

THE PARADIGM OF „REFLEXIVE PRACTITIONER” AND THE STANDARDS OF PROFESSIONAL TRAINING OF TEACHING STAFF

Constanța DUMITRIU¹, Mihai STANCIU², Iulia-Cristina TIMOFTI¹, Gheorghe DUMITRIU¹
E-mail: dumitriuconstanta@yahoo.com

Abstract

Assuring the quality of the initial and continuous training programs for teaching staff implies a constant effort for thoroughgoing studying of the theories, researches and models that have been developed at a global level, and also conceiving certain programs of suitable politics within this domain. Starting with the 80s, among the most popular paradigms of the reflexive practitioner was the one elaborated by Schön. The most important consequences of developing and spreading the paradigm are: transposing it to the educational politics and substantiating the initial training programs on professional standards which correspond to the general competences; rethinking the initial training programs and directing them towards practice and competences of educators; integrating standards during the teachers certification exams; providing an adequate methodology in order to solve many problems that present education confronts with.

Key words: reflexive practitioner; educational politics; initial training programs; competences of educators; the initial and continuous training programs

We find ourselves in a moment in the history of educational sciences in which the researches/investigations on thought, on knowledge, on the representations, on the reflexion and the beliefs of the teacher/educator know an immense development which has an impact on the majority of the politics of forming and professional development, like Wilson and Berne said/in the opinion of Wilson and Berne (Tochon, F., 2000).

Assuring the quality of the educational system in the institutions of higher learning/education represents a permanent priority, and the programmes of politics in the field of initial and continuous formation of the teaching staff are correlated with the actions promoted at the European and world-wide level. The measure/approach aims the institutional capacity that results from the internal organization and the available infrastructure, the educational efficacy that means the mobilization of resources with the purpose of obtaining the learning results that are expected and the quality management of the educational process through specific strategies and procedures.

The setting up of the mechanisms of assuring the quality in the departments of the teaching staff training is correlated with the theoretical and methodological developments of the last decade, concerning the coordinates of the preparation for the teaching career: changing the

conception on the mission of the educator, on his functions/ roles; building the professionalism of the educator through the setting up/ founding of the programmes of initial and continuous formation on the contribution of the cognitive psychology, on the study of the pedagogic expertise, on the new paradigm of the “ reflexive practitioner”.

The cognitivist profound study contributed to the development of the researches on the teacher’s thinking/ way of thinking, on the distinction of its processes of decision, teaching is assimilated more and more each day to an activity of complex problem solving, based on the inductive and deductive thinking/argument/ judgement (Altet, M., 1996). Making a synthesis of the sociologic American and British studies concerning the professionalism of the teachers/teaching staff, R. Bourdoncle analyzes/mentions conceptions, opinions and different valorizations of the teaching profession that go from consider it as a “ semoprofession” (Etzioni, 1969) to optimistic positions, like the one adopted by Huberman (1978): “ Yes, the teachers will become truly professionists! “ [3]. This sociologic conception of the teacher has an influence on the building of the basic competences that are necessary for the teaching profession and of the elaboration of the standards for the professional training.

¹ “Vasile Alecsandri” University of Bacău

² University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine Iași

The paradigm of “the reflexive practitioner” is deeply connected with the name and the work of D. Schön [4], but it also has its origin in the reaction of the researchers from the educational field that considered that a permanent focus of the teacher on action (independently from its mental processes) makes him/ the teacher often to pass by the signification of his acts. At first, the paradigm was named through the term of “teacher thinking”, the term of thinking covering broadly any study that referred to the thinking and the activity of the teacher. Other researchers use the terms: “way of thinking”, “reflexion”, “representation”, “knowledge”, “conceptions” referring to the same phenomenon, and in Francophony it is voluntarily talked about “analysis of practice”, “analysis of professional practice”, the reflexion on the practice being a metacognitive attitude.

Tochon makes a distinction between the terminology used by the first researchers of the paradigm – “teacher/educator thinking”- with which researchers operated in the cognitivist, psychosocial, psychoanalytical, sociocritic approaches and the term of “reflection/ reflexion” that represents the will and the control in thinking. Reflection channels thinking, and the reflexive options of formation are a big part of this paradigm. In the same sense/ manner, the present/ actual/ new works concerning the “reflexive formation” and the “analysis of practices” in the formation for a teaching career use a conceptual ensemble (“the knowledge/ the science of the teachers”, “the practical experience”, “the degree of professionalism”, “beliefs and attitudes”) that also defines “the way of thinking of the educator/ teacher”. The primary intention of the research was centered on the way in which teachers themselves understand education and their role in it/ in education, the conceptions, the theories upon practices, the understanding of decision taking mechanism, the way in which teacher’s thinking and action are influenced by contextual factors that are present in their structural, cultural and social environment. The professional teacher/educator, “the reflexive practitioner” is capable of analyzing his own practices, to solve problems, to invent strategies. Formation is based on the contribution of the practicians and of researchers and their aim is to articulate the theory with practice in order to build up “the capacities for analysis” of his practice. This constitutes, in M. Altet’s opinion (Altet, M., 1996) a metacompetence that allows other competences to be built.

Radical changes were recorded also in the way of thinking the research in the field of formation and innovation the primary role being given to the necessity of distinctly respecting the

partners of the change in education and the placing of the study of the teacher’s way of thinking on the principle of the horizontal dialogue. Thus, the research will remain descriptive, but it will develop in a “reflected research- formation”, in “reflexive research- formation” and it will establish a new rapport between “the knowledge and the way of thinking of the practitioner”. After 1990, we can notice an “homogenization” of methodologic and theoretic points of view in an ensemble centered on the concept of integrated and reflected professionalization. Thus, many studies appear, some strategies of research are modified, and the emphasis is laid on experience, on the placing into the situation and the integrated reflexion, on the formation through reflexion. Gradually, the paradigm of the “reflexive practitioner” becomes a “hiperparadigm” that conceptually unites a number of “subparadigms”.

“The stake of professionalization is that of passing from the teacher that only executes the techniques to an independent <<reflexive practitioner>> that is responsible for his actions” (Altet, M., 1996). The accent/ emphasis is put on the structural transformation of a trade into a profession, process that in the opinion of the author has four different and yet complementary levels: a) the changing of status level of a professional activity; b) the true development for the teaching profession, that has an emphasis on “knowing how to teach” as opposed to the old formation that was based on the mastering of the contents and the unique academic formation; c) the level of professional development of the actors, of their capacities of building strategies, own way of practice, of using the rational knowledge, actional knowledge, and of analyzing the practice; d) the level of the development of a socio-professional group (the educators/ teachers), that are capable of making themselves known as professionalists of education, of building a common culture and a professional ethics.

The practical research that is made in a partnership (universities – schools/ educational institutions) has become the major coordinate of the big / great programmes of research, especially in the Anglo-Saxon world, and it is based on different problems like: the adaptation of the research to the context of formation and the professional development of the educators; the elaboration of the conceptual frames and of the theories that correspond to these fields of action; the communication, and the popularization of the results of the research so that they will exceed the local context; the integration of the autocritic and of the metacritic in the research; the use of the

research as a key factor for the transformation of some aspects of the university culture.

The result was an eclecticism in research, a fusion of the fields in the paradigm and a transfer of methodologies from one research field to another, simultaneously with the conceptual borrowings. Thus, in a methodological plan, the qualitative research that is supported by numerous followers has become a “trend” in the scientific research, and it dominates the Anglo-Saxon space. The concept of research in education broadened / enlarged and diversified the perspective of the role of the teacher, and he became “a researcher in the classroom”, “the one that makes the decisions”, “a consultant”, “the maker of the school curriculum”, “an analyst”, and many magazines and special editions of scientific magazines were dedicated to the pedagogic researches. Among the most important consequences of the development and the spread of the paradigm are:

- the transposition of the paradigm in the educational politics and at the basis of the initial formation programmes on professional standards that correspond to the general competences and they are accompanied by criteria of performance and their descriptive profiles;

- the re-thinking of the initial formation programmes and their orientation on the practice and the knowledge of the educators (see the IUFM in France);

- the integration of the standards in the certification exam of the teaching staff;

- the “instrumental” role of the paradigm, it offers an adequate methodology for the solving of numerous problems that are an issue for the present education (racism, sexism, violence, social discrimination, new technologies).

Emphasizing the evolution of the paradigm in the conceptual plan, in the conditions of the preserving the basic principles, Tochon considers that the initial purposes were largely realized “with the price of a conceptual hegemony and of an ideological regroupation” with a lot of tricky effects. “One of those effects is its regain by the ministry /departments in a reductional attempt of evaluating from the outside the professional competences of the educators/ teachers” (Tochon, F., 2000).

In the same context, a “key article” by Clark (1988), exposed / denounced the velleities of some psychopedagogists that wanted to make a quasi-experimental research on the way of thinking of the teachers, in order to verify the efficacy of the concepts proposed in formation. In Clark’s opinion “there cannot be an evaluation of the products independently of the evaluation of the processes by the actors themselves, an evaluation

that respects the subjectivity and the appreciation of the complex phenomenon” (Tochon, F., 2000). In this context, the reform of the Roumanian educational system that is centered on the development of the European dimension in education gives a primary/special importance to the reformation of the initial and continuous training system of the future teachers, and several attempts of outlining some coherent and rigorous strategies were recorded in the last decade. Thus we notice, The Strategy of forming and perfecting/improving the teaching staff and the managers from the preuniversity educational system, that was elaborated by MEC and was adopted as an educational politics of the ministry for the period 2001-2004. This stipulated as its first objective “the professionalization of the teaching profession/ career in Roumania” through several stages: a) the elaboration and the officialization of the standards for the teaching profession/career; b) the re-thinking of the routes and of the content of the teaching staff training – the standards of initial forming; c) the specification of the competences that will have to be proved at the graduation of the studies that are stipulated by the law, as well as the ones of continuous training; d) the improvement of the continuous forming programmes which will offer the teachers updated information for their speciality and psychopedagogical. Many of the basic ideas of the paradigm of the reflexive practitioner were found at the level of the elaboration of some professional standards, general competences of the teacher, as well as in the content of continuous formation programmes developed by universities.

This extension of the paradigm over the ensemble of the field of formation raised some problems on the analytical plan. Thus, numerous papers/works in this field operated a reduction, making only simple references to some key – words like: “the formation of the teaching staff/ didactic personnel”, “continuous formation”, “professional development”, without any other specifications. Many authors saw the danger of the depreciation of the term “reflection”, that was present in every title or text that appeared in the journals of speciality, often being used for describing simple, usual activities or as a “initial/initiatic/ entrance test” in the circle of the formation of the teaching staff. The professional is characterized as a “reflexive practitioner”, but the professionalization is not reduced only to the reflexive attitude of the teacher, but it also implies a structural transformation of a body of professions, Perrenoud says. The model of the professionalist is in the same measure negated, when it is built as a synthesis of other models, leading to a “idealized image” of the

educator/ teacher that is inaccessible and that combines the different sides of the profession/job. “ This development of the instrumental logic... may lead more to the research of a standardization of the professional exercise than to the illusion of a rational mastering of the practice” V. Lang emphasises (Lang, V., 1996).

We find remarkable Newman Stephen’s attempt (Newman, St., 1999) of making a reinterpretation of Schön’s works with the intent of “dissolving” the theoretical and methodological difficulties that the works contain, through the profound study of: a) the detailed description of the author and of his works; b) the presentation of the political context of the training of the teaching staff in England and the attraction that this context had on Schön’s work; c) the underlining of the metaproblems that can be found in Schön’s work; d) putting his ideas into practice in the field of teachers training.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work is supported CNCSIS –UEFISCDI project number 834/2009 PNII – IDEI, code 496/2008.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bourdoncle, R., 1991** - *La professionnalisation des enseignants: analyses sociologique anglaises et américaines*, in: revue Française de Pédagogie, Nr.94, pp. 73-92.
- Altet, M., 1996** - *Les compétences de l’enseignant-professionnel: entre savoirs, schémas d’action et adaptation, le savoir analyser*, en: Perrénoud, Ph. (Eds), Former des enseignants professionnels; perspectives en éducation, De Boeck Université, Paris, Bruxelles, pp. 27-40.
- Dumitriu, C., 2003** - *Strategii alternative de evaluare, Modele teoretico-experimentale*, București, E.D.P., R.A., pp. 32-37
- Lang, V., 1996** - *Professionnalisation des enseignants, conceptions du métier, modèles de formation*, en: Recherche et formation, N° 23, INRP, Paris, pp. 9-29.
- Schön, D.A., 1994** - *Le praticien réflexif. A la recherche du savoir caché dans l’agir professionnel*, Montreal, Les Editions Logiques.
- Newman, St., 1999** - *Philosophy and teacher education. A reinterpretation of Donald A. Schön’s epistemology of reflective practice*, Ashgate, Aldershot. Brookfield USA. Singapore. Sydney, pp. 148-187.
- Tochon, F., 2000** - *Recherche sur la pensée des enseignants: un paradigme à maturité*, en: Revue Française de Pédagogie, N° 133, pp. 129-157.