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**THE TEACHER`S REFLECTIVE PRACTICE – A PREMISE OF
THE QUALITY EDUCATION**

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Abstract

Ensuring quality education implies a constant concern of teachers to improve their own educational practices. For this purpose, one of the important steps they have to engage in is the reflection on didactic activity, which should be considered not just an option, but a stringent necessity, an intrinsic component of the educational process. The teacher's reflection on his own educational practices can bring important benefits in the educational process: better knowledge of the students/preschool children, improvement of didactic design, optimization of the didactic strategy, identification of appropriate ways of differentiating and individualizing the teaching, facilitating a better understanding of the content transferred to students, identifying optimal ways of developing students/preschool children competences, a better pedagogical relation with the class of students/pre-school group, improving the assessment methodology, regulating/self-regulating of didactic act, optimizing the teacher's didactic style and the learning style of each students and, implicitly, the learning outcomes, adequate management of the problems that may arise in the classroom. The present study focuses on analyzing the perception of teachers from pre-university education about the role of reflection in improving the quality of the educational process, on the aspects covered by the reflective practice, on the frequency of reflection-based approaches and on the main benefits of reflective practice.

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1. Introduction

The quality of education is a very common concept in the educational field, approached in educational policy documents, in specialized books and scientific papers, in numerous research from sciences of education domain, as a reference point to which both theoreticians and practitioners of education must report.

The natural question that arises is to what extent this concept can be translated into current educational practices, so that it does not remain just an abstract construct without real links with daily activity from school.

One of the aspects that is shaping better and better, in direct relation with ensuring the quality of education, is the *reflection* on didactic activity. A quality educational process obliges to reflection, which can be used to identify its strengths and weaknesses and to design personalized solutions to the most difficult problems from the educational space.

2. Problem Statement

A World Bank Group Flagship Report (2018), entitled *Learning to Realize Education's Promise*, shows that "students often learn little from year to year, but early learning deficits are magnified over time. Students who stay in school should be rewarded with steady progress in learning, whatever disadvantages they have in the beginning" (p. 6). Those who have to monitor each student's situation and provide differentiated, personalized educational "treatments" that are likely to generate the progress of each of the learners are the teachers. But, in our opinion, not every teacher is capable of doing so. Only a reflective teacher who has integrated in his competences profile and developed his own specific reflective practice competences can lead each student to personal progress, to success, initially – school success and later – professional success.

Reflective practice is an assumed, profound and responsible analysis of the educational process, realised during its course and in the end of it, followed by appropriate decisions, with the purpose of optimizing the teaching-learning-assessment activities.

The reflective practice offers to teacher the opportunity to place each element of the educational process under the "magnifying glass", identifying both strengths and weaknesses, in order to adjust those aspects in time, so that for every student learning outcomes to correspond to those prefigured in the proposed objectives.

Zalipour (2015) present several purposes for reflection:

- teacher's self-reflection as a tool for self-knowledge;
- reflection for professional development;
- reflection to aid research on teaching;
- reflection to enhance student learning experience;
- reflection as a teaching and assessment tool (e.g. reflective journal) (p. 15).

The benefits of reflective practice have consequences both on the professional development of teachers and on the didactic demarche itself and on its direct beneficiaries, the students. The positive impact is also evident at the school organization level.

Thus, in the studies that have addressed this issue (Çimer, Çimer, & Vekli, 2013; Dewey, 1992; Finlay, 2008; Griffiths, 2000; Hoffmann, 2016; Jay & Johnson, 2002; Jennings, 2017; Leijen et al., 2014; Marzano, 2015; Mathew, Mathew, & Peechattu, 2017; Pollard, 2008; Richards & Lockhart, 1996; Selmo & Orsenigo, 2014; Soisangwarn & Wongwanich, 2014; Stăncescu, Drăghicescu & Petrescu, 2018; Walker, 2018) are presented the following advantages/benefits of the use of reflective practice:

- stimulating the change/growth/personal development process;
- achieving excellence in teaching;
- updating/optimizing the approach of the teaching-learning-assessment process;
- improving teaching practices and learning outcomes;
- co-creating/co-building the learning environment/learning experiences by involving students in this process;
- facilitating the learning process by diversifying the teaching strategies/differentiating/individualizing the training;
- assuming and realizing the roles/actions specific to action-research; integrating the research into current educational practices;
- changing the perception of the learner/understanding the needs of the students and the way in which the learning takes place, the factors that condition the learning process, at different stages of mental development;
- valorisation of the experiences and the acquisition of each child;
- improving educational interactions/relationships;
- facilitating the process of self-knowledge, self-assessment; crystallizing the sense of personal/self-efficacy;
- increasing the relevance of learning;
- strengthening team work skills; stimulating mutual support;
- building authentic learning communities;
- prompt capitalization of the provided feedback, in particular, by students, but also by colleagues, parents, etc.

“Reflection is a flash back that the teachers need to mediate for their development” (Mathew, Mathew, & Peechattu, 2017, p. 130), and being a reflective teacher is equivalent to taking responsibility for growth, for training/development, for evolution, for well-being, for the future of some generations of children. So, in accord with Schleicher (2018), we appreciate that “reflective practice is needed to take a critical stance when deciding, choosing and acting, by stepping back from what is known or assumed and by taking different perspectives. (...) Both reflective practice and anticipation contribute to the willingness to take responsible actions, in the belief that it is within the power of all of us to shape and change the course of events (p. 29).

3. Research Questions

The questions that guided our investigative approach are the following:

What is the teachers` opinion about the importance of reflection for making didactic activity more effective?

On what aspects do teachers focus when they reflect on didactic activity?

How often do teachers a reflective analysis of the teaching activity they are involved in?

What are the main benefits of reflective practice at didactic demarche level?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of our study is to analyze the perception of teachers from pre-university education about the role of reflection in improving the quality of the educational process, on the aspects covered by the reflective practice (didactic style, the grade of achievement of the proposed objectives, didactic strategies used, content pedagogical processing, organized learning experiences, how students/preschool children learn, the learning environment, the results of students/preschool children, interpersonal relationships from the classroom/pre-school group, etc.), on the frequency of reflection-based approaches and on the main benefits of reflective practice.

5. Research Methods

The method used in the investigative research was the questionnaire survey. The questionnaire used consists of ten items, some with predefined answers, others with open answers. The target group of the micro-research was represented by 122 teachers from pre-university education (teachers for pre-school, primary, secondary and high-school education), with at least ten years of work in education. Data processing was predominantly quantitative, in correlation with a qualitative analysis, based on information obtained from discussions with teachers included in the sample of research. In the following, we present the answers provided by the teachers included in the survey sample to four of the relevant items of the questionnaire.

6. Findings

The first of the selected items refers to teachers' perception about the importance of reflection for making didactic activity more effective. The results, presented in Figure 01, demonstrate that teachers think that reflection on didactic activity contributes to a very good extent (72%) to make it more effective. We can also see that all the answers are placed on the upper levels of the Likert scale, which leads us to the conclusion that teachers are aware of the importance of reflection in the teaching process.

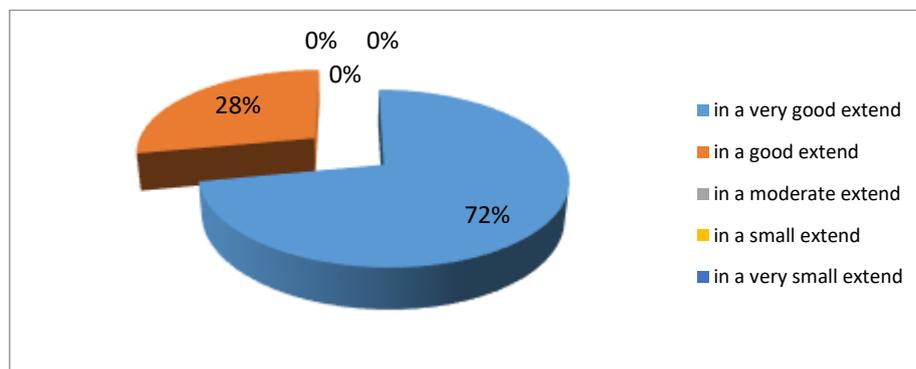


Figure 01. The importance of reflection for making didactic activity more effective

The second item considered relevant for the present study addresses the aspects that teachers focus on when reflecting on didactic activity. In order to better analyze and interpret the results from this item, we provided the ranks for predefined answers in the questionnaire, depending on the number of options of the questioned teachers (Table 01). Thus, rank I, associated with the highest number of answers, was conferred to the degree of achievement of the proposed objectives, rank II, to the teaching strategies used, rank III –to the didactic style, rank IV –to the pedagogical processing of content, the way in which students/preschool children learn and the results obtained by students / preschool children (those three aspects registered equal number of answers), the V rank –to the organized learning experiences, rank VI – to the interpersonal relations in the class of students/pre-school group, rank VII –to the learning environment and rank VIII - to other aspects.

Therefore, when using the specific reflective practice skills, the questioned teachers concentrate mainly on the degree of achievement of the proposed objectives, on the teaching strategies used and on the didactic style. These three aspects represent variables appreciated by the respondents as extremely important, as the stated purpose of the reflection on didactic activity is to increase the quality and effectiveness of the didactic activity. An effective teacher is aware of how important it's to know the extent to which the objectives set at the beginning of the activity have been achieved or not. The correlation between proposed objectives and achieved objectives, materialized in the learning outcomes, demonstrates the functionality of the educational process. The gap between them, which can be found during the reflection calls for the adoption of some decisions to regulate, to correct, and generate the expected results. The teaching strategies used also have a decisive role in making didactic activity more effective. These are ways which help teachers achieve their proposed objectives. For the success of the activity, the analysis of its own didactic style and its improvement / restructuring / remodeling is a sign of the didactic maturity, of the awareness of the major importance of the teacher's activity for the quality of the didactic process.

Referring to the results recorded in this item, we note that the questioned teachers orient their reflection to the top-rank variables of the educational process, which can lead to prompt regulatory interventions, with beneficial effects for its quality.

Table 01. Variables of the educational process which are the subject of reflection

No.	Variables of the educational process which are the subject of reflection	Rank
a.	didactic style	III
b.	the degree of achievement of the proposed objectives	I
c.	the teaching strategies used	II
d.	pedagogical processing of the content	IV
e.	learning experiences organized	V
f.	the way students / preschool children learn	IV
g.	the learning environment	VII
h.	the results obtained by students / preschool children	IV
i.	interpersonal relationships from the class of students / pre-school group	VI
j.	other aspects, namely	VIII

The next item selected relates to the frequency with which the questioned teachers engage in reflective analysis of teaching activity. Teachers' responses, summarized in Figure 02, reveal that 34% of them perform *always* a reflective analysis of teaching activity, 62% say they engage in the reflective process *often*, and 4% *sometimes*.

Analyzing these percentages, we can conclude that for the questioned teachers, engaging in a process of reflection on teaching is an important aspect and the frequency with which the reflection is performed is good and very good.

However, we cannot fail to notice the fact that, compared to the first item analyzed, where the teachers recognized in an overwhelming percentage the importance of the reflection for the efficiency of didactic activity (72% - to a great extent, according to Figure 01), the percentage distributed on the highest scale for this item is not as high (34% - always according to Figure 02). This situation may indicate a lack of skills specific to reflective practice, as well as difficulties in choosing the tools and going through the stages specific to the reflective practice.

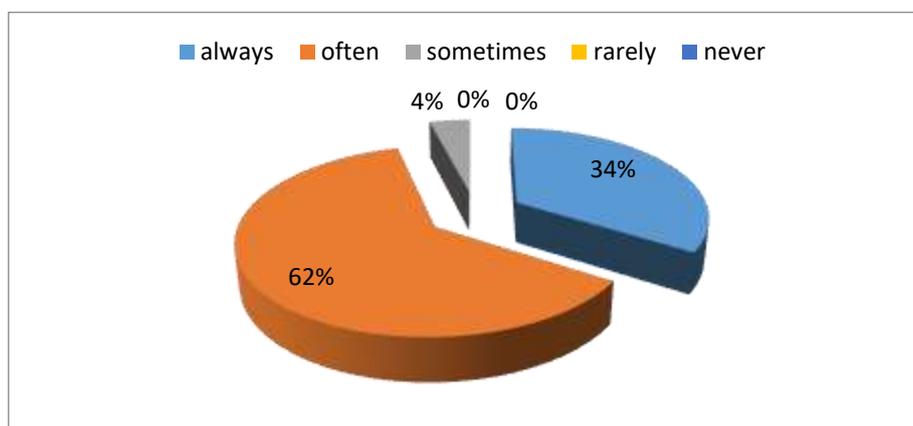


Figure 02. The frequency with which teachers engage in reflective practice

The benefits of reflective practice at the didactic demarche level are multiple. For this reason, the last item we analyse relates to the perception of teachers in relation to those benefits. Responses to this item were predefined, but teachers were free to add, too, other benefits than those already mentioned. Depending on the number of options recorded for each benefit, we conferred ranks, from rank I - associated with the highest number of responses to rank IX - associated with the lowest number of responses.

Thus, according to the results obtained (presented in Table 02), rank I was conferred to the improvement of didactic design, rank II –to the optimization of teaching strategy, rank III –to the identification of appropriate ways of differentiation and individualization of the training, rank IV - to the improvement of the assessment methodology, grade V –to identifying optimal ways of developing students / preschoolerscompetences, rank VI –to a better knowledge of the group of students / preschool group, rank VII – to a better pedagogical relationship with the class of students / preschool group, rank VIII –to facilitating a better understanding of the content transferred to students, and rank IX –to other aspects / benefits.

Therefore, the teachers included in our study sample place on the first three places in the hierarchy of the benefits that the reflective practice has at the didactic demarche level: the improvement of the

didactic design, optimizing the teaching strategy and identifying the appropriate ways of differentiating and individualizing the training, confirming its role for the effectiveness of the actions preceding the lesson (didactic design) and those integrated in the actual lesson (the teaching-learning-evaluation processes).

Table 02. The main benefits of reflective practice at didactic demarche level

No.	The main benefits of reflective practice at didactic demarche level	Rank
a.	the improvement of didactic design	I
b.	optimizing of the teaching strategy	II
c.	improving the assessment methodology	IV
d.	a better knowledge of the class of students / preschool group	VI
e.	a better pedagogical relationship with the class of students / preschool group	VII
f.	identifying optimal ways to develop students/preschool competences	V
g.	identifying appropriate ways to differentiate and individualize the training	III
h.	facilitating a better understanding of the content transferred to students	VIII
i.	Others, namely...	IX

7. Conclusion

The analyze and interpretation of the results of our study have allowed us to make the following inferences:

- teachers consider that reflection on didactic activity greatly contributes to its effectiveness;
- the most important three variables of the educational process which are the subject of reflection, according to the teachers, are: the degree of achievement of the proposed objectives, the teaching strategies used and the didactic style; on the basis of this perception, we can appreciate that the teachers participating in our investigative research are obviously concerned about the quality of the educational act, also being aware that they are the main responsible for this aspect;
- declaring that they engage in the process of reflection on teaching activity *always* (34%) and *often* (62%), the respondents demonstrate that they have specific abilities and can use appropriate support tools;
- the main benefits of reflective practice, in the questioned teachers' opinion, are: improving the didactic design, optimizing the teaching strategy and identifying the appropriate ways of differentiating and individualizing the training.

So, the results obtained from our research confirm that teachers are aware of the importance of reflective practice, but they do not integrate it constantly into all their educational practices. It is a situation that we can explain by lack of special training oriented toward developing the teaching competences related to reflective practice and providing to the teachers appropriate instruments for reflection on didactic activity.

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