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Original article

CONTINUOUS FORMATION IN THE OPTIMIZATION OF TEACHING PHYSICAL EDUCATION TO LOWER GRADE STUDENTS

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Abstract

Problem statement. Continuous preparation of the teaching staff working in the preschool and primary educational system implies their systematic participation in new training courses aimed at optimizing the teaching of those subjects specific to their professional profile and implicitly of physical education and sport discipline. Even more so, as the aforementioned disciplines appear in the curriculum starting with the preschool educational level and, in case of an integrated version, in an extended curricular domain.

Methods and procedures. The present work proposes an integrated training program for those teaching The Pedagogy of Preschool and Primary Education, resulting in a mobility of teachers within the system according to its requirements.

In this respect we suggest a questionnaire based survey being conducted upon the completion of this program. The survey should be aimed at identifying the attendees' opinions regarding the contents and efficiency of the training courses. The survey results will be accordingly processed and interpreted as to reflect the importance of continuous preparation in the teaching staff's didactic career for the pedagogy of preschool and primary education, with emphasis on physical education.

Results. Since, the physical education is mainly a practical activity during which the student is acting in a specific environment (gym, sport grounds, etc.) the conduct of the instructional and educational process implies a wide range of physical activities specific to our field, as well as, a didactic strategy quite different from the other study subjects included in the curriculum.

As already mentioned, competence is determined not only by internal factors related to the competent person (knowledge, abilities, attitudes / personality characteristics) but, at the same time, by the external factors related to the circumstances under which the competent action is carried out (task, environment, context).

Conclusions. In the actual reforming context of society, quality and competence are the main priorities of the professional training. Proposals: the re-evaluation of the social and educational roles played by the didactic personnel is a phenomenon that determines new responsibilities, both, in school and society.

Key words: preparation, formation, curriculum, didactic strategies, projection, competence.

Introduction

Romanian education system has been included in the comparative studies, conducted by European countries to emphasize both the common tendencies in teachers' initial and ongoing training and the national specific characteristics of the process. In this respect three main aspects should be considered:

- the rescaling of the social and educational role played by the teaching staff and the impact of this process on teachers' functions and responsibilities within the education system and society as a whole;
- the professional and personal development of teachers for meeting the new professional requirements;
- the improvement of the quality of teacher's initial and ongoing preparation systems, so that, their pedagogical, psychological and sociological preparedness to foster an

interdisciplinary approach and their teamwork abilities.

The ongoing preparation of preprimary and primary school teachers implies their systematic participation in training courses aimed at optimizing their expertise in teaching Physical Education and Sports.

Since, in the integrated version of the education system, this school discipline is part of the curriculum starting with the preprimary education, in an extended curricular area, for teachers at this level, periodical training is necessary especially when the objectives are in a continuous evolution in accordance with the subjects' development level.

The "Presidency Conclusions" of the Lisbon European Council held in March 2000 set a series of objectives for the EU Member States in order to establish a knowledge-driven society and economy, goal that could only be achieved through an efficient

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adaptation and improvement of the education and professional training systems.

The "Copenhagen Declaration" (Declaration of the European Ministers of Vocational Education and Training, and the European Commission, convened in Copenhagen on 29 and 30 November 2002, on enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training) set the following priorities for the development of the initial and ongoing education and vocational training systems: reinforcement of the European dimension, transparency, information, guidance and counseling, recognition and validation of competences and qualifications and improvement of quality assurance.

In our education system, regular training is necessary to ensure teachers' mobility as it was already the case when the preparatory classes were included in the primary educational level. Furthermore, since many Romanians have moved to other European countries, in order to allow our teachers to rapidly adapt to the didactic requirements of the respective country, official regulations regarding qualification recognition and validation should be implemented.

This ongoing specialty training does not imply theoretical training only. For an effective employment of the already acquired theoretical knowledge, vocational and practical training should constitute the basis of such a preparation system.

Teachers' ongoing preparation - which, in order to express the continuity and coherence of the different didactic career stages, within the context of a lifelong teaching activity, is more and more frequently known as "*continuous professional development*" - has a different statute in different countries: it is always considered a right but, in fact, varies between being mandatory and optional.

However, not in all cases teachers are explicitly bound to attend ongoing training courses. For instance in France, The Netherlands, Sweden and Island continuous personal development is a professional obligation while the participation in such courses is optional.

Methods and procedures

For a better mobility of teachers within the system - in accordance with system requirements - this article proposes a training program for Physical Education and Sports integrated for the Pedagogy of the Preprimary and Primary Education teachers.

As shown by Baillaugués (1990) ... "teacher - a relational profession" ... could facilitate the efficient employment of personal experience by raising the awareness of teacher's personal style in combination with his creative capacity.

Due to the changes intervened in the social environment lately, in the actual educational context, the role played by the teaching staff has strengthened; also the integrated curricular format - which is mandatory for the primary education too - assumes an activation of the students' overall knowledge thus turning to a good account the students' potential. The student will be able to creatively use his previously acquired knowledge, regardless the type of activity and, as a result, increase his learning motivation. Consequently, the assessment will be more permissive putting emphasis on what the student knows and not on what he doesn't.

The program we proposed has already been included in the Extended Continuous Formation Programm for preprimary and primary teachers, in 2012.

Upon the completion of the training program, a questionnaire based survey was carried out. The survey was aimed at identifying the trainees' opinions regarding the contents and efficiency of the training courses.

The survey results were accordingly processed and interpreted as to reflect the importance of ongoing preparation for teaching staff's didactic career and for the pedagogy of preprimary and primary education, with emphasis on physical education.

Our training program was designed so that the attendees were provided with a series of motor knowledge, skills and abilities, specialty information regarding the organization of the educational process of physical education, competencies specific to physical education taught in preprimary and primary education.

The program consisted of seven theoretical courses carried out over a span of a teaching practice semester. This, in fact, was considered the basis for our preparation.

The *theoretical program* had the following objectives:

- to learn the main aspects concerning the physical activity of preprimary and primary school students;
- to break up the new school program contents per study years and project its didactic implementation over specific periods of time;
- to develop assessment procedures so as to stimulate the students' preparation and avoid their adversity towards physical education.

The *practical program* had the following objectives:

- to efficiently exploit the personal potential for the management of practical physical education class,



using commands specific to the physical education domain;

- to exercise the language specific to our field of expertise by learning the terminology specific to sport branches;
- to adapt the training contents to the everyday reality and to the student's concerns, interests and skills;
- to enable the teacher to provide help and support to his students whenever necessary.

Through this practical program we pursued the management of a physical education class by using also knowledge accumulated during previous classes on different other topics. At the same time, we organized the participation of the trainees - as observers - in as many training sessions as possible, with an exchange of views on the lessons learnt during classes. The main gain of such procedures was the "participants' interaction", their possibility to share ideas and views with regard to the strategies selected for improving the training contents.

The whole instruction process got the significance of a vast modeling exercise applied to the trainees,

resulting in a transformation in space and time of their affective, emotional and psychometric cognition experience, thus enabling them to deliver physical education classes in any EU member state.

A series of practical activities - in an integrated version - were also conducted for students in lower grades 0-2. By doing so, one objective of the curriculum was fulfilled.

For the primary school cycle the physical education and sports is included, alongside other optional topics, in the curricular area called *health and motricity*. The discipline **music and movement** appears within the curricular area called *arts and technologies* and requires teachers to undergo a training that will allow them an integrated approach consisting of a combination between musical arrangements and appropriate movement categories.

To evaluate the efficiency and quality of this training course and implicitly of its contents, a set of five questions had to be answered by participants. For each question - pending on each participant's opinion - one to five points were granted.

Table nr.1

The assesment of the didactic activities conducted during continuous preparation training course

Nr. crt.	Assesment criteria	Final result (points)
Q1.	<i>Courses delivered and the debates during seminars covered the topics and objectives of the proposed curriculum</i>	97
Q2.	<i>Contents and pace of presentation were accesible for me</i>	90
Q3.	<i>Practical activities were interesting and attractive</i>	102
Q4.	<i>Aplicative part to take a grater share of the curriculum in the future</i>	101
Q5.	<i>Aknowledge that the present training course had a positive impact on the consoslidation of my preofessional competencies</i>	98
Total points		488
Number of participants		22
Maximum total possible		550

Results

Since, the physical education is mainly a practical activity during which the student is acting in a specific environment (gym, sport grounds, etc.) the conduct of the instructional and educational process implies a wide range of physical activities specific to our domain, as well as, a didactic strategy quite different from other study topics included in the curriculum.

Jinga,1998, considers that through "professional competence of the teachers working in the education system one means the set of cognitive, affective, motivational and managerial capacities that interact with the teacher's personality traits, resulting in the necessary qualities for a didactic performance meant

to ensure the achievement of the projected objectives for the vast majority of students".

Paquita, 1996), cited by Constandache, 2006, proposes "a scheme to tackle teacher's professionalism by defining several capabilities:

- to analyze complex situations, with reference to several levels of perception;
- to adapt on the fly and effectively consider the selection of optimal strategies against the goals and requirements imposed by the social context;
- to find its way in a broad spectrum of knowledge, techniques and appropriate means;
- to project its work by effectively using previous experience;
- to critically analyze his actions."



Thereby, through our training program, we achieved the enhancement of some competencies initially formed during our university courses:

- to get a comprehensive and realistic view on how the educational process has to be conceived and implemented;
- the gain of practically verified theoretical knowledge to provide the basis for the specialist training on our domain;
- to empower teachers with instructional strategies aimed at improving physical education and sports in accordance with international standards and subject age;
- to guide the learning towards formation of capabilities and attitudes, by exploiting the competencies specific to physical education and learning how to use the participative strategies in support of teaching activities;
- development of capability to design the teaching activity in accordance with the curriculum requirements, particular age and educational level.

Potolea (1998) states that teaching style is associated with certain behaviors and manifests itself as structures of influence and action, has internal consistency, relative stability and appears as a product of "personalization of principles, rules and methods specific to the educational work."

Teachers develop professional practice skills, by gaining new experimental attitude, subject to further self-reflection and analysis.

In the pedagogical practice they get in touch with knowledge that cannot be otherwise discovered and acquired. We consider that teaching style is a personal feature and its unique character has to be cultivated as a derivation source for genuine and creative pedagogical processes.

Vernioux,1986, shows the dimensions of teacher training based on a leveled structure, aiming to an initial and continuous training program with nuanced contents:

- f1 - scientific training through university studies;
- f2 - professional training by practical initiation in educational activities;
- f3 - training through research, involvement in research techniques specific to the educational phenomenon;
- f4 - enhancing personality features suitable to the teaching profession, creating didactic style abilities;
- f5 - formation by concentrating the components of the theoretical and practical training and research into the teacher's personality structure.

The main objective of our program was the further development of the skills acquired during the initial training, by organizing interactive theoretical training sessions and by translating the acquired knowledge into practice.

Table nr.2
Didactic activities conducted during the on going training
Assesment results

Questi on Nr.	Total points	Percentage	5 p	4 p	3 p	2 p	1 p
Q.1.	98	88,18 %	13 a	5 a.	4 a.	0 a.	0 a.
Q.2.	90	81,8 %	10 a.	6 a.	4 a.	2 a.	0 a.
Q.3	102	92,7 %	14 a.	8 a.	0 a	0 a	0 a
Q.4	101	91,8 %	15 a.	5 a.	2 a.	0 a	0 a
Q.5.	98	89 %	12 a.	8 a.	2 a.	0 a	0 a

p - nr. of points; a. - nr. of answers out of the total number. **Discussions**

Analyzing the assessment results summarized in the table above the following comments could be made:

The highest scores of 101 and 102 points were obtained for questions 3 and 4 pertaining to the practical and applicative aspects of didactic activities contents.

According to the participants this type of activities, both those already conducted and those in the planning stage, have a higher share in this type of training courses.

The following significant scores are for questions 5 and 1 where 98 and 97 points respectively were obtained.

The subjects believed that the participation in the training course would be positively reflected in the consolidation of their professional competencies. They also considered that the topics proposed in the curriculum and the training objectives had been fully covered.

Answering the question number two, 90% of the participants stated that the pace of contents



presentation had been reasonable and their structure accessible.

The academic activity shall provide not only teacher professional training but also teachers' formation by ensuring those competencies required by its position as a professor and educator. Consequently, the selection process for this profession has to take into account certain aspects related to the individual personality and ability to develop a series of qualities specific to our domain.

Therefore, in our view, the ideal profile of a pedagogy of preprimary and primary education teacher, seen in the light of competencies specific to physical education, implies:

➤ **Theoretical knowledge** from a variety of areas (biology, physiology, methodic specific to different sport branches, psychology, pedagogy etc.);

➤ Ability to design the integrated didactic activity in accordance with curriculum requirements and age and education particularities;

➤ Advanced management abilities and emulation spirit.

Motor competencies:

➤ Motor qualities - by practicing certain forms of physical exercise;

➤ Advanced motor experience - accumulation of motor skills specific to the sport branches reflected in the primary and preprimary cycle specialized curriculum;

➤ Sensorial qualities - visual acuity, differentiated hearing sensitivity etc.;

➤ Qualities of the loco-motor system and of the overall physiognomy (pleasant appearance, medium and high mobility of the main joints, spatial and temporal orientation ability, etc.);

➤ Attention (concentrated, distributive, mobile);

➤ Intellectual qualities (memory, thinking, creativity, language, etc.);

➤ Special and general attitudes (psycho-pedagogical abilities, affectivity, strong personality etc.).

Psycho-pedagogical, psychological and managerial abilities formed through specialty courses, knowledge implemented during regular and competition activity, with the main objective of attracting students towards practicing physical exercises and thus substantially reducing the number of sick-leave days:

➤ Pedagogical mastery (high professional qualification and native educational qualities);

➤ Pedagogical tact - ability to assess facts and actions in a balanced way taking cautious and delicate actions;

➤ Love and respect for students;

➤ Solid organizational skills focused on providing an optimal educational environment;

➤ Continuous training through information, documentation, specialization, attendance of various symposia, scientific presentations, masters etc..

Personality traits:

➤ Dynamic nature with an impeccable behavior;

➤ Abilities in practicing a number of sports in general those contained in the curriculum enabling the teacher to demonstrate the motor skills to be learned;

➤ Integrity and advanced communication skills.

Physical education does not pursue the limited, intrinsic goal of physical development which could be achieved parallel and independent of other features of the human personality. On the contrary, physical education - a component part of a system - acts on the integrated personality development, concomitantly with the other components.

Conclusions

The main issue of the contemporary education is not the one regarding the knowledge acquirement but that of learning methods and procedures on how to manage abilities forming processes leading to the discovery and effective use of new knowledge. Consequently, the education system has the duty and responsibility to educate students for the changes taking place at economic, social, political and cultural level, both, domestically and internationally.

The concern for curriculum and standards characterizes most of the questions asked in relation to the future of education. What and how do our students learn compared to the students in other countries? Are our students able to compete the students from other countries? Is the Romanian education system - in its actual format - relevant, significant and useful for the future of society and individual? Is there enough freedom within the system to meet the more and more diversified students' interests?

In the reforming context of society the quality and competence issue is a priority of the professional preparation.

Taking into account the results obtained it could be concluded that:

➤ The didactic strategies applied in this formation course were a good self - promoting and professional development opportunity for participants;

➤ An emphasis on the applicative parts of the content, addressed with a view to the means, methods and strategies in general, was desirable.



Thereby, the pedagogy of preprimary and primary education teacher will be empowered with didactic strategies having the following objectives:

- To place learning - as a process - in the center of the school approaches (what the students learn is important and not what the teacher teaches);
- To focus the learning towards the formation of capabilities and attitudes by the development of competencies specific to problem solving, as well as, through the use of participative strategies in the didactic activities;
- To make the school learning offer more flexible (structuring the education not uniformly and uniquely for all, designed for an abstract student, but an education for each student, based on its own needs and development particularities);
- To adapt the learning contents to the daily reality and to the student's interests and abilities;
- To introduce new contents and objective selection and organizational methodologies in line with the principle "not much but well"; what is important is not only what but how well, when and why do students learn; how useful what has been learnt in school would be for their future life;
- To provide the students with the opportunity of individualized and motivating educational pathways, directed towards creativity and personal fulfillment;
- To increase the accountability of all educational partners with regard to the design, monitoring and assessment of curricula.

The opportunity of training courses is valued for providing additional new information and consolidating teachers' professional competencies.

Proposals

Romanian education system, being included in the European comparative studies, has to reflect common tendencies of the initial and ongoing training with its specific national orientation

Periodical teaching staff training should have as main objective the development of professional competencies. It should address, also, the methodology, student's management techniques and the implementation of different changes imposed by the educational reforms.

By identifying those situations when the five years period could be reduced the provisions laid down by the *Didactic Personnel Rules and Regulations* make the aforementioned period more flexible. The reduction of the five year period applies

to the management, guidance and control staff, uncertified in the field of educational management, under the following circumstances: when significant changes of the curricula take place, when new instructional methods and technologies are implemented, based on a personal request, with the recommendation of the Staff Council, upon a new position take-over.

The rescaling of the social and educational role played by the teaching staff is a phenomenon that triggers new responsibilities in school and society.

The functional unity between initial and ongoing training becomes the priority for higher education institutions that professionalize through curriculum selected and organized in modules, against the program which defines the types of skills.

In this respect the following are necessary:

- The reevaluation of the social and educational role played by the teacher through new responsibilities in school and society;
- The personal and professional development of the teaching staff through professional exigencies that define the "professionalism" in didactic activity and new competencies specific to the studied topics are proposed;
- The improvement of the ongoing training systems by enabling them with practical competencies specific to physical education, so as to encourage, through pedagogical training, the team work, innovation, preparation for organizing small-scale sporting events.

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