Specialist training in pedagogy – a recurring challenge for adult education. Case study: „Al. I. Cuza” University of Iași

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Abstract

Institutions designed exclusively for the training of adults, universities are undergoing an accentuated development process throughout the world. During its history, the Romanian higher education system has also benefitted from an ascending evolution, from both quantitative and qualitative standpoints. During the first years after 1990, the “Pedagogy” field of study went through a course of institutional growth; gradually, however, it has reached a stage characterised by difficulties and restraints. The present study evokes the Romanian experience regarding the training of specialists in pedagogy, from the perspective offered by the establishment of this activity at the “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iași prior to and after the 1990s. While identifying the features related to the development of the Pedagogy course of study, the paper also comprises conclusions regarding the contemporary existence of particular dysfunctional aspects in relation to the training of specialists in this field. The assumptions and demonstration included herein refer to the idea that in Romanian adult training, an unprecedented crisis is clearly visible in relation to training pedagogy specialists; this situation demands constant reevaluation, and, in the upcoming years, it will likely further need to be addressed as a matter of urgency. Finally, the study enumerates the arguments in favour of a political intervention targeted towards improving the quality of the Pedagogy course of study and it structures the identified sustaining elements by reference to multiple organising criteria: the school environment (students, teaching staff, parents, curriculum) – as direct beneficiary of the pedagogy specialists’ work, the world of education, as a whole – as a reality with a fast dynamics, unique in the history of the socio-human existence, the professionalization in a definite direction, the pedagogy field itself. Creating the bases for an efficient and valuable educational intervention, pedagogy requires a constant reconfiguration of its own institutional ontology, as an extension and in complementarity with its comprehensive ontology.

Keywords: university education, education for adults, pedagogy, course of study, professionalization

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1. Introduction

Specialists in the field of pedagogy are professionalised, throughout the word, by way of university studies. For this reason, the activities which are conferring such specialists their professional identity are situated, in their essence, within the wider context of adult education. In Romania, the experience of training the above-mentioned professional category has a several decade-old history, although the pedagogy field had been present, as an educational offer within the study programmes, from the beginning of the higher education institutions’ functioning. In the present considerations, we scrutinize the experience in Iași in the field of pedagogy, both as a field of study, and as an academic course of study, so as to highlight several significant aspects within the overall context of the current analysis. The assumptions and the demonstration included in the second part of this study show that in adult training in Romania an unprecedented crisis is becoming apparent in relation to training specialists in pedagogy, and such a situation needs future attentive reassessment and it should be addressed as a matter of urgency at the level of national educational policies.

2. Pedagogy at the „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iași; historical landmarks in the field’s development

The history of the „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iași includes, since the year it was founded, 1860, worthy moments in the establishment of pedagogy. Among the educational fields made available to students, pedagogy was encountered as a learning discipline equally open to incipient scientific approaches (as applicable at the respective moment) and to philosophical methods (Stan, 2010). After the establishment of higher education in Iași, the organizational framework in which pedagogy was taught consisted of philosophy education, and as a result the first courses about education were taught by reputable philosophy professors, such as: Simion Bărnuțiu (1808-1864), Titu Maiorescu (1840-1917), Constantin Leonardescu (1844-1907), Constantin Dimitrescu-Iași (1849-1923).

In 1878, 18 years since the commencement of academic activities, a self-standing academic pedagogy chair was created. The first person to hold this position was Constantin Dimitrescu-Iași (between 1878-1885), who was succeeded by Ion Găvănescul (from 1888 to 1932) and Ștefan Bârsănescu (between 1945-1965).

The visibility enjoyed by the field of pedagogy increased substantially in the academic environment, in the community, and particularly in secondary education, as a result of the establishment in 1899 of the University Pedagogical Seminar; its first director was, for 33 years, Ion Găvănescul (1899-1932). After the Second World War, the 1948 Education Law regulated the establishment, for the respective year, of a pedagogy faculty. In its first academic year, 1948-1949, the Faculty of Pedagogy-Psychology had 34 students, two departments (Pedagogy and Psychology) and offered students various subjects in the courses included in the curricula (1939-1959 Yearbook, 1960): General Pedagogy, The History of Pedagogy, Methodology, Child Psychology, Didactics, School Hygiene, General Psychology, Applied Psychology, Pathological Psychology, Animal Psychology. With an existence of only three years (1948-1951), the post-war Faculty of Pedagogy-Psychology marks an important moment in the history of training specialists in educational sciences.

After 1951, pedagogy found its own position within the Faculty of Philology-History-Philosophy; one of the largest institutions in the University of Iași at the time, the above-mentioned faculty comprised 8 divisions, among which the pedagogy division (which was associated with Romanian language and literature) and had 11 departments, one of which for pedagogy-psychology. Future teachers were trained in pedagogy (as major) and in Romanian language and literature (as minor) (Grămădă, 1986). Subsequently, the same course of study was included in the psychology-sociology division (Cernichievici, Iancu, 1986). In 1958, the University of Iași broadened its pedagogical academic offer by setting up the Pedagogic Office (Romanian, Cabinetul pedagogic), which continued the experience and tradition of the Pedagogical Seminar from the beginning of the 20th century and which had responsibilities in connection with the practical activities of the students – future teachers. In the academic year of 1968-1969, the structure of the Faculty of History-Philosophy included a distinct pedagogy division. In this institutional framework, the education of students in the fields of pedagogy and psychology continued until 1990.

After 1990, the “Pedagogy” course of study had a clear track in institutional growth. In 1990, the Faculty of Philosophy included Pedagogy, in addition to, and distinct from, Psychology as a course of study. Seven years later, in 1997, the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences appeared and in the newly configured framework, a
Pedagogical University Seminar was organized (in 1994), followed by a Department for Teacher Training (in 1999). After the events of 1989, the re-instatement of the Pedagogy and Psychology courses of study within the Faculty of Philosophy in the “Al. I. Cuza” University of Iași may be regarded as a reparative act. Their enormous success among young adults was demonstrated on several occasions by the fact that, at the admission contests, there were up to 20 candidates per each available student position, which clearly constitutes the best evidence of the necessity for these specializations (http://www.pshh.uaic.ro/prezentare/despre/istoric.htm).

2.1. The first pedagogy professors at the University of Iași: Simion Bărnuțiu and Titu Maiorescu

Simion Bărnuțiu (21 July1808, Bocșa, Sălaj county – 28 May 1864, Valea Almașului), the first professor of pedagogy at the University of Iași, taught for ten years in the Moldavian capital. He was initially a teacher at Academia Mihăileană (1855-1860) and then at the academic institution in Copou (1860-1864), both readily accepted as prestigious adult education institutions. The years spent in academic positions laid the bases for Simion Bărnuțiu authoring a comprehensive work in the field of educational sciences. Specifically, in 1870, Simion Bărnuțiu published a textbook about education, entitled Pedagogy. The two sections of this work indicate a comprehensive interrogative content and, as a noteworthy aspect, in concordance to similar German themes, which he also expressly refers to (especially to A. H. Niemeyer). Starting from the historical presentation of several educational systems, Simion Bărnuțiu describes the Romanian system of education and instruction (in the first part of his work), and thus makes „the first broader reference to the past of Romanian schools” within a work of pedagogy (Noveanu and Potolea, 2007). The structure of the material synthesized by Simion Bărnuțiu integrates the core pedagogical topics which will be the subject of analysis in numerous subsequent specialised papers, such as intellectual, corporal, aesthetic and moral education, the relationship between education and instruction, the principles of instruction, Romanian language teaching, the aims of teaching pedagogy etc.

Titu Maiorescu (1840, Craiova – 1917, Bucharest) was linked to the pupils from Școala Normală „Vasile Lupu” in Iași, as well as to the students from all the faculties in the University of Iași. He is the first Romanian intellectual of European fame to organise public conferences on issues related to education in the Romanian context. In the 1861-1862 academic year, such public conferences were held in Bucharest, and during the academic year of 1862-1863, the conferences took place in Iași. The illustrious scholar also initiated courses and seminars for the training of members of the teaching staff. The idea of having practice training for pupils from Școala Normală was put forward in 1863 by Maiorescu in his capacity as a principal of the afore-mentioned secondary school in Iași.

3. Pedagogy and its rise after 1990

The complex analysis of a plurality of data regarding the evolution of the Pedagogy course of study in the organizational structures after 1990 evinces a paradoxical conclusion; on the one hand, the data reveal a clear rise at the academic level of the course of study, but, on the other hand, in the last years, the data indicate its transition into a stage characterized by difficulties, dysfunctions and constraints which require lucid analysis and adequate future intervention both at the level of the institution in Iași, and in the general scheme of national politics.

3.1. Methodology

The information which lays the basis for the assertions within our current analysis has been identified by way of analyzing the academic and administrative documents; we have analyzed the study plans followed by students taking the Pedagogy course of study during 1990-2013, the academic records (starting with the first series of graduates - 1990-1995 up to the latest one - 2010-2013) and have carried out the analysis / interpretation of the synthetic information regarding the evolution of cohorts of students (when admitted into the faculty and on graduation), as indicated either in academic records or in study guides offered to students at the Faculty of Psychology and Education Studies.

The information resulting from the analysis of study plans has been introduced in double entry tables: the academic disciplines studied by students for each academic year were noted: years I, II, III, IV, V - for graduates
with 5 academic years; years I, II, III, IV - for graduates with 4 academic years; years I, II, III - for graduates with 3 academic years. We referred to the 21 aspects of the study plans assimilated by the graduates who finished their studies during the 24 years of educational activity after 1990 (the year when the pedagogical and psychological disciplines were reconfigured within the overall academic disciplines studied by the young adults). Afterwards, the data gathered in the tables (with the structure shown below) allowed the simultaneous display of disciplines within the educational offer. When changes to the initial version of the study plan occurred, these were acknowledged and certain meanings have been identified, with respect to either the name of the respective discipline being changed (when the discipline was kept), or certain disciplines being abandoned, or new disciplines being introduced. Also, we identified the moments when significant quantitative and qualitative changes occurred. By way of example, please find below a sequence of the methodology we adopted, without detailing the entire information thus obtained (due to space restrictions).

| TABLE 1. COLLECTED DATA FORM |
|-----------------------------|
| ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE | NUMBER OF ACADEMIC YEARS |
| | 5 years | 4 years | 3 years |
| Logic | x | x | |
| Curriculum Theory | x | x | x |
| Aspects of Sociology | x | Sociology/ Introduction to sociology |

3.2. Collected data

Going through the above-mentioned sources allowed us to present some relevant information in the context of our study; the categories outlined below suggest the breadth, characteristics and dynamics of the activity of the Pedagogy course of study at the University of Iași, and lay the basis for the final remarks of this analysis.

The Pedagogy course of studies had a continuous activity after 1990; during the 24 years of academic education, 21 graduating years finalized their studies in this field, and 3 are currently pursuing academic studies: 3 followed 5 years of academic studies, 12 followed 4 years of academic studies, 6 graduating years, which finished their studies, followed 3 years of studies in the Bologna educational system. The Bologna system was introduced in the Romanian universities in 2005. The already-mentioned continuity indicates the stability of students’ orientation towards this field, despite the suppression of certain pedagogical courses of study within pedagogical high schools. The graduation years which followed the Pedagogy course of study and the duration of studies (5 years, 4 years, 3 years) are reflected in the below table.

| TABLE 2. THE NUMBER OF GRADUATION YEARS AND THE DURATION OF STUDIES BETWEEN 1990 AND 2013. |
|-------------------------------|
| NUMBER OF ACADEMIC YEARS |
| Duration | 5 years | 4 years | 3 years |
| First year | 1990/ 1991/ 1992 | 1993/ 1994/ 1995/ | 2005/ 2006/ 2007/ |
| | 1996/ 1997/ 1998/ | 2008/ 2009/ 2010/ |
| | 1999/ 2000/ 2001/ | 2011/ 2012/ 2013 |
| | 2002/ 2003/ 2004 |
| Number of series of graduates | 9 out of which: |
| 3 | 12 |
| 6 with finished studies, |
| 3 with on- going studies |

Student recruitment for the referred course of study was carried out over a 12 year period (from 1990 to 2002) by way of admission examination, and starting with 2002, for another 12 year period (between 2002 and 2013) by way
of portfolio-based competition. Irrespective of the adopted selection form, we note the complete allocation of the student positions available for this course of study. Certain differences were brought to light with respect to the number of admission sessions where the student positions administratively established were fully allocated; during the last 5 years, both a summer admission session and an autumn admission session were organized (for the purpose of allocating the available student positions, including in a subsidised regime). While at the time when the classic selection by way of admission examination was applied, there were several candidates trying to obtain a student position (as a direct effect of the large increase of applicants for high education at the level of the entire academic education in Romania - according to Stan, 2007), during the period of admission based on portfolio competition, the allocation of available student positions was made with significant difficulty, during two registration sessions, with very little competition. While during the first period there was a true selection of candidates from a cohort of persons coming mainly from secondary education institutions having a pedagogical profile, during the second period the selection was basically absent; it was replaced with recruitment aimed at occupying the available student positions, of course with the observance of the agreed conditions and criteria.

With respect to the number of students, after the 1990s, in principle, the numerical situation after 1948 is reproduced; during 1948-1949 the faculty had 34 students, and after 1990 there were generally less than 40 students. Exceptionally, in 2003 and 2004 there were 43 students registered in the first academic year, in 2002 there were 47 students and in 2006 there was the largest number of students in the first academic year, namely 48. Table 3 selectively presents the number of students registered in the first year of studies, from 1999 to 2013.

| Year | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
|      | 40   | 37   | 39   | 47   | 43   | 43   | 38   | 48   |
|      | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 |
|      | 38   | 38   | 32   | 29   | 32   | 39   | 36   |

In all academic years referred by us herein, the number of students who finished their studies was different from the number of persons who were admitted in the first academic year; there was always a smaller number than the maximum possible (Table 4).

| Year | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
|      | 37/40| 33/37| 33/39| 43/47| 45/43| 38/43| 34/38| 46/48|
|      | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 |
|      | 41/38| 35/38| 37/32| 25/29| will finish studies in 2014 | will finish studies in 2015 | will finish studies in 2016 |

The difference between the number of students registered in the first academic year and the number of students who finished their studies in their respective graduation year is explained by the fact that there are persons who, due to various reasons, postponed the final examination for obtaining their bachelor degree, or have not passed it on their first try. Out of these students, some are recruited for academic re-registration in the following years; this phenomenon led to maintaining a comparable high number of students registered in the first academic year (compared to the preceding years), although a small, but continuing decrease in the total number of students in the first year of academic studies can be nonetheless detected.

The temporal continuity of the presence of Pedagogy specialization at an academic level is associated, however, with the discontinuity of students’ contact with certain categories of pedagogical matters. More specifically, while the graduation years with 5 academic years studied 51 academic disciplines in total, the graduation years with 4 academic years followed 43 academic disciplines, and the ones with 3 academic years followed 36 disciplines. Out
of these, the disciplines within the pedagogical field are predominant, followed by psychological disciplines. The constant core element of compulsory specialized disciplines included the following academic subjects: introduction to pedagogy, curriculum theory, the history of pedagogy, the theory of education, the theory of training, the theory of evaluation, pre-school pedagogy, the methodology of teaching educational studies, specialty practice/ pedagogical practice, general and differential psychology, etc. In addition, social and human disciplines were also present in different proportions, so as to ensure a necessary connection between the educational sciences and the theories which reflect the framework for the individuals' social existence (sociology, economics, ethics and deontology) and the areas that reflect the framework for the individuals' spiritual manifestation (philosophy/ logic/ the logic of educational discourse/ rhetoric/ the theory of knowledge/ hermeneutics/ axiology/ anthropology/ ethics and deontology). The latter series of subjects are present for the graduation years with 5 and 4 academic years, but they are mostly missing in the case of graduation years with 3 academic years. For them, the disciplines which are studied approach the educational act mainly from a pedagogical perspective and to a lower extent from an interdisciplinary perspective. For instance, students from the 2005, 2006 and 2007 graduation years were taught some elements of educational sociology despite the fact that they had not had any contact with the subject sociology/ general sociology during their undergraduate studies or even in high school, in the case of students who did not graduate from a high school with a focus on social and human sciences. From time to time, the study plans for the series of graduates with 5 and 4 academic years also included other disciplines: genetics and physiology / neurophysiology, school hygiene education and sanitary education, the history of philosophy, the history and philosophy of religion, social pedagogy and social integration didactics, family life pedagogy, self-education methods and techniques, child protection, art theory and artistic education, services psycho-pedagogy, psycho- pedagogical and social intervention, etc.

The Pedagogy course of study was connected to several professionalization tracks; while immediately after 1990 pedagogy graduates had a certain opportunity to work within the pedagogy - psychology departments of high schools with a pedagogical focus, such an option reduced gradually, simultaneously with the reduction or suppression (within certain timeframes) of the high schools with pedagogical profiles. Nevertheless, the roles of teacher – counsellor/ school counsellor and speech therapists were created, with the appropriate reflection in the applicable study plans in the faculty (Butnaru, 2009).

4. Conclusive Remarks

Regarded as a scientific field of knowledge, pedagogy is also viewed, in the present study, in other hypostases, such a study subject, an academic department, a faculty, an academic course of study. The analysis herein mainly looked at the administrative-organizational sides of pedagogy. The difficulties referred to in the above remarks may be regarded as deficiencies inherent to the development of any scientific area, at a particular moment in time. In the case of the Pedagogy course of study, we are of the opinion that such a perspective is insufficient or inadequate especially by reference to the categories of problems and issues which generally appear in school and in society from the point of view of training young adults. In this respect, we particularly refer to the following aspects:

- the increase of the role of formal education (starting from early education and continuing with university education and the training of adults in a formal, non-formal and informal framework);
- the radical change in the condition of education, of training adults in postmodernity (Popa, 2004), of the position and status of the trainer/ teacher, of the total of educational aims set forth at institutional level (Albu, 2009);
- the increase in the number of problems faced by students of all ages, and their transfer into the environment of educational institutions (i.e. belonging to incomplete family structures, the negative impact of mass-media, violence in general, violence in school/ bullying, child abuse etc.);
- the increased pressure on teachers of pedagogy to take over teaching roles in universities (as an effect of the teacher training being carried out exclusively in higher education institutions), on training adults who turn to pedagogy, even though their initial education had not prepared them for such roles (Stan, 2008; Cozma, & Diaec, 2008);
increasing expectations from all primary and secondary education teaching staff, at least towards pedagogy instructors, in the context of carrying out activities of life-long training and of the renewal/reform process undergone by the Romanian educational system (Stan & Curelaru, 2007) etc.

An insufficient investment in the training of specialists in the Pedagogy field could generate a re-occurrence of the episode from the beginning of the 20th century which has been invoked, with sadness, by G. G. Antonescu (Antonescu, 1923). In its search for scientific identity, pedagogy could overlook the need for defining itself as an area of university course of study. In the absence of such a high level, there is the risk that the tasks related to promoting and making pedagogy visible are taken over and managed by either the “exaggerated modernists” or the “enthusiastic dilettantes”. Consequently, as a field which creates the bases for an efficient and valuable educational intervention, pedagogy requires a constant reconfiguration of its own institutional ontology, as an extension of and complementary with its comprehensive ontology.

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