Ways to determine students to become competent teachers

Gabriela Kelemen a *

a 2900 Arad, B-dul Revolutiei nr. 77, P.O. BOX 2/158 AR, Romania

Abstract

I would like to underline the importance of a good initial formation for the students who want to become teachers. Being a teacher is a vocational profession. It implies dedication, passion for this profession, love for children, more aptitudes which confirm if somebody has vocation. The teachers assume different roles in this profession. The teacher training and teacher preparation programmes vary in different faculties of education by curricula, by formation of the academic staff, by ways of leading courses and seminars, by the organization culture. Also I would like to underline some good practice in initial training of future teachers.

1. Introduction

Our contemporary society is a society of globalization determined by a development without precedent of technologies, telecommunications, and transport that facilitates change at great scale. Roland Robertson said that "the concept of globalization refers to the decrease of the world and the increase of the awareness degree of the world as an entity". Globalisation is affecting all of the social, political and economic structures and processes. And knowledge, education and learning have a central role for the success of the Global Information Society (GIS) and global information economy. Knowledge is becoming an increasingly important factor of production. In this world, education at all levels, from primary school to university is in a process of transformation of its objectives, values, and practices. The worldwide expansion of entertainment and advertising media convey notions of individualism and consumerism that are changing definitions of gender and solidarity among social groups. New technologies and communication practices have promoted responsibilities for social welfare and the inclusion of diverse cultures.

Since education is the main source of knowledge creation, the education systems must be changed to deliver new skills and expertise necessary to excel in a more competitive environment. New emphasis on competition, quality control, parental choice, marketing, and the linkage of education to work means that schools all over the world face innovations and challenges to established practices. In our institution, the Faculty of Science Education, Psychology and Social Work, the mission is to provide the best education programme adapted to the radical changes which lie on contemporary society, yet in harmony with European educational principles. Our objectives regarding the training of future teachers for preschool and primary school are a high priority by developing / improving their...
initial training. The initial training is done by licence and master programme, programmes which follow the regulations of the European Commission laid down in the Joint Report by the European Council and the European Commission on progress towards Education and Training.

This document entitled The Common European Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualifications provides that: Teachers play a vital role in supporting the learning experiences of young people and adults. We can see the social valorisation and empowerment of teachers nowadays, an important objective since education is seen like a necessity for a nation. The necessity to ensure quality education in schools is a condition to improve the quality of teacher training.

2. Competences for the didactic profession

The question that emerges is what competences make a good teacher? Teaching requires individual and academic competences seen as behaviours or in terms of individual as psychological attributes enabling teaching at a performing level. Teacher competences are conceived in terms of underlying stable, personal, and situation-independent characteristics providing a basis for excellent performance. Competence is usually associated with a highly professional performance and there is a direct link in the field of education between a teacher’s professional competence and the pupils’ performance. Professional competences are the system of knowledge, skills, abilities and motivational disposition which provide the effective realization of the professional teaching activities. There are two distinct meanings of „competence” in education. From a theoretical point of view, competence is understood as a cognitive structure that facilitates specified behaviours. From an operational point of view, competence seems to cover a broad range of higher-order skills and behaviours that represent the ability to deal with complex, unpredictable situations. Competence means performance, namely knowing how to do something very well. It designs an applied savoir-faire, but besides all other characteristics, competence also involves a mobilization of the heuristic type⁶. Being competent implies the ability to transfer, a concept that entitles us to state that competence should be regarded also from a transversal perspective.

In order to become a preschool or primary school teacher, a student should acquire the following:

- general competences;
- field related competences, psycho pedagogic field related competences;
- methodological competences;
- communication and relating competences;
- management competences.

This operational definition includes knowledge, skills, attitudes, metacognition and strategic thinking, and presupposes conscious and intentional decision making (Westera, 2001).

We must underline the importance of teacher cognitions and the context in which teaching takes place. Compulsory education graduates describe the profile of a future teacher who needs to have the follow competences:

- Professional Values and Practice
- Professional Knowledge and Understanding
- Professional Skills and Application

---

Articulation between theory and practice is seen from an integrated perspective. The teacher in the classroom does not transmit ready made information anymore, s/he builds learning experiences, and s/he finds him/herself in a partnership relation with his/her students, negotiating the objectives of learning but also forms and ways of evaluation. S/he treats the classroom as a real world, analyzing its explicit and implicit rules and revaluating real world as an inexhaustible scene of learning situations. In modern school or better said post modern school (Cărtărescu, Mircea, 1999), hierarchies resulted from evaluations are not revalued, the stress being laid on learner’s responsibility, considered a motivational source. Individual and motivational particularities are respected and revalue building educational alternatives. Co-work between teacher and disciple does not mean lowering the respect for the teaching staff but it underlines the necessity to rethink the relationship by considering the double meaning of instructive-educational flux. This means that teachers have something to learn from their pupils too. Didactic methods use personal expression, reflexive and critical attitude, autonomy of the individual but also of the group, stimulating learning by cooperation in order to bring about personal development through self-consciousness actions within small groups “teachers and pupils working together” as opposed to practice where the all-knowing teachers tell pupils what to learn (Bocoș, M., 2002).

The curriculum and its theoretical and practical dimension, well settled in concrete concepts and experiences, acquire the strength to re-project the didactic activity in a global and total way. Drawing an efficient curriculum becomes a problem of pedagogic, methodological and technological instrumentation. Didactic activity incorporates
a varied and flexible methodological support; the evolution of science and social practice offers to schools new models of designing and guiding learning experiences.

Pedagogy contributes to training specialists for the instructive-educational activity of the teaching staff and for teaching field disciplines. It is doubtless that practical training in one field or another is essential, necessary but not sufficient for a teacher. Being a teacher involves, first of all, along vocation, training for a specific job that requires specific competences of psychopedagogical and methodological training (Albulescu, I., 2004). Any teacher, irrespective of the subject s/he teaches should contribute with personal and subject resources to educating the trainees, to forming desirable behaviours within society (Ionescu M., I. Radu, 1995). Being a good specialist in a certain field is not a guarantee of pedagogic success (Bîrzea, C., 1995). Moreover, the field of education is, due to its complexity, one that does not allow improvising based on empirical knowledge. On an international level, within specialized organisms in education problematic is being talked about formulating a system of requirements for school educators of today and tomorrow, one that ensures training of capable teachers and that knows to train, educate, cooperate and combine resources from the perspective of interdisciplinary teaching and education. Competence is today the main criterion for being validated in a profession, irrespective of the job and the acquired position on a social level.

The ensemble of qualification components, defined as professional knowledge, abilities and necessary attitudes for a high level labour conscription are expressed by professional competence. These competences are acquired by future professionals in the career training stages but, in the early years, they are expected to be acquired at least in a form that allows new acquisitions thanks to direct experience grasped while working (Ionescu M., 2000). New orientations in the theory and practice of education and in the guidance of development have deeply changed the paradigms of contemporary pedagogy. Training a competent teacher gathers varied dimensions:

- academic training;
- field training;
- psycho pedagogic training;
- methodological training;
- practice.

Theoretical training is continuous and it is sustained by the variety of experiences and school confrontations throughout the career. As a professional, the contemporary educator is defined by three types of competences:

- personal (responsibility, capacity to deal with problems, critical thinking and creativity, capacity to initialize changes, empathy and tolerance)
- Psycho pedagogical and methodological (knowing pupil psychology, personality development, elaborating learning experiences, communication with pupils, parents and other actors of the educational system, measuring learning progress)
- Field knowledge belonging to the curriculum that teachers have to change into school learning experiences.

The assessment of competences must include the issue of transfer, but assessment is a highly complex process. For instance, competence as a cognitive „ability” may be determined by the observation of successful performance, but the successful performance may easily be the result of chance, and cognitive malfunctioning could thus be obscured.

3. Research argumentation

Knowing what and knowing how makes the difference, a good teacher is a theoretician and a practitioner at the same time. S/he must put the theory into practice in order to:

- develop a general culture which will enable the trainee to assume his or her role as a teacher;
- promote the acquisition of scientific pedagogic knowledge that is the basis for educative action;
- provide sound knowledge in theory and in primary education subjects;
- develop attitudes for intervention in different socio-educative contexts.
These skills have the following components:

- development of cognitive pupils’ abilities;
- direction of pupils’ activities to achieve the educational results;
- work with groups of pupils with heterogeneous learning abilities;
- formation of pupils’ responsibilities for the results of their work and education;
- command work;
- elaboration of study and school development programmes and curricula;
- communication with parents and local social environment;
- dealing with professional and moral problems;
- organization of self professional development.

Being a teacher means competence and this competence requires assimilation of field knowledge and didactic experience, the main effort being oriented towards forming and affirming themselves as specialists in a certain field.

3.1. Methodology of research

We started from the idea that practice plays an important role in developing expertise in teaching; it also provides the trainer the opportunity of both assessing and guiding the trainee for both formative and summarise evaluation purposes. In our faculty the students start their practice only in the second year of study and the programme includes teaching, demonstration, and participation in co-curricular activities and evaluation, which becomes the final assessment of the student teachers. In my opinion it starts too late for a good training so, in 2006, I started an experiment with a number of 50 students. 25 of them started the practice in kindergarten and primary school (as volunteers) from the first day of the first year of faculty. They attended the courses (as observers) in an alternative way, a week in the kindergarten and a week in primary school. The schedule permitted this since the courses of the faculty are in the afternoon and the courses in the kindergarten and primary school are in the morning.

Their task was to observe all the activities from kindergarten and primary school and to note the activities of the teachers and the activities of the children and pupils. Student teachers had to observe the teaching methods of usual routine.

At the end of the each week we used 2 hours for discussions in order to clarify any misunderstandings. Student teachers must have the details about the scheme of studies, age of the students, knowledge of the class, abilities and specific problems of the students, timing of the school, textbooks and teaching aids.

The next 2 years they started practice in the regular way as their colleagues did, a day per week in kindergarten and a day per week in primary school.

3.2. Results of research

The students that started practice in the first day of the faculty had better results in tests and exams compared to their colleagues. When they finish the licence study, in June 2011, 90% succeeded in finding employment in September as teachers at a school institution (kindergarten or primary school).

Conclusion

Teaching practice ensures the link between theoretical knowledge and practical activities that provide students the opportunity to grow through experience and they begin to link to a culture of teaching. Graduates of our programme stress the following aspect that teaching practice has effect on:

- teaching skills and acquisition of the role of a teacher;
- observing a variety range of experiences that students go through;
- understanding the practical aspects of the course as distinct from theoretical studies;
- putting theories into practice and developing a deeper understanding of educational principles and their implication on learning;
• developing skills in the use of fundamental procedures, techniques and methods of teaching;
• acquiring the desirable characteristics / traits of a teacher and to display appropriate behaviour;
• developing desirable professional interests, attitudes and ideas related to the teaching profession.

Teaching in the classroom is not only the objective of teaching practice, but also to provide training in all activities which student teachers are going to perform in the future during their didactic life. For this purpose they have to understand the role of teaching by spending a whole day in school and observe all the characteristics of teaching activity. They have to participate in all school activities like preparation of daily activities, timetable, preparation and maintenance of different registers, evaluation of class work and homework, arrangement of tutorial groups, sports/ games, morning assembly, co-curricular activities, duty during recess, duty as day master, duty before and after school, decoration of classroom, preparation and maintenance of attendance board, information board, looking after and arrangements of aids in classrooms, science laboratories and library. But the function of practice teaching depends mostly on the teacher as tutor, and the teacher/tutor's relationship with student teachers and experienced classroom teachers.

Teaching as a unique profession requires adequate teachers skills and competences that the student teacher must acquire during his/her licence degree training and master studies. It is a long process of learning and teaching practice that constitutes an important part of any teacher-education programme. I may say that it is an art that should not be treated with levity or carried out in a haphazard manner because it helps the practicing teachers to imbibe the teaching culture which they will depend on throughout their life.

References


Iucu, R., Pacurari, O., (2001), Formare initiala si continua, Humanitas educational, Bucuresti.


http://www.sp.uconn.edu/~nrctg/sem/semart09.html


http://www.iienetwork.org/