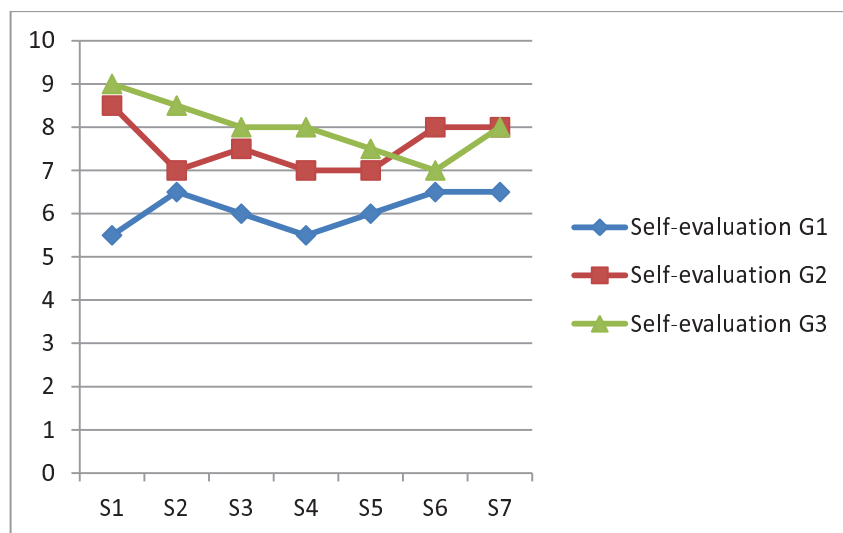


Fig. 1 Student’s learning to learn competence - self-evaluation

In Table 1 we have presented some successful strategies that students considered useful in their experience, to develop and strengthening "learning to learn". The presented strategies emphasis on the affective component of the learning to learn competence. It is important to student to like the teacher and they have expectations form the teachers to “attract” them, to make them like the subject. They also have some legitimate expectations: to teach well, to explain well, linking theory to practice, to encourage them, to motivate.

Table 1 Successful strategies for teacher to develop student's learning to learn competence

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Successful strategies for "learning to learn" – suggestions for teachers.	-a teacher should initiate us in intellectual work techniques -it was easy and pleasant to learn discipline x because I liked the professor -to explain well, to use attractive methods through play -to motivate students, to be calm, to be open, to listen to students -more freedom, optional disciplines for those who want to learn	-have the prowess to display information, to tie the theme of the lesson to practice, to get you to seek new information about the theme. -teacher attitude, if you feel that enjoys it, knows very well what he preaches, the courage to let you search more information. -teacher must have the ability to attract the student, students to be interested, motivated to learn the curricula.	-resume easy when you learn well in class, frequent evaluations -if you like and are interested, understand what the teacher teach, -give examples, link to practice, made us be careful and to like -in teaching starts from what students think, use debate, is close to students

4. CONCLUSIONS

As we could see the students are more aware of the cognitive and affective dimensions of learning to learn competence and less on the meta-cognitive. From this perspective, they expect more to be supported, motivated, drawn (external elements) than it is for their own learning self-management (self-regulation, self-organization, self-empowering).

They also recognize the importance of motivation, will, concentration and individual particularities in learning and they are open and willing to the idea of counselling for learning - are interested to learn about methods and techniques to learn fast, efficient and feel the need to be encouraged and motivated.

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