International conference "Education, Reflection, Development", ERD 2015, 3-4 July 2015, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

The relation between prospective teachers' beliefs and conceptions of learning and their academic performance

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Abstract

In order to highlight students` conception of learning in correlation with their learning approaches, we have applied the questionnaire "Approach to Learning and Study Skills Inventory" (ALSSI) developed by Entwistle and Ramsden in 1981 to pre-service teachers. Self-assessment in achieving high results is in close connection to students' conceptions of learning. If students get a high score using deep approach or strategic approach, then it is likely for them to estimate high performance in that subject. The higher the students` scores in surface approach to learning are, the better they will estimate poor results in pedagogical disciplines.

Keywords: beliefs, conceptions of learning, learning approaches, academic performance

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1. Introduction

The analysis of some of the learning approaches used in higher education started from N. Entwistle' s conception (1998) that the development of perceptions regarding students' learning (from memorizing to transforming) and intellectual development (from dualism to relativism) are factors that influence the option for a certain approach to learning. They are based on the argument that a learner doesn't approach leaning in just one way. Other research emphasizes the role of the educational environment as the third factor of influence regarding the approaches to

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learning. This involves the nature of the working task, the circumstances in which performance will take place, provision of data concerning the task etc. (Bigss, 1987). Starting from the above, we have identified three approaches to learning.

Deep approach to learning implies critical examination of new facts and ideas, as well as tying them into existing cognitive structures and making numerous correlations between ideas. Students promoting a deep approach to learning look for the meaning of the information, focusing on the central argument or on concepts needed to solve a problem. They are able to distinguish between argument and evidence and make connections between different modules/chapters/units. Deep approach to learning and especially strategic approach to learning involve students' good knowledge of the task, and of the ways of solving it efficiently. They also mean good planning skills, monitoring and assessment of resources and processes involved in learning. The premises for metacognition are thus created.

Surface approach to learning means accepting new facts and ideas uncritically and trying to store them as isolated, unconnected items; relying on rote learning; focusing on outwards signs and the formulae needed to solve a problem; receiving information passively; failing to distinguish principles from examples; treating parts of modules and programs as separate parts. Strategic approach to learning involves targeting the students' learning process towards achieving maximum academic performance through objective means of grading. Students rely both on rote learning and meaningful learning, depending on the assessment task. They use systematic learning methods to receive the highest mark possible. Students have two focus points: the academic material and the requirements of the assessment.

When speaking about prospective teachers, it would be expected from them to be more aware of their learning approach. It is also expected that they had more self-assessment competencies than other category of students. The development of professional competences for the teaching career, the development of self-assessment and reflexive judgments are constant goals throughout the entire teacher training program.

Professors should take into account the students` personality, the sum of all internal and external factors which influence directly or indirectly the process of understanding and learning and regard it as an attribute which defines the institutional, socio-cultural, economic context in which a student develops and shapes his personality.

The inverted connection is conducted through:

- self-correction sheets– as student - teaching material interaction,
- appreciation of students` interaction as manner of peer correction,
- dialogue management as means of guided communication.
- self-assessment: as exercise by means of which one can observe errors, can understand the manner of thinking, development of motivations and personal values, etc. It is also a procedure which enables teachers to analyze the students` perception of the subject and the way they relate to it. „Self-assessment attitude is already an important factor of progress in schools and the acquisition of this ability is a primary educational objective". (Cardinet, 1994, p. 44-45)

The demands of formative assessment highlight that it has a didactic efficiency from a cognitive and affective point of view because it brings about students to assess their own representations, internal and external motivations. It also enhances applications by involving the development of self-assessment. Self-assessment prepares students to play the role of grown-ups and self-assess their interests thus becoming a privileged assessment tool among other assessment methods.

The regulation system of formative assessment has three functions (De Ketele, 1992, p.2) whose aim is to:

- recognize success;
- identify and recognize errors;
- rethink strategies and improve them.

Formative assessment as complex process turns errors into a study object for students and not a guilt or resignation object, fact that determines the development of self-regulation and self-assessment processes.

Researchers have highlighted the development process of active, independent learning abilities by granting more time to formative (extended) assessment in the management of activities. Formative assessment is considered „an