

Dimensions of teaching staff professional competences

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Abstract

Teaching competence is a complex, systemic, is much more than 'technical' school achievement tasks or only the information necessary to implement them.

This paper aims at an analysis of the structure of the professional competence of the teacher for preschool and primary school teacher for taking professional competence and scientific variables provided by the set of capabilities necessary scientific knowledge of specific curriculum content, pedagogical competence circumscribing the ability to know the psychological profile of those we educate, the ability to determine the difficulty of the learning material, the ability to make learning material accessible and psychosocial competence revealing ability to adopt a different role to influence the group of children, the ability to easy set and appropriate relationships with others.

Keywords: self-assertion, professional competence, specialty competence, psycho-pedagogic competence and psycho-social and managerial competence.

1. Theoretical Background

The studies of the last decades in the educational field have had as major concern the investigation of didactic efficiency starting from the initial formation stage whose primary objective is the forming of didactic competences against pedagogic aptitudes.

Any profession, including the didactic one, can run its course only when the person who professes is competent, corresponds physically and psychically to its demands. „Practicing a profession adequatly implies a set of
knowledge, abilities, specific skills, acquired substantially which materialize through performing well-defined actions” (Pitariu, 1983).

Competence is defined by a set of potential behaviours (cognitive, affective and psycho-motor) which allow the individual to profess a complex activity efficiently. Loosely, it is connected to a profession, a status, to a professional and social initial situation and it integrates in an unitary whole savoir, savoir-faire and savoir-agir. Declarative, procedural knowledge and attitudes can be identified in incipience in case of beginners and as a coherent and stable system in case of experts. (Raynal & Rieunier, 1997)

To be competent in a profession implies: to apply specialty information; to analyze and to make decisions; to use creativity; to work with others as member in a team; to communicate efficiently; to adapt to the environment of the workplace; to cope with unforeseen situations. Competence is proved through solid knowledge, through the skill and ability to use them in developing a certain activity and to obtain successful outcomes appreciated by the others.

The structure of professional competence includes aptitudes and capacities but the dominant role is held by professional experience which facilitates the transfer and interface of knowledge, abilities and aptitudes.

Even if on a first impulse the notions of didactic competence and pedagogic aptitude overlap, on close inspection there are differences between the two notions. The competence has a much larger sphere, it also refers to the activity outcomes, including besides knowledge in the respective domain, the capacity to do something well, efficiently, correctly whereas aptitude is a complex of relatively stable abilities which condition the successful achievement of intellectual, artistic, scientific, organizational, technical, manual activities. (Gherghinescu, in Marcus, 1999).

Competence represents the individual capacity to interpret a phenomenon, to solve a problem, to take a decision or to perform a task, being a result of the knowledge, skills, abilities, aptitudes an temperamental and character traits the person in question disposes of. Thus, didactic competence appear as a structure and emergent whole which means more than the sum of its parts (knowledge, aptitudes, skills, etc.).

Through didactic competence „we could understand the educator’s set of cognitive, affective, motivational, managerial and personality capacities which confer him the necessary qualities to perform a didactic activity which would ensure the attainment of the planned objectives by the majority of pupils whereas the obtained performances situate near to the maximum level of their intellectual potential” (Jinga,1998).

Capacity is defined as a person’s physical potential condition which enables the person to act adequately and efficiently or as a system of functional and operational abilities which together with skills, knowledge and necessary experience lead to efficient actions and performance. It is always demonstrated and demonstrable through facts, unlike aptitude, which, according to an older orientation, represent only a segment of capacity, respectively, only the potential abilities which are to be turned to profit. (Popescu- Neveanu, 1978).

From the point of view of professional formation, capacity represents a finality of an overall formation, common to many situations and competence is the finality of a global formation which involves more capacities for a single situation.

Didactic competence does not identify with pedagogic aptitude, though, the latter is implied in the former, didactic competence having a larger sphere and including in its structure a series of data which refer to the teacher’s speciality training, to his/her guiding values, to the social relations which integrate them.

Unlike didactic competence, pedagogic aptitude is formed in the wake of a permanent interaction of psychologic, social and psycho-social factors „is a complex psychological formation which, based on a certain organizational and functional level of psychical processes and functions – modelled under the form of a system of interiorized actions and operations, genetically built according to the model of educational activity – facilitates the efficient behaviour of the teaching staff, through an adaptive operationalization of the whole content of his personality” (N. Mitrofan, 1988).

As in any field of activity, competence represents a condition which ensures performance and efficiency in the respective activity. Much more in the educational field, competence represents a princesp condition in ensuring the efficiency of the educational act. Any divergence from the competence criterium reflects upon the pupil’s personality, upon his school results and even upon his performances in the didactic activity.

As any professional competence, didactic competence with its cognitive, affective-attitudinal and experiential components has a triple origin: vocational, formational and experiential. Its acquisition is achieved through initiation, qualification, completion and specialization. Through the initiation and qualification activity, specific to the initial formation of the teaching staff, students, the future teaching staff acquire knowledge, minimal actiona
abilities and skills, necessary to the evolution of didactic activities, as well as professional competences which allow the achievement of specific didactic activities.

Didactic competence has a complex systemic structure, it is more than a „technique” of performing academic tasks or than the information necessary in their achievement. It reflects the educator’s capacity to capitalize, to ensure a certain functioning level of psycho-pedagogic information, to transfer and to valorize it in concrete didactic activities, corresponding to a certain learning cycle and to certain scientific disciplines whose content will be interiorized by the learners.

The competence profile of the teacher, defined as a convergent domain between status/role and personality, is not a simple summation of competences, but a complex structure which determines the individual style of activity, peculiar to each educator and which includes – specialty competence, psycho-pedagogic competence and psycho-social and managerial competence (Jinga, 1998, p. 81).

Scientific-professional specialty competence, includes the following main capacities: familiarity with the scientific content of the discipline; the capacity to establish connections between theory and practice; the capacity to renew the contents according to the new acquisitions in the scientific field and in others domains.

Psycho-pedagogic competence includes the capacity to know pupils and to take into consideration their age group and individual characteristics in the planning and achievement of the instructive-educative activities; the capacity to communicate easily with pupils, to influence and motivate them for the learning activity and for a particular discipline; the capacity to plan and achieve instructive-educative activities optimally; the capacity to evaluate instruction, programmes and activities objectively, pupils’ education and their successful outcomes; the capacity to prepare pupils for self-instruction and self-education.

The psycho-social and managerial competence is made up of: the capacity to organize pupils’ relation to the instruction tasks and to establish group responsibilities; the capacity to establish cooperation relations, an adequate climate within the group and to solve the conflicts; the capacity to assume responsibilities; the capacity to lead, to organize and coordinate, to guide and to motivate, to make decisions according to concrete situations.

The didactic profession requires from the person involved in the instructive-formative activities specialized and precise scientific information, selected for the pupils’ level of understanding as well as cognitive abilities necessary to processing the information „a solid specialty training centered on a wide cultural horizon, the capacity to expose the information clearly and systematically, objectivity in relation to pupils, in the evaluation process, exigency and at the same time respect of pupils’ personality, confidence, sincerity, acceptance of the dialogue (on an equal position), spirit of justice, etc.” (Popescu – Teiușan, 1995).

The professional-scientific competence also implies a large general culture, as the teacher transfers elements of social, material and spiritual conscience of humanity in the pupil’s individual conscience. A teacher having a high scientific and cultural level will contribute more efficiently to the formation of the specialty and general culture of his pupils. Culture contributes to the development of intellectual aptitudes, feelings and emotions, will and character, namely it completes the scientific-professional and didactic competence.

Psycho-pedagogic competence supposes that the teacher has expertise in the system of information and skills he teaches, to organize his ideas in a logical, clear, coherent and precise presentation, according to modern pedagogic requirements and the teaching process must be attractive, suggestive, stimulating.

One of the studies related to teachers’ defining characteristics identifies three behavioural structures: (Ryans, 1960, in. Ausubel & Robinson, 1981):
• structure A – is characterized by affection, understanding and friendship being opposed to the structure defined by distant attitude, egocentrism and limitation;
• structure B – is characterized by responsibility, methodical character and systematic actions being opposed to the structure defined by lack of planning, indecision, carelessness;
• structure C – is characterized by stimulating power, imagination and enthusiasm, being opposed to the structure defined by inertia and routine.

Commenting the fact the this study analyzed the teaching efficiency less, D. Ausubel and F. Robinson show that there is a close connection between teacher’s affection and pupil’s academic efficiency. The „heart –warming” teacher, described in these studies, is the one who ensures an emotional support to his pupils, is oriented towards them and accepts them as persons. The authors believe that an analysis of the relation between the variables of the
teacher’s personality and the teaching efficiency must also take into consideration the pupil’s motivation and especially, the main motivational impulses which manifest in the learning process (affiliation, affirmation and cognitive impulses). The pupil dominated by an affiliation impulse (in the case of early childhood) will have the tendency to identify with the teacher as he did initially with parents and consequently to learn in order to please the teacher and to be praised and rewarded. (Ausubel & Robinson, 1981)

Under these circumstances, the teacher must embody the same warm-hearted person, having a supportive role, as parents had before school. He shares praises and encouragements and appreciates the pupil’s behaviours. Identifying with this source of encouragement and approval, the pupil is inclined to assimilate the values promoted by the educator and consequently he is strongly motivated to learn and to attain a superior efficiency.

For the pupils whose motivation is supported by self-affirmation and prestige impulse, the more efficient teachers are those who are task-oriented, are methodic and systematic in class management and in the organization of didactic activities, who create conditions in which the pupils’ performance levels are clearly defined and appreciated.

The pupil with a strong cognitive impulse will be stimulated by teachers able to generate intellectual effervescence, to create cognitive conflicts, to capture pupils’ interests through innovative elements, to challenge pupils to advance in the field. Active, stimulating, inventive and enthusiastic teachers are very successful with the discipline they teach and pupils’ behaviour is much more productive under the influence of this type of stimulation.

2. Objectives

The main objective of the paper is to establish the structure of preschool and primary school teachers’ professional competence, perceived by practitioners with different didactic experience in the field. As specific objectives, we analyzed the weight of structural elements of professional competence for the two categories of subjects.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The sample of subjects had been made up of 54 subjects – 26 preschool teachers and 28 primary school teachers – having an educational experience between 2 and 32 years, graduates of an university programme of study and 25 subjects experts in the field, university teaching staff, specialists in Education sciences field, Preschool and Primary School Pedagogy.

3.2. Materials and Procedure

In the first stage of the study, subjects – experts were asked to indicate at least 10 attributes which define competence units necessary to the professing of the didactic occupation.

We selected the attributes which had the largest frequency and made a list with 25 attributes (checklist) – units of professional competence – grouped in three major dimensions: specialty competence, psycho-pedagogic competence and psycho-social and managerial competence.

The list of attributes had been presented to subjects who were asked to rank 10 attributes of professional competence in order of their importance (the first attribute is considered to be the most important and the tenth is considered the least important). The attributes had been rated with points from 10 to 1 (10 points from the most important attribute and one point for the least important).

After adding the points obtained by each attribute, we elaborated a hierarchy and implicitly a hierarchy of the dimensions of professional competence.

The results had been analyzed according to the variables – specialty (preschool teacher / primary school teacher) and the experience in the field.
4. Results and discussions

The results obtained in the first part of the study, in which the subjects-experts indicated minimum 10 competences necessary for the didactic activity, underlined the following: the 25 subjects indicated a number of 44 attributes which define the preschool teachers’ competences (8 specialty competences; 23 psycho-pedagogic competences and 10 psycho-social and managerial competences) 38 attributes which define primary school teachers’ professional competences (4 specialty competences; 26 psycho-pedagogic and 8 psycho-social and managerial competences).

After analyzing the hierarchy of competences by the subjects who develop didactic activities in the preschool education, the following categories of specific competences had been identified: specialty competences (expertise in the scientific content of the curriculum disciplines, the capacity to update, to process, to essentialize, to illustrate, to represent and to develop the specific contents, the familiarity with the information methods and techniques; the capacity to achieve inter, intra and pluridisciplinar correlations), psycho-pedagogic competences (the capacity to know pupils and to take into consideration their age and their individual characteristics in the planning and achievement of instructive-educative activities, the capacity to communicate easily with children, to influence and motivate them for the learning activity, the capacity to plan and achieve instructive-educative activities optimally, the capacity to evaluate objectively pupils’ education and their possible academic achievements) and psycho-social and managerial competences (the capacity to organize pupils in relation to the instruction tasks, to create adequate learning contexts and to establish group responsibilities, - the capacity to establish cooperation relations, an adequate climate within the group and to solve conflicts, the capacity to assume responsibilities, to lead, to organize and coordinate, to guide and to motivate, to make decisions according to concrete situations).

Subjects teachers in the primary school cycle identified the following categories of specific competences: specialty competences (the familiarity with specific notions and their adequate use in the field of education sciences and the disciplines of the primary school curriculum, ), psycho-pedagogic competences (the familiarity with and the use of the specific strategies for the curriculum disciplines – the use and the familiarity with the instructive-educative strategies specific to primary school cycle, the achievement of didactic projection at different levels, the application of the methodology of knowing pupils’ personality, the organization, development and evaluation of didactic activities, the capacity to prepare pupils for self-instruction and self-education, the manifestation of a creative attitude in applying the didactic strategies at different disciplines of the curriculum and psycho-social and managerial competences (the capacity to establish cooperation relations, and an adequate climate within the educational group, the capacity to solve conflicts, the capacity to promote prosocial and civic participation behaviours).

The comparative analysis of the two categories showed that teachers from preschool education place psycho-pedagogic competences on the first position (the capacity of knowing the specific of children’s psychical development – 33% of subjects, the capacity to adapt didactic strategies to the specific of children’s psychic development – 26% of subjects ) and psycho-social competences (the capacity to form relational and cooperation relations to children – 15%, the capacity to create and promote prosocial competences – 14%) unlike the primary school teachers who situate specialty competences on the first position, the expertise in the scientific content of the disciplines specific to primary school education – 46% and on the second position psychosocial and managerial competences – the capacity to solve conflicts – 38%. Psycho-pedagogic competences – the use and familiarity with instructive-educative strategies specific to primary school education is situated on the third position, only 14% of respondents consider it as primordial.

The analysis of the answers according to the variable experience in the educational field underlined another hierarchy of professional competences. Thus, the beginner teachers in the preschool and primary school educational cycle consider psycho-pedagogic competences primordial – the capacity to plan and achieve optimally instructive-educative activities and to evaluate the learning results objectively, whereas teachers having a seniority of over 20 years consider that psycho-social competences hold the first position – the capacity to solve conflicts. The specialty competences – to know the informational methods and techniques and the capacity to achieve intra, inter and pluridisciplinar correlations – are considered primordial by the subjects having between 5 and 10 years experience in the educational field.
A quantitative analysis of answers emphasized the fact that subjects consider two competences as fundamental in the efficient development of the didactic process at both preschool and primary school level – empathy and efficient communication. Subjects consider that empathy also contribute to the development of psycho-pedagogic competences as well as to the development of psycho-social and managerial ones, and the efficient communication capacity potentiates the teaching activity.

5. Conclusions

The results of the study underline the fact that the psycho-pedagogic dimension is primordial in the structure of the preschool and primary school teachers’ didactic competence. The psycho-pedagogic dimension targets the identification of the pupils’ age and individual characteristics and the capacity to adapt the learning contents to these characteristics.

The competences belonging to the dimension which targets the scientific content of the disciplines are less important, significant differences being identified between the two categories of the teaching staff.

The study underlines the necessity of outrunning unilateral opinions, exclusively pedagogic, psychologic or managerial and the embracement of an integrating, systemic vision of professional competences which would establish not only its structure but also the different variables which facilitate or hinder the manifestation of a competence.

References


