

The professionalization of new teachers towards the consolidation of their knowledge and competences

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Abstract

This article puts the accent on the professional preparation of new teachers. By means of scientific analysis, using polls filled by student teachers, new teachers and accompanying lecturers on professional practices, we are going to show the double challenge that comes with building and consolidating knowledge and competences in the professional preparation of new teachers while facing the actuality in schools and in the collaboration that they have to achieve with trainers, mentors or colleagues with experience in order to achieve more successful teaching. Entering in the profession represents an important stage in the forming of the new teacher. In most of the cases, he or she will have to face the professional requisitions and give almost the same performance as a more experienced teacher. Because of this, treatment of knowledge and competences have to be seen as important aspects in teaching students. We treat problems that are connected with the initial forming of new teachers, the professional development and the conditions that are created in teaching the profession of the teacher. Building these knowledge and competences in the beginning of the career has a very important role on this matter.

Introduction

When introduced to the profession, the beginner teacher has to face multiple challenges. They have to especially gain new knowledge and competences in order to become an efficient teacher. He needs to stabilize and re-use the knowledge and competences that he already possesses. This paper is a short analysis of the difficulties beginning teachers come across and the work that has to be done for building and consolidating the knowledge and competences of the teachers in the beginning of their career.

The difficulties of beginning the profession.

The beginning of the teaching profession

According to Rebore (1991, citation from Weva, 1999), the introduction and the beginning of the profession are firstly connected to making new teachers familiar and comfortable with the working environment in the physical and organizational view and also in the social, philosophical and political view. The adaptation of the new teacher

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with the culture, especially with the organizational one of the environment in which he is exercising his profession is a fundamental component in creating professional self-esteem and security. The concept of beginning the profession in teaching is generally defined by 3 of the following characteristics: socializing, professionalism and the transformation of identity. (Vallerand, Martineau & Bergevin, 2006)

Individual and complex

As soon as the new teacher finishes his beginning formation, he fully enters the beginning period of exercising the profession. The problems of the beginning phase of the profession are many and they justify the interest that is shown in this field. They are placed everywhere in the thematic we are treating. Individual problems and the problems of the professional development of teachers have preoccupied a big number of researchers. Norman and Feiman-Nemser (2005) confirm that the beginning teacher still has a lot to learn in the moment he starts his profession and some aspects of it can only be taught by practicing teaching. So, even the beginning formation treats different aspects of the duty of a teacher, it is observed that the beginning teacher needs for more practice and experience, in order to really possess all the aspects of his new profession. The beginning formation can never be fully thorough and teaching how to teach is realized gradually during the stage of entering the profession. We have to add here that the stage of beginning the career has a great influence and it must not be neglected in the dynamic of professional perfection (Huberman, 1989), because it places the bases of professional motivation. (Raymond, 2001, 23). A successful entrance in the professional life appears like a defining factor in developing the personal feeling of being efficient, and preserving this feeling while exercising the profession. (Weinstein, 1988; Huberman, 1989b; Murnane, Singer, Wittlet, Kemple & Olsen, 1991; Martineau & Corriveau, 2000).

Difficulties of entering the profession

Teaching is a complex profession, which is exercised in a dynamical situation. Furthermore, the definition of the function of the teacher has been broadened a lot in the past years. The paradigm of the simple transmitter of knowledge has left its place to a more global and emancipating education. The increase in the demands towards the duties of the teacher and the diversity of the students are problems that are added to this profession.

When entering the profession, beginning teachers are faced with a lot of difficulties, which, most of the time they have to face on their own. With individual or general origin, this difficulties can be divided into 3 problematic outcomes: pedagogical/didactical, personal (psychological and motivating) and socio-professional (the integration into the profession and into school equipments)

The personal difficulties have to do with the private life of beginning teachers and with their future projects. These difficulties, on which the professional environment has almost no role, can have bad consequences as far as teaching efficiency is concerned. Doubts as far as choosing the professional career and the practice in an environment far from the concrete one are part of these types of difficulties.

The socio-professional difficulties are all the problems that have to do with building relationships connected with the integration of the new teacher in the school equip and with the communication with the students and parents. The war against these kinds of

difficulties has to have priority for the director of the school institutions and more experienced teachers since it can endanger the need of the beginner teacher to adapt and integrate.

It seems that these difficulties get stronger from the absence of social knowledge that beginner teachers feel in general (Eurydice, 2002), which is a consequence of bad interpretation of reality. The everyday difficulties teachers go against while exercising their profession and the eventual lack of institutional support can decrease a lot the beginner teachers' self-esteem. Pedagogical and didactical difficulties are immediate obstacles in the efficiency of teaching and learning of the beginner teachers. They appear since the very first moments of exercising the profession (Nault, 1993) and are connected with:

- Class administration (Veenman, 1984; Nault 1993) as far as discipline and motivating the interest of students is concerned (Veenman 1984) and the administration of possible conflicts in class;
- Accomplishing in good time teaching objectives;
- The planning of the subjects and the teaching process;
- The evaluation of learning and the achievement of the students;
- The administration of the social-economic and cultural composition and differentiated work with students with difficulties in learning

From the conversations with the beginning teachers, we see more concerns than concrete difficulties in entering the profession, insisting in the fact that the beginnings in teaching are difficult in an emotional plane.

Another difficulty of the beginning teacher, often cited in scientific literature is the evaluation (Bedard, 2000; Veenman, 1984), especially building the mechanisms to evaluate the students and preserving a fair evaluation. Lastly, you can also see didactical difficulties in beginning teachers; difficulties in the adaptation with the program in a way that it can be understood by all the students. Difficulties in teaching some special subjects, difficulties in teaching in a way that is different from what they learned in university etc. We put an accent on the difficulties of administrating the class and especially administrating the discipline, and on the lack of professional support from the part of the colleagues can make important obstacles in achieving results for a successful teaching.

Method

The selected method for this study can be described as the combination of studying literature and analysing the gathered data towards polls applied at beginning teachers who exercise the profession for their first or second year. Recently there have been a lot of papers for the first year of teaching, mentoring, the portfolio, the role of the directors of school institution, professional beginning in the profession etc. The gathered data from the appropriate literature, the different bibliographic notes and different résumés made it possible for the important aspects to show up. The poll and the interviews made with beginner teachers had as a purpose to show the difficulties that beginning teachers had to go through in the beginning of their careers and their opinion on the initial formation and the demands for a continuous qualification.

Analysing the data

As far as difficulties in the beginning of the career are concerned, categorizing the problems that beginning teachers had to go through is made possible to be realized

on the basis of an analysis of the main components. Realizing this discovering factorial analysis, seen in the aspect of elaborated literature, has shown the problems and difficulties of teachers in the beginning of their careers. These difficulties have been grouped in three categories: difficulties connected with the pedagogical and didactical aspects of the profession, difficulties of administrative and organizational character, and difficulties faced in creating relationships while exercising the profession inside and outside the school. Schools where beginning teachers exercise their profession, who accepted to be part of this study, are placed in urban and rural areas. The table synthesizes the result of this categorization by defining the level of difficulty for every variable with the help of Likert scale. We underline that the whole result is calculated for every difficulty category. According to the analysed results we can tell the main difficulties faced by the new teacher personnel are of the pedagogical and didactical character. In the same way, difficulties related with the two other categories must not be neglected, but we have to admit that beginning teachers in exercising the profession, have less difficulties as far as integration and cooperation with the school community is concerned. The difficulties in these cases can be seen more in the administration of the class and discipline, in the material sources and the evaluation of learning. As far as the administration of administrative procedures is concerned, we notice that in most cases they don't become smaller with the increase in experience.

Difficulties in the beginning of the career	Fully disagree	Don't really agree	Agree	Fully agree
Component I: Pedagogical/Didactical				
• Learning evaluation	12.90	37.20	40.80	9.10
• The administration of the class and the discipline	15.10	29.30	41.40	12.20
• The planning of the teaching process	16.60	41.20	33.40	08.80
Component II: Administrative/organisation/ material				
• Material sources	15.20	34.30	35.40	15.10
• Preserving administrative documents	21.10	33.40	33.30	12.20
• Organizational obligations of exercising the profession	24.90	38.20	26.20	10.70
Component III: Building relationships				
• Collaboration/sharing resources with colleagues	25.20	44.20	23.50	07.10
• Relationship with parents	28.70	50.5	26.2	10.7
• Relationship with directors	47.9	39.3	08.3	04.5
• Relationships with colleagues	48.9	39.1	09.1	02.9

Table 1. Categorizing the difficulties in the beginning of the career expressed in %

The graphic below allows us to clearly observe the results of the table above for every variable, combining it with the calculation of the levels “Agree” and “Fully Agree” according to the Likert scale.

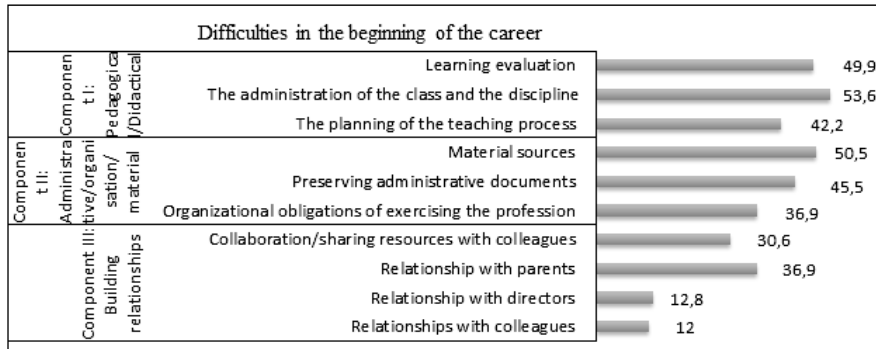


Table 2 : The graphic of the difficulties faced by beginning teachers in the beginning of the career

While continuing the work on categorizing difficulties, we have built a list with the data on the difficulties in the beginning of the career

The difficulties related with the relationships that can exist between beginning teachers and their colleagues are in a second plane, according to our observations because they are placed last in the classification. A part of the teachers who were asked see themselves as isolated. Having had support while facing the difficulties, they see a lack of experience exchange which is shown in the difficulties of the integration in the school equip. We can also insist on the fact that there are many beginning teachers who appreciate the efficiency with the adaptation with the practices or the professional experience of their colleagues with a greater experience in teaching. Also, the difficulties that are related with the relationship with the community and the parents of the students are shown to be less problematic.

As far as the working environment is concerned, the results show the importance of the role of the director of the school in promoting cooperative professional practices and the need to clarify the responsibilities of the director towards the teacher in the beginning of his career. If their attention towards the beginning teacher in the administrative, pedagogical support and in the support towards the creation of relationships is not full, then it creates a difficult relationship between them. Furthermore, it is noticed that the difficulties that are connected with the cooperation and the usage of common sources with the colleagues increases if the school directors don't encourage this practice in their collective.

Faced with these difficulties, beginning teachers put part of the responsibility to the beginning pedagogical formation because they don't feel fully prepared in this direction. Around 55% of them say that they weren't given a realistic view of the beginning of the profession, the difficulties and the problems that they had to face. They see a lack in the beginning formation in several levels: first of all in the level of methodological and didactical administration (48%) and especially in the difficulties that have to do with possessing the knowledge that they have to pass to the students, with the difficulties that have to do with the planning and evaluation, but also with the lack of means and sources which favour the discovery of difficulties their students are having; secondly, in the level of the administration of the interaction with the students (53%), for which they put and accent mainly on the lack of formation as far as the administration of the dynamic of the relationships in the class is concerned (an unpleasant situation that may affect the normal development of a class and techniques of preventing and interfering while faced

with unpleasant behaviour or attitude). So the variable “class administration” is one of the variables that influence a lot the scholastic achievement; thirdly, the administration of the administrative dimensions connected with the profession (44.3%) is also insufficient. It is seen mostly throughout the beginning formation and in a more specific way in the administrative obligations that are connected with entering and exercising the profession as a teacher; fourthly, there are seen absences in the preparation for the administration of the relationships with educative character (58%) where there are a lot of absences. Working in a partnership with different actors of the school, in the broad meaning of the word (directors, colleagues, mentors, parents, students etc.) seems like a dimension that was neglected throughout the initial formation.

To the request to formulate possible ways of improving the job in the initial formation, the beginner teachers answered that they wished to have more elements that were close to the teaching reality. They also asked for more information that has to do with the different contexts of teaching and learning (the characteristics of the students, types of teaching and learning). They suggest 4 proposals that have to do with the initial formation: to be accompanied by mentoring teachers, who have better knowledge of the different problems of teaching (22.3%); increase of the professional practice hours (16.7%); the placement and application of a dispositive for the practice analysis (15.5%); and the conducting of a practical module for class administration (12.8%).

Despite from the difficulties they faces, there can be seen a feeling of belief in the possession of professional competences in them (82%). This is a fundamental result, because this feeling of belief and the efficiency are defining for the motivation of the individual, his engagement in work and facing the difficulties. It is also observed a relative increase in the feeling of professional competence in beginning teachers who are in the third year of exercising their profession as teachers.

Furthermore, the experience as a teacher allows the facilitation of some difficulties. And mainly, in the level of pedagogical competences, entering the profession becomes the source of development towards the clarification of duties, the improvement of professional competences connected with the class administration, the unexpected problems and getting to better know the student.

In relationship with the needs that the teachers have in the beginning of exercising the profession, we can say that they need a helping support, also known as a mentoring system offered by more experienced teachers. There other needs come with a helping scale: the development of different meeting that deal with experience exchange, being accompanied by a pedagogical adviser, the orientation towards continuous qualifications that will be appropriate with their needs, the realization of seminars with qualifying characters etc. The needs that are connected with continuous qualification are focused mainly, on one side, on the administration of the interactions in class, and especially in the placement of an appropriate learning environment, and on the other side, on the methodological and didactical administration and especially in mastering teaching and a better acquisition of the evaluation of the competences.

The professional development of teachers

Seeing the multiple difficulties that teachers have to face in the beginning of their career, some researchers judge that the initial formation is insufficient and inadequate and as such it needs to be improved. Some others say that the initial formation is adequate, but

it's normal that the beginning teachers have gaps and deficiencies because, as a professional, the teacher needs to continuously develop his knowledge and competences. Teaching the profession is seen as a continuous process, which doesn't end with the initial formation but keeps on going throughout the whole professional career.

In this way, the teacher that has recently entered the profession hasn't ended his studying and needs to gain new competences and knowledge throughout the whole time. This process of learning and professional development of the beginning teacher is achieved through strategies used by him. Guillemette (2005) identifies four possible ways of professional development: using the inner sources, using the outer sources, reflexive practise and collegial dimension (scholar).

Using the inner sources is referred to the process of consolidating the knowledge and has to do with transferring the knowledge and gained competences during initial formation, which as we have seen, can sometimes propound different problems at beginning teachers. Using the outer sources has to do with participation in professional qualifications, the consults with sources such as the library, internet, pedagogical advisers, mentors or experienced teachers in school, continuing further studies and participating in research projects. Reflexive practice is a concept developed by Schon (1983) and consists in thinking during the action and after it and its purpose is the improvement of pedagogical practices. In order to achieve this, teachers can use different reflexive means, such as diaries and stories on the practice. Lastly, the collegial dimension also refers to the reflexive practice but it's realized from the interaction with other colleagues. Learning is so realized from the cooperation with the colleagues, participants in groups of the reflexive analysis, supervision between teachers, the common development of the didactical material, discussion and professional exchanges. Thinking about the practice, even though practiced only with the help of your superiors will allow the beginning teacher to learn from the experience and discover new teaching methods, which better adapt to his personality.

Programmes of professional entrance in the teaching profession

The programmes of professional entrance are still used even more to facilitate the entrance in the career of beginning teachers and makes possible for them to become competent and capable teachers. These programmes are different as far as their duration and content is concerned. Some of them require mentoring, meaning the accompanying of beginning teachers from an experienced teacher. Other programmes offer welcoming activities in the beginning of the year: school visits, introduction with the members of the personnel, written guides that are given to beginning teachers, information sessions etc. Some others offer qualifications for debuting teachers, connected with specific difficulties that beginning teachers are traditionally faced with, especially in class administration. Some programmes of professional entrance integrate discussion groups, sometimes between beginning teachers and experienced teachers and sometimes between beginning teachers only. Online discussion forums, source internet sites so the beginning teachers can observe experienced teachers are also offered from these programmes.

The purpose of all of these is to help the beginning teacher get familiar with his working place and continue the development of professional competences, which he needs in order to exercise the profession with efficiency.

The analysis of the results of the analysed poll and the observations on the field and also the conversations with different actors allowed us to show a considerable number

of elements which need to be taken into account in order to reduce the difficulties in the beginning of the career of teachers.

In other words, we recommend assistance in relation to fulfilling and preserving administrative documents and making the pedagogical sources available for every beginning teacher throughout his first year of exercising the profession. A systematic orientation towards continuous qualifications in planning and evaluating learning, and towards class administration and discipline.

Conclusion

All in all, at the end of the initial forming, beginning teachers don't always feel ready to face the working market and can face different difficulties. But with working experience, the beginning teacher will manage to develop a better competence as a teacher. With the purpose of gaining competences and new knowledge, beginning teachers are offered a lot of chances, especially individual reflexive practices or in interaction with the mentors, continuous qualification, programmes for entrance in the profession and inner sources. Lastly we have also shown that some attitudes and personal characteristics can damage or help the professional development of beginning teachers.

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