Portrait of teacher actions from the perspective of school managers

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Abstract

This work aims to study how the managers of preschool units know the portrait of teacher actions because the success in a kindergarten’s activity depends largely of its leader and on the instructive – educational quality. Thus, we investigated the perception of managers on the identification of preschool „specialty” of the educator, knowing the most suitable and appropriate to achieve specialization in the training of pre-school group manager of education, specialized knowledge of the elements of professional activity of the educator, identifying the most suitable formulas to designate the one that has an active teaching at pre-school and not least identifying the most significant actions the educator holds in his teaching.

The method we used in gathering the data is the interview based on the questionnaire.

Keywords: educational manager, educator, educator specialty and educator skills, teaching actions

1. Introduction

Teachers have seldom been the spokespersons of a nation, faithful and sincere interpreters of national ideals and missionaries of culture and civilization. Their voices not only spread the new ideas among the people, but also facilitated the free movement of values.

Noble in its essence and goals, teaching has known stages of enlighten and of being praised, epochs of glory and achievements, reaching a top place in the chart of professions. Aware of their role and status in society, the teachers continuously and modestly work to dedicate themselves for society’s development and improvement.

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The preschool group manager nowadays acts in a new context of requirements, obligations and resources that implies significant changes in his attitude and behavior, of roles and instructive-educative strategies. These types of requirements lead to a new understanding of priorities in the educational research field and brought up new means of research. In the last two decades, pedagogical research focused greatly on the “natural” behavior and on the teacher’s roles, on the teacher-pupil/child relationship, on pedagogical skills and optimal teaching action strategies, on the criteria and methods of assessing a successful teaching. These approaches outline a major trend in scientific research, mainly interested in the relations between the teacher’s characteristics, teaching methods and their effects on the teaching results.

There were many studies and researches centered on the teacher (A. Dragu, S. Gernichevici, F. N. Gonobolin, V. Oprescu, J. Stefanovic, N. Mitrofan, Popescu-Neveanu P. s.o.), allowing some conclusions and strategies for the future: the teacher’s role grew in the contemporaneous society, the number of requirements increased and became more complicated, the scientific bases of his activities developed and improved; his role as a leader in the education of the youth is still unknown, although there are other factors involved; the teacher’s accountability emphasized.

It looks like there is an outline of the educator based on some psychological criteria and s.o., but we have to admit that it is possible these general dimensions can be viewed from a different point, according to certain specific conditions, as is the case of his activity.

Preschool group managers are the first to convey in the young generations, in a methodic way the culture values of their forefathers, guide their steps in the vast field of sciences, and watch over the development of their personalities. The educator helps every child evolve, stimulates, guides and corrects his/her growth in a way that his/her psychical abilities evolve from inferior to superior stages. The educator also creates a proper learning environment, makes sure that all his children get the same amount of his care and that their individual or language differences, cultural or social backgrounds, religion, sex or nationality do not influence the teacher-child relationship.

There are only a few pedagogical studies and researches on the educator’s activity. Elena Joița focused in 1989 on the educator’s personality and the effectiveness of his work, P. Popescu-Neveanu studied the aspects connected to the educators’ system of values, and in a more recent paper, S. Marcus and his team dealt with the so-called “didactic pre-competence”. L. Gliga (coord.) in his “Professional Standards for Teaching Profession (2002) wrote a chapter centered on the teacher for kindergarten and primary school.

The scarce number of studies on the educator made us take up this research, but also because the teacher training for kindergarten took initially place on a high school level, from 1996 at University Pedagogical Colleges, and since 2005, as a university specialization in Pedagogy of Primary and Preschool Education.

“The 180° change” of education in the contemporaneous society is generated by the Man’s need for change and its increasing number, by the labour market standards for good professional, by the rapid and unpredictable evolutions of Economy (Frumos, 2003).

When society changes, the educational system also changes, thus it becomes a key factor in assuring individual and social success, which is complied with re-evaluations (Clark, 2000).

From a traditional perspective, the outlining of the “ideal” educator’s profile was not mainly based on studies or rigorous experiments, but on some thoughts and meditations on the problematic field of the educational activities. Only in the 20th century we can talk about the first attempts to experiment on some variables of the educator’s activity.

Studying how the spiritual and moral profile of the teacher was dealt with in Pedagogy, we understood that the image of the “ideal” teacher varied according to the epochs of society’s development, every one of them underlining its musts and organically correlating them with the requirements for the learning process and the school.

From all times, regardless of the degree of civilization and welfare of a society, the pedagogue, educator, and, lately, the preschool group or class manager, the one that had educated and is educating the young generation was and is still considered as role model for his/her pupils, developing various of their character and behavior traits, way of thinking, as well as teaching the normal amount of knowledge.

This pilot study tries to render the “ideal portrait” of the educator according to the perception of preschool unit managers.
2. Objectives of the study

This study was intended as a fact finding pilot study and aimed at finding how preschool unit managers understand the identification:

- of the “speciality” of the educator for kindergarten;
- of the most suitable and proper specialization for the professional training of the preschool group manager;
- of the professional elements/factors/requirements of the professional activity of the educator;
- of the most suitable method to designate/appoint the person for the educational process at the preschool level;
- of the most significant teaching activities of the educator.

2.1. The research hypotheses

In this study we started from the following hypotheses:

- If the performancy, efficiency and quality of the instructive process in a teaching institution is strongly linked to the leading ability of the manager, he has a real and positive view of the teachers in that kindergarten?

3. Methodology of the study

3.1. The study group

We worked with 50 kindergarten managers, half from the urban area, and the other half from the rural area. This research was made in April-May 2014 at preschool institutions in the Bihor county.

3.2. Research Method

We have used a 5-question questionnaire with free answers.

The first question asks for the way in which the subjects understand the “speciality” of the educator. The identification of the most suitable speciality for the professional training of the educator as seen by the kindergarten managers is the aim of the second question – a question with a single answer choice. The third question focuses on the knowledge about the specific professional activity of the educator. The identification of the most suitable method to designate/appoint the person for the educational process at the preschool level is dealt with by the forth question. The fifth question is the most significant and relevant; it focuses on the most significant actions for the activity of the educator. The kindergarten managers are asked to rate the answers according to their importance.

The interpretation of the results differs from one question to another. Questions 1, 2 and 4 were of multiple choice-type, thus we recorder the frequency of the answers. For questions 3 and 5, the managers had to rate the answers, thus we totalized the scores for each answer.

The fifth question was the most complex one; the subjects had to use scores from 1 to 15 for each of the listed answers, resulting the classification of the rate of the requirements of the specific professional activity of the educator.

All five questions aim the understanding of the “ideal portrait” of the educator’s actions as viewed by school managers.

4. Results and interpretation

4.1. How would you define the “specificity” of the educator?

Table 1. “Specificity” of the educator

| “Specificity” of the educator                                                                 | Urban | Rural | Total | % |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|---|
| a) Well trained person for the didactic task of instructing and educating the children in the preschool level and teaches all the subjects of the educational frame to a group of children. | 18    | 10    | 28    | 56% |
b) A good professional to work with children ranging from 3 to 6 year old and a devoted teacher.

c) It is a field in which the educator can achieve great results and professionally and emotionally guide the preschool children.

d) A person aware of the individual and age differences of the preschool children, capable of communicating, a good pedagogue and a “second parent”.

e) It requires a lot of talent, determination and an increased level of work, but mostly devotedness.

f) Proper psycho-pedagogical and educational management training.

g) Complex activity that begins the development of the child’s personality and character; a process responsible for the future activity of the preschool child.

The highest score is achieved by the marker that describes the educator as a well trained person that teaches all the school subjects to the group he/she manages. These specific requirements of his/her work call for a great amount of knowledge. Teaching activities have to be abundant in content, thus, he/she has to possess the basic knowledge for all school subjects, at a higher level than specified in the syllabus; he/she has to be able to professionally guide the children’s activity in all the curricular areas.

Ranked secondly, there are three markers that at the motivational level underline the orientation of the educators towards spiritual values, like: self-esteem, love to the youngest and possibility of further development/improvement.

A special place in defining the speciality of the educator is rendered to the vocation/determination for performing this profession.

4.2. What do preschool unit managers understand by the professional training of the educator?

The kindergarten managers identified the proper specialization for the professional training of the “ideal” educator by answering the second question.

Table 2 Double specialization

| Index No. | High school diploma - specialization educator | Pedagogy of Primary and Preschool Education – Master’s degree in preschool education | Pedagogy of Primary and Preschool Education – Psychology | Pedagogy of Primary and Preschool Education – Music | Pedagogy of Primary and Preschool Education – Arts (Drawing) |
|-----------|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| 50        | 1                                           | 11                                                                              | 26                                                     | 6                                                   | 3                                               |

The most suited combination of specializations for the training of a good professional for preschool is Pedagogy (Bachelor’s degree) and a Master’s Degree in the field of preschool education. At the other end of the pole is the combination of high school diploma having as specialization: educator, scoring only one point.

Ranked secondly is Pedagogy-Foreign languages due to the answers of managers from the rural area, where the lack of professionals is greatly felt.

The combination Pedagogy-Psychology is ranked thirdly because of their common field of Educational Sciences.

The other two combinations, Pedagogy-Arts (Drawing) and Pedagogy-Music scored the same number of points, being ranked on the forth place. Managers considered that the interaction mode within the learning process at preschool is the “game”, and creativity is the “ace” in the educator’s hand.

The answers given by the subjects are realistic, because the profession of educator is such a complex one that its combination with another specialization would decrease the quality of the professional training; there could be cases when the graduate is not thoroughly trained for either of the two specializations. This idea is also shared by the Ministry of Education: the educators for primary and preschool education should be trained solely for this profession, without having a second specialization.
4.3. Which are the factors that render the specificity of the educator’s activity?

The third question focuses on the knowledge about the specific professional activity of the educator.

Table 3. The specific professional activity of the educator

| Index no. | Teaching all school subjects of the educational frame | Teaching the same group of preschool children during a complete school level/cycle. | Age differences of preschool children | Preschool level is the first stage of the educational system |
|-----------|-----------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| 50        | 175                                                 | 166                                                                             | 106                                  | 53                                                     |

The highest score is ranked for teaching all school subjects of the educational frame, and the second, by teaching the same group of preschool children during a complete school level/cycle.

The educator possesses the basic knowledge for the school subjects he/she teaches, establishes intra and interdisciplinary connections for their systematic approach, uses a proper language for every one of them and constantly updates his own knowledge system by individual study and participation in training activities.

The fact that the educator teaches the same group of preschool children during a complete school level/cycle allows him/her to thoroughly understand their individual, age and background differences and he/she uses this knowledge in planning and organizing the learning process.

Thus the educator properly learns and uses scientific methods to understand the child, permanently draws observations under various conditions, communicates with the child, his/her family, friends and peers.

4.4. Which is the most suitable method to designate/appoint the person for the educational process at preschool level?

The kindergarten managers considered that the most suitable the person to perform teaching activities at preschool is the teacher for preschool education, as showed in table no.4.

Table no.4 Methods to designate didactic activity at preschool level/cycle

| Index No. | Educator | Teacher for preschool education | Teacher | Graduate of University College | Different choice |
|-----------|----------|--------------------------------|---------|--------------------------------|------------------|
| 50        | 19       | 22                             | 7       | 2                              | -                |

The “traditional” label: educator is highly considered by school unit managers, although the first rank is scored to teacher for preschool education. The concept of teacher covers a large field: all professionals of education, regardless of their didactic degree or status. It includes all professions: educator, mentor, and tutor, teacher for primary school, for secondary school, high school or university, all the “actors” of the teaching staff. At the other end, there is the label of graduate of University College.

4.5. Which of the didactic process actions are the most significant for the activity of the educator?

The last question is the most complex one and helps us identify the most significant strategies of the didactic process of the activity of the educator.

Table no.5 Significant didactic strategies

| Crt. no. | Didactic strategies | Score |
|----------|---------------------|-------|
| 1        | To thoroughly plan and organize his/her group activity. | 731   |
To check daily the activity of his/her preschool children.  
To understand the way of thinking of preschool children.  
To easily and properly interact with children.  
To observe to signs of the development and to stimulate the learning activity of preschool children  
To frequently organize parties, outside school activities and open-door activities.  
To examine and appreciate preschool children.  
To show interest in scientific studies and research.  
To adapt the teaching materials to group of children and to create new models of teaching activities  
To identify learning situations.  
To speak clearly and correctly.  
To make house calls.  
To determine the difficulty degree of the teaching material.  
To create his/her own teaching materials.  
To make use efficiently of his/her authority.  

Planning and organizing the teaching activity is ranked firstly. It represents the complex action of pre-designing, in a systematic vision, the models of the teaching activities, according to which all the parts of the educational process – objectives, contents, strategies, evaluation, and mostly, the forms of teaching are completed at a high level of competence and effectiveness.

Organizing and planning are linked; they also require a managerial approach able to assure the making of proper teaching decisions and to adapt the educational micro-processes. Both ask for the usage of some norms that give them a certain assurance in the success of the teaching act.

At this level the educational process helps the children gather knowledge and organize their independent work, forms their abilities and skills. They also expect to get recognition for their work. The following teaching strategy was considered that of daily checking the preschool children activity.

It is important for the educator to know the amount and quality of knowledge acquired by his/her preschool children, thus he/she finds the best way to organize his/her future teaching activity, to know from where to start. The activities of feedback and evaluation help the children consolidate their knowledge, to avoid any mistakes and errors. When their knowledge is checked up, they develop the sense of duty, become accustomed to perform their learning tasks on a daily basis, and are stimulated to get good results for their work during the kindergarten program. The activities of feedback and evaluation also help the educator to assess his/her results of the activities performed with the group, to find which methods and actions are suited for his/her children and which are not, and to improve his/her teaching methods.

Among the most significant didactic strategies are also to understand the way of thinking of preschool children and to easily and properly interact with children.

The educator uses proper scientific methods of understanding the child: makes permanent observations under various conditions, communicates with the child’s parents and peers, but also with other members of the school community.

The educator chooses the best instruments to know the child and makes use in an adequate and creative way of his/her findings. Together with the children, he/she sets and follows a set of rules on the child-child relationship, child-educator relationship, and child-parents relationship, helping them to establish their own sets of behavior norms.
5. Discussions

Analysing the comparative study of the preschool group managers, from the perspective of kindergartens’ managers, both urbane and rural, of those who have or do not have achievements in the didactic work of children’s instruction and education, there have been found some traits of which depends, in a higher or a lower extent, the performance in this activity and which can be considered actions of the didactic activity that can make the portrait of the new century’s ideal teacher.

The didactic activities on the whole, the pedagogical and professional skills represents the pedagogical talent, first expressed by what we call pedagogical art.

In general researchers has tried to provide a model of the „ideal” teacher, presenting the ensemble of the qualities and personality traits necessary for those who dedicate their lives to the work of instruction and education. In reality a preschool teacher’s work means, besides these qualities provided by researchers, a certain flexibility of the teacher depending on the specific of the school, on the children, on the double profession and the geographical area where the activity takes place.

Everybody agrees that an important place in the teaching system is that of the teacher. He is the first that in an organized and planned manner, gives to the new generations the cultural values created by the previous generations, guides their steps in the large field of science, watch the formation of their personality. The teacher knows that in order to attain his aims, he must always start from the cognition of the child in the ensemble of his particularities, from the child’s experiences, interests and endeavours.

6. Conclusions

Our study aimed at how preschool unit managers understand the “ideal” profile of educator actions in order to increase the efficiency and quality of teaching at preschool level.

Thus, the findings are the following:

- The difficulty to put in only a few words the “speciality” of the educator, a term not easy to define, as opposed to that of a teacher.
- The best and most realistic combination of specializations is Pedagogy (Bachelor’s Degree) and Master’s Degree in preschool education field.
- Teaching all school subject of the educational frame is one of the specific traits of the professional activity of the educator.
- The most suitable label to designate the person to perform the teaching process at preschool level is teacher for preschool education.
- The most significant teaching strategies of the educator are: to thoroughly plan and organize his group activities, to check daily the activity of his/her preschool children, to understand their way of thinking, to have an open and proper relationship with his/her preschool children, to show interest in scientific studies and researches, to notice the signs of the development of children in his/her group.

School unit managers profiled the preschool group manager – the educator – in a relatively objective way, reaching all the basic elements also underlined by the bibliography of the field.

The results of this study confirmed the pursued hypotheses.

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