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**THE PEDAGOGICAL TEACHING PRACTICE FOR STUDENTS
STUDYING PRESCHOOL AND PRIMARY EDUCATION**

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Abstract

The pedagogical teaching practice is a compulsory discipline for students enrolled in the PIPP programme. During their practice, the students carry out didactic activities under the guidance of their mentor and their practice coordinator. The purpose of this discipline is to examine the applicability of the theoretical knowledge acquired by the students during their training programme. The proposed text discusses the status of the teaching practice within our contemporary society, it details the professional competencies of PIPP students, presents the general objective of the discipline, namely the development of students' competencies for planning and designing the contents of disciplines and, above all else, the formation and development of competencies for the teaching of didactic activities. The activities undertaken by the students during their teaching practice are as follows: performing the didactic activities at the class the student was assigned, analysing and evaluating the lessons taught using the lesson analysis sheets, and developing their pedagogical practice portfolio. In order to discover the manner in which the teaching practice in schools was executed, we have performed direct observations on the activities of the students, we have conducted discussions with the teaching mentors, and we have applied a questionnaire and have written a concise commentary on the data found.

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Keywords: Student, teaching practice, didactic activities, activity assessment, pedagogical portfolio.



1. Introduction

The curriculum for the Preschool and Primary Education programme includes, at the present time, the discipline observational teaching practice during the 1st semester of the 1st year of study – observational teaching practice in preschool, at all levels – and observational teaching practice in school, starting with the preparatory grade through the 4th grade, during the 2nd semester. During their 2nd year of study, the 3rd semester observational practice takes place once again in preschools, at all levels, and the 4th semester observational practice is accomplished in schools, from the preparatory grade and up to the 4th grade. Furthermore, the curriculum for the 3rd year of the programme includes the discipline pedagogical teaching practice, undertaken in the 5th semester in preschool, at all levels, and in schools, starting with the preparatory grade and up to the 4th grade, during the 6th semester.

The pedagogical practice of the students enrolled in the Preschool and Primary Education programme commences with a preliminary activity of researching and planning the activities that are to be carried out throughout the semester. This activity is a group one, undertaken by the students with their practice coordinator teacher.

The actual pedagogical teaching practice then takes place (including the evaluation and self-assessment). This activity is mostly realized by the students, but coordinated by their teacher and, especially, by their mentor.

There is also a part of the pedagogical practice that consists of familiarizing students with methods of implementing differentiated activities, with modalities of realizing extracurricular activities, with strategies of counselling pupils with special educational needs, as well as familiarizing them with school management activities. These activities are carried out by the students and the practice coordinator teacher.

The students of the PIPP programme undergo several stages in their pedagogical practice. There is an initial stage through which the assimilation by the students of fundamental theoretical elements is achieved, as well as their familiarization with the main instruments necessary for the accomplishment of their pedagogical practice. During the phase dedicated to the observational practice, the acclimatization of the students with the specificity of didactic activities in preschool and primary school is aimed at. In the period reserved for the teaching practice, the formation and development of practical didactical planning is the focus, as well as the execution and practice of endeavours specific to the teaching-learning-assessment processes (Jucan, & Chiş, 2013).

2. Problem statement

In what concerns the development of the professional competencies of students, aimed at in the pedagogical teaching practice discipline, emphasis is placed on:

- Designing instructive or educational programmes adapted to the different age/ability levels and different target groups;
- Using, interpreting, processing and applying specialized, psycho-pedagogical, and methodological knowledge during the entire didactic process of designing the instructive-educational activities and didactic materials;

- Performing the activities specific to the instructive-educational process in preschool and primary school;
- Applying the knowledge concerning the methodological stages of accomplishing activities specific to the instructive-educational process in preschool and primary school;
- Using specialized, psycho-pedagogical, and methodological knowledge when conducting instructive-educational activities in preschool and primary school;
- Applying the principles and teaching methods specific to the activities/subjects taught, in order to ensure the progress of the preschoolers/young pupils;
- Assessing the effectiveness of the strategies used and their impact on young pupils/preschoolers through a comparison with the standards and objectives stated in the curricular documents;
- Performing instructive-educational activities that comply with and illustrate the principles and methodologies specific to the didactics applied in preschool and primary school education.

The general objective of the discipline is represented by the development of the students' competencies for planning and designing the contents of disciplines, and, especially, the formation and development of competencies for the teaching of didactic activities.

Our endeavour in the present paper is centred on the manner in which the pedagogical teaching practice that takes place during the 6th semester in schools, starting with the preparatory grade and up to the 4th grade, is organized and accomplished. The activities undertaken by the students in this context are the following (Jucan, & Chiş, 2013):

- Performing the didactic activities for the class the student was assigned;
- Analysing and evaluating the lessons taught using the lesson analysis sheets;
- Developing the pedagogical practice portfolio. Following the observations and analyses made, the students will develop specific materials that will constitute their personal portfolio.
- Defending and assessing the pedagogical practice portfolio.

As far as the general competencies of students in this discipline are concerned, we note that they must essentially possess the competencies required for practicing the profession of primary school teacher (Bocoş, & Jucan, 2007). Considering this, the students aim for the application, in a manner particularized to the discipline taught, of all the components of the general teaching-learning-assessment process (the principles, objectives, methods, means, organizational forms, procedures, methods, and instruments of assessing academic results). The students are also acclimatized to the modalities of planning and designing the contents of subjects, as well as extracurricular activities or the counselling of parents. Furthermore, the students have knowledge of didactic planning, complying with any requirements, but also proving their creativity in the process. They also constantly study and refine the structure of didactic activities' projects (Păun, Ezechil, 2012)

It should be noted that, throughout the pedagogical practice, the students are involved in the realization of activities specific to the instructive-educational process in preschool and primary school (Bocoş, & Jucan, 2008). The students learn, in a practical manner, methods of assessing the learning processes, the academic results, and the progress registered by young pupils. During their teaching practice in class, the students develop their ability to get acquainted with pupils (individually and within the school group), by observing their behaviour during playing and learning activities, but also through studying the

pupils' personal portfolio, in the interest of differentiated treatment (Chis, 2005). It is also important to train the ability to organize and perform certain extracurricular activities with the pupils, as well as cultivate the student's ability to perform a self-assessment and integrate its outcome in order to promote professional development (Iucu, 2005).

3. Research Questions

In the current study we were interested to find out, mainly, which are the specific didactic activities, conducted by the students in the specialization Primary and Preschool Pedagogy, within the pedagogic practice.

4. Research Methods

Regarding the method of assessment of the students, this is achieved through observations made by the mentor and by the practice coordinator teacher, and is finalized through an oral examination. Furthermore, based on observations made in the classroom, the students will develop a pedagogical practice portfolio, throughout the semester, that will contain the following (Chiş, Jucan, Catalano, & Dragoş, 2017):

- The annual planning of activities for the class in which the student is undergoing his teaching practice in;
- The thematic unit planning of activities for the class in which the student is undergoing his teaching practice in;
- The development of 12 lesson plans for the class in which the student is undergoing his teaching practice in (the plans of the lessons taught and other plans);
- The development of analysis sheets for the lessons the student observed (12 lessons);
- Completing the psycho-pedagogical characterization sheets (5 sheets);
- Assessment tests for pupils (a minimum of 5);
- Other didactic materials relevant for their didactic activity in the school.

The oral assessment of the students will have as evaluation criteria the following: the organization and coherence of the informational content, highlighting the applicability of the theoretical theme, the psycho-pedagogical language used, the ability to translate the theoretical content into practice, the creative potential shown throughout the activities, the ability to analyse and synthesize a material, the originality manifested by the student during the practice activities, as well as the realization of the portfolio. The minimum standard accepted in the assessment will be the assimilation of the theoretical notions, but especially their application in practice, and the assimilation of behaviours and attitudes in a coherent approach, as reflected by the university curriculum and in accordance with the requirements of the national framework for qualifications in higher education.

In order to discover the manner in which the teaching practice in schools was executed we have performed direct observations on the activities of the students and we have conducted discussions with the teaching mentors. Additionally, for the correctness and accuracy of this information we have deemed it necessary to apply a questionnaire to the students in the 3rd year of the PIPP programme – a total of 87 subjects. The purpose of the questionnaire was to collect information regarding the manner of

accomplishment of the teaching practice in schools. More precisely, we were interested in the didactic activities undertaken by the students in the class they were assigned for teaching. We were also intent on discovering the exact number of hours they spent teaching the class and whether this number of hours was sufficient to provide them with a minimum of practical experience. Another aspect covered by the questionnaire items refers to the method of realizing their practice portfolio.

5. Findings

We have attempted a qualitative interpretation of the data obtained and even a concise commentary of the data reflects the fact that the didactic activities undertaken by the students were focused on three components. The most important component was that of the planning, execution, and assessment of the teaching activity (75%). Then, the students carried out activities of observation and participation in certain curricular or extracurricular activities (15%) and also carried out activities pertaining to the general familiarization with the school (10%). Within the component aimed at planning, execution, and assessment, the activities undertaken concerned the development of didactic projects and of the materials necessary for the execution of the lessons.

Each student has completed 12 hours of actual teaching. All of the students stated that this number of hours is insufficient for their specialized training. This aspect motivates us to create smaller groups of students that would be assigned to a mentor, in class, to ensure a higher number of teaching hours in the future. Furthermore, 50% of the students have noted that they had performed integrated teaching activities. Concerning is the fact that 50% of the students have said that, at the request of their mentor, they have used the classical approach of teaching each discipline individually. This leads us to draw attention to the fact that teachers are still focused on solely this type of activity, to the detriment of the modern, current, integrated one.

For realizing their pedagogical practice portfolio, all students mentioned that they have relied on the help of the teacher responsible for the class where they completed their practice. Other sources used in this endeavour and mentioned by the students were: the Internet and their own personal experience.

6. Conclusions

The formation of psycho-pedagogical competencies in the students of the PIPP programme is achieved through a set of specialized disciplines, hours dedicated to the theoretical training, but also through the pedagogical practice activity, distributed among the three years of the bachelor's degree programme.

From a curricular point of view, we note that, in what concerns the students, the current model, with the pedagogical practice carried out during each year of study, covers their theoretical training and the psycho-pedagogical practice needs and is compatible with the European systems.

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