BEING A TEACHER – A PROFESSION OF FAITH

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Abstract: The unprecedented transformations which took place in the last few decades in contemporary society impose a permanent revision of the training methods of the future teachers. On the European and international level, we notice a change in the perception of the teaching profession. There is a more acute problem of focusing on the qualification at standards of higher quality in their preparation through the assimilation of key skills. From this point of view, the institutions of higher learning have great responsibility in the training of professionals in the didactic field, so that they can accumulate the skills which are sufficient and necessary to continuous training, according to the principle of lifelong learning. The orientations towards the professionalization of the teaching profession impose a training level of the learners which can adapt to social changes, and to the transformations at the level of the profession through permanent accumulation in lifelong learning.

Key words: education, competences, teaching, critical thinking, reforming.

1. Competences and professionalization

The educational ideal is regulated at the level of educational politics so that the personality profile formed through the educational process can coincide with that solicited by society in a given historical period. The educational ideal of the contemporary Romanian school, according to the regulations of the ministry of resort, is: "the free, integral and harmonious development of human individuality, in the formation of an autonomous personality and in assuming a system of values which are necessary for personal fulfillment, through the development of the entrepreneurial spirit through active participation of the citizen in society, social inclusion and employment on the work force market".

In order to reach these standards formulated as necessary and compulsory percepts, the protagonists of the educational act, as main actors, must themselves be prepared in a way in which they can put in practice these regulations at high standards. This aspect imposes the professionalization of the teaching profession through rigorous initial and continuous, responsible and competent training. Such training involves forming general and specialty skills. But what does a competence involve? According to the regulations of the Law of National Education, we have a few definitions:

➢ A "multifunctional and transferable complex of knowledge, abilities and aptitudes";
➢ "the proven capacity to select, combine, and adequately use knowledge or other abilities, consisting in values and attitudes, in order to solve successfully a category of work or learning situations , as well as the personal or professional development in conditions of efficacy and efficiency".

At a closer look, we notice that the didactic profession involves a complex of competences[1]:

➢ specialty and general knowledge;

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[1] J., Bruner, The Culture of Education, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996.

- ➢ capacities, aptitudes and availability;
- ➢ didactic experience;
- ➢ professional reflection and attitude;
- ➢ Personal values and qualities.

The concept of competence demands the existence of performative knowledge converted in savoir-dire, savoir-faire, savoir-etre. That is why the accumulation of professional competences involves going longitudinally and transversally through the disciplines which contribute to the general training of the future teachers for the primary and secondary school. The educative process involves a holistic approach of the object and subject of education. Given the age level and the human resource he will be working with, one firstly needs psychological competences. Knowing the child's psychology is self-imposed. One can't work with a human material without the thorough knowledge of human psychology. As psychology approaches vast subjects, the future teachers will have to acquire knowledge about child psychology, the development according to age levels, without neglecting the individual particularities that differentiate them. How necessary is this scientific knowledge of the psychological development of a child? It is as necessary as the statement that the child isn't a miniature adult, he is a human being with his own needs and rights, and with a vast potential that the adult has to develop. The Convention of United Nations approaches the situation and rights of children: "The children of this world are innocent, vulnerable and dependent. They are also curious, active and full of hope. Their life should be one of joy and peace, playing, learning and growing. Their future should be modeled in harmony and cooperation. They should shape themselves through horizon enlargement and acquirement of experience"[2]. If we talk about early childhood, or the pre-school period, we can characterize it through the children's capacity to use the language to express their ideas and feelings, to interpret events and phenomena close to them in order to understand the world they live in and to adapt it to their level of understanding. Late childhood, which begins after 5 years of continuous schooling is characterized by low cognitive skills that allow children to reflect on everyday occurrences and events in a more impersonal way, the ability to adapt to the realities of concrete also increases, and, under the sphere of education influences, the ability to regulate emotions and personality nuances in the child becomes more structured. R.B.Cattel considers personality as a "factorial and dynamic design, expressed in the responses to situations.[3]" H. J. Eysenck 'the algorithm of mixing intellectual, energetic anf attitude at the level of an individual."

In addition to thorough knowledge of child psychology, teaching skills involve acquiring knowledge of the profession of general pedagogy, teaching methodology and deepening of didactic methodology. General pedagogy clarifies the concept of the role of education as a training process and human transformation. This training is based on the aims of philosophical, religious, cultural, social aims imposed by the learning process. Planchard Emile said on pedagogy that "it deals with what is, what should be and what is done.[4]" Preschool Pedagogy and small schooling deals with specific education and the schooling of preschool age children. In addition to the acquisition of skills as a basic

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[2] H.Rudolph Schaffer, Introduction in the Psychology of the Child, ASCR Publishing House, Cluj Napoca, 2005, p.8.
[3] Cf. R., Coerter, L., Montada, 1982.
[4] Emile Planchard, Contemporary School Pedagogy, EDP, 1992, p. 32.

theoretical level we notice the implementation of this knowledge and teaching skills. A first class of skills that future teachers are required to assimilate regarding the instructional design are:

- The skill of didactic design;
- The capacity to build basic tools implemented in information and communication technologies;
- The capacity to apply modern methods;
- Skills to develop educational models;
- The adaptability of learning techniques to the needs of learners;
- Skills in building educational learning environments;
- Assessment skills.

Gaining professional competence is a difficult and important task in the preparition and training of future teachers. It is known that the teaching profession is a vocation requiring certain specific skills, such as passion for the teaching profession, love for children, empathy, patience, etc. tactical sense. In addition to these, the teaching profession is acquired by accumulation of skills and experience.

Prospective teachers to be well prepared from the theoretical and practical point of view must:

- be able to achieve a teaching design;
- be able to make a lesson plan;
- be able to work with curriculum documents;
- be able to conduct a practical activity in the classroom;
- apply techniques and interactive methods of learning;
- provide feedback to the learning activities of learners.

We notice that future teachers must know and apply elements of design education in classroom practice, and this requires not only theoretical knowledge on design development education, but more than that, it involves their application in classroom practice so that the circuit of the teaching process is complete: teaching, learning, evaluation.

2. The learning activity and optimization methods

The educational process is based on direct and indirect learning activities based on motivation, especially on the intrinsic. Leontiev (1991), considers activities as basic units of a human being, which can be classified according to the motivation behind them. The learning activity should be seen as a specifically human activity involved in the acquisition of knowledge for knowledge and understanding of the world. Before proceeding to the learning activities, the teacher must realize the aspect that each child, in his uniqueness, perceives the world surrounding him based on personal experience and his individual way of processing information. This requires the teacher to learn to differentiate between these factors. Each student has specific preferences and learning styles and a good teacher will adapt their teaching performance in order to satisfy all these requirements. In the teaching practice, learning must be differenciated. If understanding is better accomplished, the learning will be more effective. The learning activity must be transformed from a dependent activity into an independent, self-conscious, well-organized activity. The personal experience of learners, the learning styles and preferences must be taken into account in encouraging learning situations so

that the student are involved in their learning. In order to meet the variety of personal needs of learners within a class ione must offer appropriate education, and effective assessment to enhance school performance. How can the teacher achieve these goals? By differentiating learning in several directions, to change the balance of teacher-student activities in the classroom, the content taught should represent only a pretext for the formative development of learners and the teacher becomes the facilitator of learning experiences, not only the resource, and the learning experiences should turn into real purchases. The differentiation of learning can be achieved on many levels:

The differentiation of learning though resource materials that provide the optimization of learning, the same content can be taught by using multiple teaching aids;

The differentiation of learning through different tasks applied to learners in groups or even individually to facilitate learning tasks at their own pace through personal and intellectual applied effort, with:
• an appropriate range of tasks;
• the adaptation of the theme to the abilities, skills and interests of learners;
• a variety of topics to be chosen from.

The differentiation of learning activities through support, because some learners have more need of help than others to perform certain tasks. This assistance is provided in different ways:
➢ individual support from the teacher
➢ support through technology
➢ the reward of achievements
➢ fostering teamwork
➢ guidance for small groups.

The differentiation of tasks according to skills, preferences and the disposition of learners so that:
➢ objectives can be achievable;
➢ evaluation criteria are presented;
➢ developing individual action plans;
➢ support of those in need;
➢ meeting individual needs
➢ use support materials.

The differentiation of content can be achieved by careful selection in accordance with the recommendations of the curriculum by eliminating unnecessary duplication, and widening the curriculum according to learners'interests.

The differentiation of the educational process so as to contribute to the development of thinking by calling for flexible activities to arouse the interests of learners, to develop the skills which are already formed, to help develop their skills.

The differentiation of the results of the evaluation process of the learners so as to give learners the opportunity to express themselves differently. The learning outcome should demonstrate abstract thinking, complexity, depth of understanding and the application of key skills and abilities to different learning situations. Students participate in learning situations, but they perceive them differently, the rapidity of the response differs, as well as the approach, so the tasks should be challenging, exciting the students' desire for knowledge and be consistent with their beliefs and their culture. Therefore in order to support students in learning, the teacher should:

➢ work permanently with students as a mediator in the learning process;
➢ balance individual and group tasks;
➢ maintain relationships with all educational factors: parents, guardians, community.

The differentiation of learning through independent projects, which should be applied to learners with special skills to a field or the another, to increase interest and to develop these skills through independent work. The idea is to facilitate differentiated learning at their own pace and in their area of interest by individual study, with the teacher have only the role of a mentor and facilitator.

3. Creating the educational environment

It is very important for the teacher to create an educational environment conducive to learning. The classroom must first meet some ergonomic rules. In addition to this, the educational area should be a pleasant environment for study, to stimulate learners to focus their interests and creativity. An ideal classroom should be divided into areas of interest with particular spaces for different activities: reading, writing, practical skills, clothing and construction, creative play and audio-video and Internet browsing. Somewhere in the center of the room it would be necessary to have a large common area for whole-class activities. All learning activities, those with the whole class and those with individual groups, and are led by the teacher who becomes a facilitator, a partner and a mentor of learners in the labyrinth of knowledge. Such a good education area offers many opportunities for differentiated learning and individualized practice.
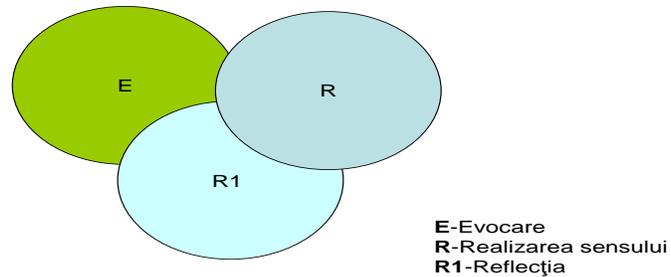
4. Tehniques of critical thinking in learning activization

In order to assist a thorough understanding of learning differences, the teacher must act in a professional manner by using a support methodology. He should apply classical and modern teaching methods in a manner tailored to the individual and class level.

By using techniques based on critical thinking[5], teachers can employ the Socratic technique to determine students to think deeply on a subject. Using the techniques of developing critical thinking proposes a framework that guides thinking and learning to a deeper understanding, as a well-structured strategy. This structure starts from the idea that learning should always start from the life experience and knowledge of learners, and on this knowledge we should thus build durable and reliable new knowledge. The stages of the learning framework proposed by the techniques of critical thinking comprise three stages:

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[5] Charles Temple, Jeannie L. Steele, Kurtis S. Meredith, Applying the techniques of developing critical thinking, Supliment la Revista Didactica Pro, nr.2 (8), 2008, Bucuresti.

Etapele cadrului de învăţare conform gândirii critice

E-Evocare
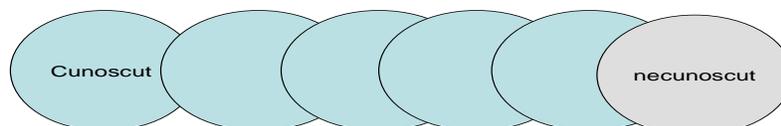**R**-Realizarea sensului
R1-Reflecţia

1.Evocation - E, is carried out by means of a preparatory conversation regarding the subject and topic under discussion. The stages are the following:

- o identification of problem / subject;
- o making notes on the blackboard;
- o discussions regarding what should be known about the subject / problem
- o making notes on the blackboard;
- o discussions regarding the usefulness of the subject / problem

2. *Meaning achievement - R,* understanding the learning situation is fulfilled progressively, while trainees acquire new information and their expectations are confirmed. Now, the teacher is the facilitator that professionally conducts the thinking process of his/her trainees towards discovering knowledge.

3. *Reflection – R,* involves a prior discussion that contributes to practicing and fixing new information while the cognitive transfer is understood and accomplished. It is carried out based on a set of questions that would lead trainees to the awareness of the novelty regarding the topic under discussion. The teacher will guide them through questions toward etracting relevant information that has not been mentioned in the evocation stage.

Treptele cunoaşterii în gândirea critică

Critical thinking is a mechanism of change, but the support that makes it work is he teacher with his/her personality, abilities, teaching style and charisma. No matter how modern a method or a techniques is, it is still plain talk if the teacher does not properly and skilfully integrate it among other didactic strategies.

5. Practical research

In our effort to undergo the most effective training for our students at the Faculty of Educational Sciences and Social, domain *Pedagogy of School and Pre-school Education* we have decided to do an experiment on two parallel groups of students. For one disciplines, *Pedagogy of School and Pre-school Education* we have taught the lectures as rectories and at the discipline *Methodology of cultural, civic and recreational Activities* we have used techniques of critical thinking as teaching method. We took into consideration the following premises:

- o Self – motivation in the process of student formation.
- o Developing self – evaluation strategies of self performances by students related to pre-established objectives.
- o Establishing seminar objectives in accordance with the identified, perceived formation needs – new competences.
- o Application of active and reflexive methods for the formation of adults as extrinsic motivators,
- o Operations within the student focused formation process (group discussions, problem situations, case studies, empathic communication, untraditional school environment, non-school environment)
- o Creation of "living the success" situations
- o Taking into consideration psycho-pedagogical particularities of adults (has a high concentration degree, easily carries out more difficult tasks, can do individual work)
- o Establishing a favourable climate for learning.
- o Valuing students' intellectual and practical thesaurus
- o Creating equal opportunities for all students, so as all of them to benefit of multiple learning resources.
- o Balancing intellectual and emotional components of the lecture
- o Creating premises for a direct confrontation with practical, social and research problems.
- o Favouring students' openness toward change, personal and professional improvement

I have been working in this system for a semester. Then I have assessed students' performances. By comparing students' results at both disciplines, I have noticed that they had better results at the discipline thought with critical thinking techniques.

The results of our experiment are the following: the difference between the two groups is not very big. The general level of assessed performance has improved as revealed by the chart below (Chart no 1).
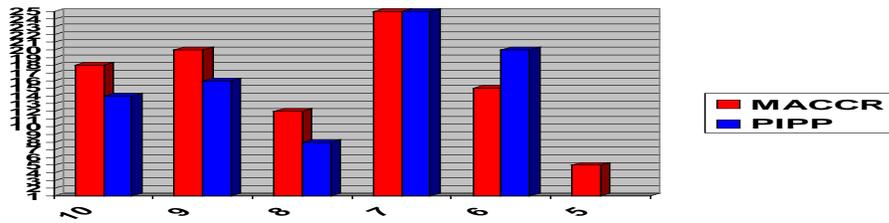
Rezultatele evaluării iniţiale şi finale

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Chart no1 –Students' results at evaluation

Table no 1. Results of initial and final evaluation

	High	Medium	Low
Initial level of satisfaction	58,83%	28,91%	12,26%
Final level of satisfaction	69,98%	18,64%	10,38%

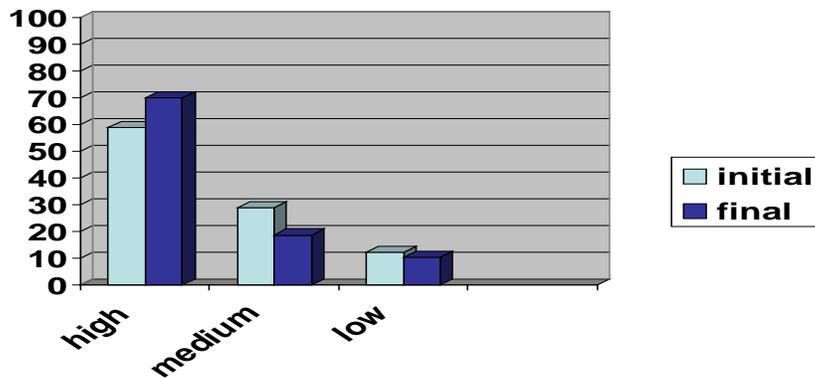# Result of initial and final evaluation

Chart 8. Results of initial and final evaluation

The level of self – evaluation has increased by one point at the end of the semester and corresponds to the balance between initial and final evaluation (Table no 1). The decrease in the average value of the satisfaction level is explained by negative evaluation of some students' own work as a consequence of frustration registered at the interference of cognitive lineal – unlinial system.

Conclusions:

We consider that a well prepared teacher has to acquire along with pedagogical and didactical knowledge also a certain attitude toward his/her profession and toward the trainees. Therefore we strongly emphasize that a well prepared teacher has first of all to be a dedicated one. Profession is learnt by acquiring information that is turned into knowledge and that has to be put in practice with vocation, strictness and critical sense. Self – criticism should be present in every moment of didactic activity in the class, being aware of the fact that the trainees' unfulfilment is partly the teacher's unfulfilment because most of the times trainees' results depend on the teacher's involvement in the didactic process.

We strongly support the idea that didactic profession is a vocational profession.

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