Aspects of teachers’ counselling in professional training programs

Ileana Rotaru *

*Eftimie Murgu University, I-4 Traian Vuia, 320085, Resita, Romania

Abstract

The theme focuses on quality assurance and on the efficiency of the continuing training programmes in University of Resita. Our experience and pressures have determined to underline: the way that the teachers of the undergraduate level perceive the continuing training programmes, the identification of professional development needs and the perception of the career development from the school’s management point of view. Our research is based on this three coordinates and it analyses on two perspectives: from the trainer’s perspective and from the institution’s one. Our main research method is qualitative (over 900 interviews and associative verbal tests). The results are presented in this paper along with our observations and recommendations.

1. Introduction

The theme focuses on quality assurance and on the efficiency of the continuing training programmes for teachers of the secondary in University of Resita. Our steps were made in the line of co-works between the university’s professors and the teachers of the undergraduate level. An efficient quality management of the continuing training programmes has as strong points: the marketing and the training needs accordingly to the school’s policies and the methodology of the Ministry of Education.

Our experience and the pressures originated from the reform of the educational system, have determined to underline and to focus our research on: the way that the teachers of the undergraduate level perceive the continuing training programmes, the identification of professional development needs and the perception of the career development from the school’s management point of view. The analyse is situated on these three coordinates. The continuing training programmes have given us the opportunity to apply several questionnaires, verbal associative tests and to have over 900 interviews.

The continuing teachers’ professional training of secondary and university’s levels represents a solution of the reformed and the modern educational system. The concept of continuing training defines a set of theoretical and practical activities, institutionalized in the educational system that they engage the participation of those who play the role of teaching in order to increase their psycho-pedagogical knowledge, their methods and their specialities, in the sense of developing attitudes and socio-professional skills accordingly to a quality education management.
In Romania, the former National Centre for the Continuing Training of the Teachers from the Undergraduate Level (now Direction of the Undergraduate Level of Romanian Ministry of Education) has as main purpose to coordinate the activity of continuing training by accreditation of the continuing education programs. Our research focuses on the universities as continuing training providers these kinds of programs. During the past years, there was observed a cracked between the two main actors: the undergraduate teachers and the ones of the universities. The last one were accused of lack of practice working with pupils being more caught in academicals researches than in educational practice. They didn’t offer viable solutions for real educational practice. In order to avoid this type of controversy, a high quality management of continuing training programs made by universities centred on:

- the marketing and the analyse of the training needs;
- the design of the professional training accordingly to the school’s policies and needs;
- the organizations of the professional training programs accordingly with the Ministry of Education’s methodology and in respect of the legal procedures;
- the monitoring of the continuing training activities;
- the evaluation of the training by different evaluation procedures: portfolios, individual papers and group works.

The activity of running continuing training programs by the University of Resita have given to the trainers the possibility to create other continuing training programs on the next three directions:

a) the perception of the continuing training education by the teachers of the undergraduate system of education;

b) the identification of the training needs in the local region;

c) the perception of the continuing training activities from the school’s management.

2. The perception of the continuing training education by the teachers of the undergraduate system of education

The concept of teachers’ continuing training is often used synonymy with the one of perfection in the language of adult education. E. Paun (1999) defines the two concepts. The continuing training has a wider sense than that of the perfection. The forming is defined by the sum of all the activities realized after the initial training in order to update the professional training for the individual to adapt to the changes and to the new. The continuing training refers to two main aspects: professional training and professional recycling. At this level the professional recycling is incorrect understood due to its abusive use in the communist period. This is the reason why it is sensed a small degree of reluctance when the teachers are discussing professional training: “I have attended several stages of professional recycling programs. I have lots of papers (diplomas). Aren’t they recognised by your university?”. This example shows the semantic confusion, the perception of the programs as mandatory and the lack of information about the legal norms and methodologies. Discussing back the concept of recycling, Husen & Postlethwaite (1985) defined as an activity of deliberate assimilation, necessary when there are serious gaps in teachers’ professional trainings. Others (Landsheere, 1986) considers that the process of recycling shows a general and serious gap due to a fast and profound change of knowledge or to an essential change of the school’s curricula so that the initial teacher’s training become insufficient. In summary, Paun (1999, 162-163) underlines that the continuing teachers’ training has two main aspects:

- the process of continuous, profound and own initial professional training;
- the reconsideration and the completion of the initial professional training in the context of new challenges, totally different from the former ones.

The school plays a very important role as a supportive environment and helpful for training, along with the teacher’s understanding of the concepts analysed above.

Further on we will discuss the role played by the school. During the continuing training courses of the University, we applied over 900 interviews and associative verbal tests to teachers of the undergraduate level: school teachers, primary school teachers, high school teachers. The items were represented by items like: “For me, the continuing professional training represents…”). An exhaustive listing of the answers allowed us to interpret
rigorously the answers that refer to solving the problematic situations. Thus, the continuing training represents for
the interviewed subjects the next:
- an continuous training during the professional career;
- the adaptation to the new;
- a necessity;
- the opportunity to improve;
- the compliance to other competencies;
- the possibility to achieve new skills;
- to practice the new knowledge;
- to perform better;
- a continuing learning.

The most frequent answers refer to the adaptation to the new, to apply the new knowledge and to a will for
continuing learning/ education (over 80% of the answers). In conclusion, for most of our subjects, the continuing
training educational process is being confused with the professional recycling, based on Landsheere hypothesis (the
adaptation to the new – due to the inner and rapid change of the knowledge and to the changes of school’s
curricula). Also, the continuing training has the meaning of the sum of activities made by a person after his/her
initial training (Paun, 1999).

3. The identification of the training needs in the local region

Before we started the training programs for the undergraduate teachers’, we had been preoccupied to identify
the training needs at the school level and the teachers’ training needs, too. We considered that the reluctance to
change can be reduced by providing training programs that will support the teachers in solving different issues in
their practice and to offer them the necessary and useful instruments in their every day work. Thus, we have noticed
that the graduating teachers of our training programs are interested for courses on the next areas: student oriented
teaching; didactics; counselling and guidance; NTIC (new technologies of information and communication);
management of total quality; the psychology of learning; applying alternative strategies; evaluation; parents’
training and others.

Most of the answers were recorded for specialty knowledge (over 89%), counselling and guidance (over
80%) and psycho-pedagogy (80%). These results underline the hypotheses of our study: the principle that the
teachers’ career counselling can be a consistent factor of school organizational development. The counselling
activity, along with coaching, mentoring and training activities could be one of the organisational options in order to
give support to the organisational interventions centred on the individual dimensions and improvement of the
teachers’ performance.

In this context, we developed and certified to the Ministry of Education several training programs for
teachers of the undergraduate level: “Counselling and guidance” (2008) and “Competency in communication”
(2011). The training curricula are focused on the principle of self-improvement as an activity that implies the most
the subjective condition of the teacher. Paun (1999) enunciates as premises for self-improvement: the professional
ethos, the level of aspiration and motivation and the pupils’ conscience as a human being. Ovestreet (Apud, Kidd,
1981, p.338) affirms that the teacher must be a person that learns. If he has lost the learning skill he cannot be a
colleague with the others anymore.

The self-improvement devotion stands for one of the most important coordinates of the teacher. It defines
his/her personality and self-esteem. These were some of the ideas that our professional training programs insisted
on. We insist on the idea that the changes of the curriculum and of the evaluation process must be understood,
known and motivated in order to be practiced. Otherwise the reform in education will remain outside the school,
strange for the school’s inner reality and away from the classroom. We have insisted on the training needs of our
region, of our teachers and on the personal ones. As trainers, based on the teachers’ biograms and genograms we
respected the profession of teacher. We realized a teacher’s portrait. They are aware of their own personal qualities
as models in the community and their families: modesty, diligence, selflessness, empathy, calm, communicative,
patience, punctuality, energy, tolerance, perseverance, honesty, sensitivity, perseverance, kindness, professionalism,
organizational spirit, etc. They identify that the teacher’s qualities are: responsibility, honesty, conscientiousness, empathy, tolerance, understanding, patience and punctuality. Those qualities are observed in their relation with the students and parents in the everyday educational process.

4. The perception of the continuing training activities of the school’s management

We mentioned above the role of the school manager as an interface between the training providers (e.g. universities) and school as beneficiary. The decision of participating in a certain professional training program is not made by the teacher on his own. He/she is counseled, guided by the school’s manager and by the training responsible in the school. In this way, they use their coaching skills and respond to the school’s organizational development, too. In this context, we were interested in how the professional training is perceived in schools by the teachers. The registered answers were: permanent; a preoccupation of the methodical commission, an obligation/a task; it is realized with gasps; very poor represented; formal. During the interpretation of the results we noticed that the necessity and the importance of the continuing training programs were not properly understood by the school’s manager. Most of them did not know what the concept of “training” refers to. This aspect identified a niche for the next continuing training programs: to include or to focus on the school’s managerial team.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion we underline the importance of the continuing training programs in general, but also on the theme of counseling and guidance, of professional orientation. We have demonstrated that their impact is not only on the personal professional level, but also on the school’s one as an organization.

The teachers recognize the importance of the professional training program in their career and personal development. From the training providers’ point of view, we based our educational offer on the themes, subjects and values of the teachers’ of the undergraduate level in order to continue to stimulate and encourage the self-training activities.

References


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*** Law of Ministry of Education [O.M.Ed.C.] no.4611/2005 regarding the approval of the methodology of accrediting the lifelong training of the teaching staff in the undergraduate education system