Acquiring competences for the didactic profession

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Abstract

This article would like to underline the importance of the initial education necessary for the profession of educator. We underline this issue by starting with an objective evaluation of students’ training for becoming teachers. We identified an increasing lack of interest on the students’ part. The phenomenon is global and it is manifested to all ages. Is it a crisis of the education system, is it a crisis of the educational methodology or is it a crisis of our society? We try to understand the causes of this phenomenon so that we can improve the efficiency of educational process.

Keywords: Education, crisis, learning, school, improving, system;

1. Introduction

If we were to paraphrase Mialaret G., "culture is never a reached state," we would say that a teacher can never reach the ultimate preparation level. A career teacher is primarily a perfectionist, a discontent in a good way, trying to improve in different ways and by all available means in order to maintain the professional standards. He must keep himself updated with everything new in his domain. The phrase life long learning fits well with this profession.

Our faculty prepares students to become teachers for primary and preschool levels by means of initial training. The studies, according to the Bologna Process have a duration of three years, during which they acquire the necessary theoretical and practical knowledge to become a preschool or primary school teacher. The responsibility for a good theoretical and practical training is assigned to them, as conscious grown-ups as well as to the faculty and its representatives, namely the academic corpus. The need for good student preparation, as future teachers is included in the mission of our faculty, but more than that it is a moral responsibility of each teacher. Teachers belonging to the academic corpus are the primary resource that motivates and stimulates students to become teachers.

In our study, we would like to show the extent to which our students have succeeded in assimilating the necessary competences so as to be able to be employed in their field of study.

2. Professional competences

Theoretical and practical training is required in order to accede to the status of preschool or primary school teacher. This training aims at providing the future teacher with the necessary competences for carrying out a performance-based level of education in both preschool and primary school education. Firstly, we should clarify the
concept of competence. Larousse Dictionary\(^2\) defines competence as: *the capacity, the recognized ability of a person to practice and to decide based on thorough knowledge in the field s/he activates*.\(^3\) So, the idea of a thorough training in the field of activity is stressed by this definition, training that can be made by assimilating knowledge thorough field work. But competence also involves attitude, ways of relating that involve value levels, mobilizing personal resources found in knowledge, intellectual and practical abilities, advanced operating schemes, objective representations, social values and attitudes.\(^4\) Competence sums up an integrated assembly of knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to the subject in order to be able to successfully face a certain category of situation, which involves adapting, quick problem and project solving, taking the right decision.

We notice that the concept of competence is considered a contextualization of *acquisitions on the level of performance* (knowledge, abilities and aptitudes, see Figure 1), all these being used within a certain context, namely a competent person is authorized to carry out a certain activity due to his/her level of performance within a certain specific field, certified by a specific authority.

![Figure 1. The components of competence](image)

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 type.\(^6\) 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.

Figure 2 below shows a hierarchy of acquisitions achieved by students through their initial training.

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\(^2\) Apud. Le Boterf, G., *Construire les compétences individuelles et collectives*, Paris, Éditions d’Organisation, 2000.

\(^3\) http://www.larousse.com/competences

\(^4\) Ph. Perrenoud. *Construire des compétences dès l’école*, Paris: ESF, 2000.

\(^5\) Bernaerdt, Delory, G. Leroy, Paquay, Rey, Romainville, Wolfs. *A ceux qui s’interrogent sur les compétences et sur leur évaluation*. Forum, mars 1997, 21-27.

\(^6\) Tardif, J. (2006). *L’évaluation des compétences. Documenter le parcours de développement*. Montréal: Chenelière Éducation.
The formation of these acquisitions depends on several factors: students’ level of previous training, intellectual level, the professionalism of the academic corpus and also their active involvement in lectures and seminars.

3. Research argumentation

The postmodern society, with all its implications, influences the educational process irrespective of the level at which it is situated. Changes without precedent have brought about effects favourable to the development of humanity, but also less wanted influences have been noticed. We can observe this aspect in the behaviour of our students that have become less interested in studying, read less and less, spend less and less time engaged in activities that involve a sustained effort. Hedonic attractions provided by the mass-media, the Internet, clubs etc., fill most of the teenagers’ spare time. On the other hand we observe a degradation of social ideals, a shift of values, an uncertainty regarding the meaning of life, things that influence all aspects in the life of a teenager. We insist and draw attention on the following: education and school should not lose their fundamental values: goodness, truth and beauty. In this respect, during teachers’ initial training one should focus firstly on developing the necessary competences (intellectual and practical acquisitions) that meet the requirements of today’s educational system with everything it involves (human and financial resources) but also on assigning them all the necessary abilities for a lifelong training. If in the first year of study the number of students attending the lectures is almost 100% (in the first semester), the number of attending students is cut to almost a half by at the end of the last year of study.

| Students-Program of study Pedagogy of Primarity and Preschool Education | Universitar year 2005-2006 | 2006-2007 | 2007-2008 | 2008-2009 | 2009-2010 | 2010-2011 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| No. of students | 253 | 256 | 924 | 765 | 725 | 525 |

4. Research methodology

We have used a complex methodology in order to conduct the study, from empirical observation to quality analysis of research results. Quality analysis involved different, rather observatory, inductive procedures, but the quantity data confirm the data of research. Firstly, we wanted to show how students’ attendance to lectures
decreases from one year to the other, followed by a comparative statistics study between the number of students, number of graduates and number of employees in the system based on their age. We wanted to prove that mature students have better power of discernment, are more hard-working and prove themselves to be more thorough in their training for a didactic career.

4.1. Research results

The results presented in the histograms below reveals the fact that in the first year of study most students attended 95% to 99% of their lectures, their attendance lowered from one year to the other. In the last year of study, the attendance is placed somewhere between 78% and 50%. We also noticed a significant difference regarding age based attendance. Thus, mature students, even employed in the system, attend more lectures than young students that are unemployed.
4.2. Critical interpretation

The situation revealed above requires a critical analysis. Students’ behaviour is obviously determined by social influences, but because they are students it is assumed that they spend their free time in a positive, engaging and formative environment. Friendships are built based on common interest, interests that should obviously involve attending lectures and studying. There is one question that arises: do students attend classes in the last year as they had attended in the first one?

A possible interpretation would be that some of these students got a job and can no longer regularly attend classes due to their working hours. Another interpretation would be the flexibility of the students’ attendance grading system. A fault is also the way teachers keep track of students’ attendance at lectures and seminars.

4.3. Discussions

What could we do to improve students’ lecture attendance? Lecture attendance should be part of all students’ evaluation system, and should count in the final grade. Motivation for lecture attendance could be stimulated by grading involvement at seminars. Moreover, seminars should be delivered in a more attractive and challenging way, the teachers should use active – participative methods that would encourage:

- interaction between students;
- cooperation between students;
- encouraging active learning;
- encouraging communication;
- giving feedback.

Practice confirms that the students’ proactive involvement in learning activities determines a motivated, stimulating participation, but also a good training for their future didactic career. Aspects, such as proactive behaviour, personal initiatives, and relationships established between different personalities transform students into active agents of their own formation, becoming initiators of improved learning situations. Thus, seminars based on active – participative methods contribute to the development of motivation, stimulation of critical thinking, and students’ creativity in developing their competences for the didactic career. Another aspect that we observed in this study was the percentage of enrolled students that graduated the programme and how many of them managed to find employment in the educational system.

Table no 2. No of students, no of graduates and employees
4.4. Interpretation

By analysing the data presented in Table 2 and Histogram 7 we observe that 50% of the number of students enrolled in the first year graduated from our university with a bachelor’s degree, and out of these only around 30% are employed in the educational system. We also observe that there is a significant difference between adult students and young students regarding both graduation and employment in the system. Adult students are more hard-working when training for their didactic career, fact revealed by the higher number of graduates and system employed adult students.

Conclusions

We conclude by stating that there is a strong connection between lecture and seminar attendance and thorough training for a didactic career. Students that attended their lectures and seminars, irrespective of their age, were better trained, graduated successfully and managed to be employed in the educational system. The difference between mature and young students is in their seriousness and consciousness, a fact also reflected in the results of our study.

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