

The Difficulties of the Initial Teacher Training in Romania

Adrian Opre, Liliana Ciascai, Patricia Nagy, Ioan Ciascai
Babes Bolyai University and Technical University, Cluj Napoca

1. Characteristics of the Initial Teacher Training

Due to the present socio-economic situation the teaching seems to have taken on a secondary importance in Romania. The number of students interested in becoming teachers is in continuous decline. Those who do pursue degrees in teaching do it with full awareness of the fact that the various faculties do not have a very difficult entrance exam. In the last five years, there have been numerous signs pointing to the increasingly superficial scientific knowledge of the candidates for teaching degrees. Despite these signals, the faculties haven't done anything to change their curricula and improve the present situation. On the contrary, instead of reducing the number of highly specialized courses, the faculties have increased the number of courses focusing on basic knowledge. We will demonstrate these facts by showing the changes in the curriculum of the initial preparation for becoming a teacher.

TABLE 1. The pre-service curriculum of student teachers with only one teaching specialization - a comparative study

[See the tabel file](#)

The situation presented in the table 1. describes the pre-service curriculum of students with one major (e.g. Physics). There are also departments with double majors (e.g. Mathematics-Physics, Chemistry-Physics, French-Romanian, etc). In the case of double majors, the preparation for the second major is done according to the curriculum of the initial preparation presented above (with the same number of courses, seminars, and Teaching Practice).

If we take a look at the table, we notice a decrease from 322 to 224 in the total number of classes in the curriculum of the pre-service training in the departments with one major.

We can also infer from the table that out of 224 classes of initial preparation, the 56 hours of apprenticeship are divided as follows:

- 25 classes of assisting at lessons given by the mentor-professor or another colleague;
- 20 classes of analysing one's own lesson or the lesson taught by a colleague;
- 5 classes of teaching;
- 6 classes of preparing lessons and building and presenting a portfolio.

These 5 classes of teaching represent 2.23% of the total period dedicated to the students' initial preparation.

Nowadays, the initial training period of students who intend to become teachers and have only major field of study represents 8% of the total number of classes dedicated to academic and teaching preparation. Six percent of this is theoretical and 2% the practical preparation.

2. The Organization of the evaluation research

The goal of the evaluation research presented in this paper is to point out students' difficulties in the Teaching Practice and to identify the causes.

Between December 2000 and January 2001, 268 subjects have been surveyed. Twenty were teachers (methodologists and mentors), 66 were Physics students (from the departments Physics, Mathematics-Physics, Technological Physics, and Medical Physics), and 182 were high school students.

The investigation/analysis of the efficiency of the Teaching Practice was based on surveys that included questions concerning these aspects:

- the level of theoretical preparation of the student (knowledge of Physics and psycho-pedagogic and methodological knowledge);
- the student's performance compared to the performances mentioned in the lesson assessment sheet;
- the most frequently encountered difficulties during the Teaching Practicum;
- organization and layout of the Teaching Practicum;
- suggestions for improving the activities of the Teaching Practicum.

The items concerning the teaching activity were elaborated based on the lesson evaluation sheet of the student pursuing the apprenticeship. The other items were specified after surveying other mentors having a great amount of experience in this field.

The student's activities for each individual criterion are assessed with a grade, as follows: insufficient, sufficient, average, good, or very good.

Regarding the problem mentioned above, there are three questionnaires. The mentors and students replied to 53 respectively 54 items, and the high school students to 27 items. The subjects were asked to express their agreement (totally agree: YES or partially agree: yes) or their disagreement (totally disagree: NO or partially disagree: no) regarding a statement in an item. Every questionnaire also included space for opinions or suggestions, which could be general or regarding specific contents of the items.

3. Results

3.1. Evaluation of the theoretical preparation level of the students

When asked about the quality of the students initial preparation, the professors evaluated first their psycho-pedagogic preparation. Second the methodological preparation and finally the Physics knowledge of the students has been assessed.

The students "blame" the inconsistency of the psycho-pedagogical knowledge on the fact that this knowledge is very general, purely theoretical, and was acquired long before the Teaching Practicum.

3.2. Students' performances versus the requirements mentioned in the evaluation sheet

Most students don't think that their scientific knowledge has to be tested. They are of the opinion that their teaching contained no scientific mistakes and that the information taught was accessible to the high school students. Some of the high school students noted the inconsistency of the college students: "The students do not have the necessary Physics and Math knowledge in order to teach logically at the level of our understanding" (high school student); "The students lack a lot of information; they say unclear things, which create chaos during the classes" (high school student).

3.3. Frequently noticed difficulties in the apprenticeship

The continuous support the students are given by mentors while they are preparing the lesson determines college students to have a different perception from that of the mentors regarding the difficulties in lesson preparation.

Our data revealed that the college students are often unaware of some mistakes in their lessons. Nevertheless these mistakes are seldom missed by the high school students.

The observation sheets of the students' lessons, drawn up by the mentors, note a frequent inability of the students to ask concrete questions of their class. This often makes them to reformulate the question or use auxiliary questions.

Other observations mention frequent situations in which the students aren't able to decide whether an answer is correct, or they accept incomplete or wrong answers.

Many deficiencies concern the use of experimental apparatus.

- the students aren't familiar with the contents of the Physics kit and do not know how to perform the experiments;

- the students do not know how to evaluate the results of an experiment and often do not make the experiments plainly visible to the entire class.

A large part of the students' clumsiness during experiments is due to the fact that in college they don't perform experiments but make theoretical determinations.

3.4. Organization and Development of the Teaching Practice

Most teachers and students consider the number of classes for observing the teaching mentor as being sufficient. They also believe that the number of classes assisted permit the college students to get an idea about the specifics of the Physics lessons the mentor have presented. The professors and college students disagree on the number of classes taught by the college students. The mentors and college students agree on the fact that objectives and detailed analysis of the lessons improve the college students' performance in teaching next class.

90% of the professors and 77.28% of the students agree that the help provided by the mentor to the college students for preparing their lessons is important in increasing quality of the lessons.

3.5. Suggestions for improving the quality of apprenticeship

Suggestions made by mentors:

- a review of the curriculum, focussed on reducing the gaps knowledge of the college students
- separation of the initial academic curriculum from the teaching one
- reintroduction of the laboratory for techniques of teaching experiment;
- keeping the students and the management of the faculties up-to-date about the curricular changes in the pre-university education,.
- co-operation between methodologist, mentor, and student.

Suggestions made by students:

- the study in college of middle school and high school Physics kits;
- becoming familiar with the teaching methods used by some teachers and promoted in the last few years in Romanian education;
- more support and encouragement from the mentors;
- the freedom to object limitations given by some teachers and the chance to enter grades into the grade book.

Most high school students suggest that the college students have to be admitted to the Teaching Practice only after having been tested on their Physics knowledge and teaching aptitude.

4. Conclusion

The situation described by responses of the college students suggests a review of the curriculum for both initial academic and professional preparation. Theoretical and practical activities performed in college have to be adjusted to the paradigm changes in pre-university education.

A part of the deficiencies mentioned by the surveyed subjects can be remedied through a rigorous preparation for teaching done in college. This preparation means an increased number of classes of methodological disciplines.

Increasing the classes of the Teaching Practice can solve another part of the difficulties.

Being certified for a teaching career should follow a balanced examination, not only partial exams.

