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## Policy and practice of initial teacher training

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### Abstract

The first part of this article discusses the need to re-think some policies and practices in initial teacher training, in order to obtain quality teaching. The second part presents an empirical research, with the students who attend the psychological-pedagogical module, with the purpose of improving the quality of teaching. This article illustrates the implementation of a project, completed with the students who opted for a teaching career training. They observed and recorded the presence or absence of didactic categories (principles, teaching methods, types of communication, assessment tools) in the act of teaching of the observed teachers.

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### 1. Introduction

„... in reality, the formation of teachers doesn't exist”, stated Crocker & Dibben (2008) in a baseline study on teacher education in Canada; because there is a great diversity in the programs aimed at teaching efficiency, standards for admission for the profession, ways of preparing curriculum and what is taught, respectively learned, assessment quality – which, compared to any other profession, creates a sense of chaos.

The studies aimed at teacher training - and their professional quality - are directly related to the success rate of the students/pupils. It is estimated that teacher education is the foundation of the education system and it represents the basis of quality education at all school levels; it appears that it is essential to the prestige of the teaching profession.

Although the initial training of teachers is different from country to country, even from region/province within the same country, there are some important similarities: teachers acquire education information (fundamentals of pedagogy, curriculum theory, theory on evaluation and teaching, education psychology, education philosophy etc.),

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respectively teaching and learning theories, as well as methods specific to the discipline they will teach. Theoretical training is followed, in different measures, by a practical training stage in schools.

This article presents a part of the activities taking place during the psycho-pedagogical module, by which the students get their skills regarding a teaching career certified. The psycho-pedagogical module takes place in universities and has a voluntary regime. The students of the university can apply for this module, regardless of specialization. The module operates based on a unique (at a national level) learning plan and it contains both compulsory and optional disciplines. One of the compulsory disciplines of the plan is Pedagogy. In the first semester of the second year, the students involved in the module can choose to attend a project that focuses on direct and systematic observation of the educational phenomenon. By getting involved in this project students secure 30% of their final Pedagogy discipline grade.

The project's results reflect the students' perspective on the educational actions that take place during their classes and seminars, in a critically constructive manner. Students observe and record the presence of different didactic categories that the project requires, within their specialization. The „in situ” study of different didactic categories allows students to link theoretical knowledge with educational practice. It is worth mentioning that the analysis of such didactic categories is made without naming the persons that teach the courses and seminars.

The article also points out to the university educational practices. Initial teacher training in higher education is poor and few of the higher education teachers are concerned with the pedagogical aspects of teaching, focusing almost exclusively on the content of their specialization. In the pre-university level, teachers are involved in continued training programs in order to update and optimize their teaching styles and strategies – meanwhile, in higher education, this doesn't happen. If a continuous and constant interaction between scientific and didactic content doesn't take place, higher education's desires will not be achieved - or will only be partially realized by informing, not forming students for their future careers.

The situation is not specific to the Romanian school and is confirmed by studies –few of them, indeed- to take place in the entire European education space (Bireaud, 1990; Attali, 1998; Roegiers, 2012). Higher education is overwhelmed by new tasks, focused almost entirely on research, which makes the act of teaching to become a „Cinderella” of the teacher's activity. Dominated by financial and economic interests, becoming more and more a service-provider, the university has no time or interest to clarify the educational paradigm in which it forms the young generation. The emphasis on training is definitely put on specialized, professional training – thus, pedagogy is often not even an issue for teachers in this education segment. The pedagogical relationship is one of an individual type, between teacher and student and it is not a component of their training as teachers.

These are just some of the issues that were the basis for organizing the seminar activities with other coordinates in mind, making sure those students get to „exit” the restraining frame of the seminar hall and link theory with practice in their daily lives, in direct contact with their teachers.

## **2. Description of the current context**

Initial teacher training is a vital social action, which includes instruction and education. From a classical pedagogical perspective, teacher training implies initial professional training – extended to the adult education. From a modern and post-modern pedagogical perspective, teacher training means integrating complex socio-professional training – initial and continued – at the level of strategic models of lifelong education.

According to the statistics, there are over six million teachers in Europe now, whose role is to help others acquire a variety of knowledge and skills necessary to build their personal and professional development. Teachers are recognized mediators between a world in constant transformation and the students who are about to enter this world. Also, the teacher career is seen as an increasingly complex one and the teacher's work is taking place in more and more difficult conditions, with growing responsibilities. Many quality teachers leave the profession due to low wages, difficult working conditions and insufficient professional support.

All attempts to change or reform the quality of teaching are modeled by the policies on teacher training at European and national standards, by accreditation standards for initial and ongoing training for teachers programs, by the evaluation and certification of such programs. The policies and practices regarding initial training are more like a kaleidoscope, due to the multitude of factors that must be taken into account: types of knowledge, abilities and attitudes, curriculum documents, topics of study, the future teacher's previous experience, students, syllabus, purposes etc. Like a kaleidoscope, all these elements - and more - mix and generate models of teaching practice.

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