

# A CASE-STUDY REGARDING TRAINING FOR TEACHING CAREER AT “LUCIAN BLAGA” UNIVERSITY OF SIBIU, ROMANIA

Adriana, NICU<sup>1</sup> and Alina, MAG<sup>2</sup>

Training Department “Lucian Blaga” University of Sibiu, Sibiu, România, adriana.nicu@yahoo.com  
Training Department “Lucian Blaga” University of Sibiu, Sibiu, România, magalina@gmail.com

**ABSTRACT:** This study offers benchmarks on Romanian university teacher training in situ, with customization for the University of Sibiu’s pedagogical studies program. Initial teacher training is a process which faces several problems. Any professionalizing teaching career begun in these programs has, at its base, pedagogical studies focused on two different targets: the initial formation of future teachers and, through them, the formation of another generation of students. To achieve these two, distinct goals we solicited and considered the views of our present students on their curriculum, namely upon the content taught and forms of assessment in the context of teaching (courses) and learning activities (seminars). The authors also sought to capture the extent to which young people participating in these courses will follow a teaching career, and, if so, they will benefit from information received during their initial training, or, alternatively, will consider these courses are a waste of time, both financially and personally.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The world is changing with a speed without precedent and, as a result of this, the university needs to constantly improve its educational provision in order to keep up with the pace. The problems of the society in which we all live and the quick rhythm of societal changes burden the university in its possibilities of offering a satisfactory training for future professionals. It is thus very important for a university to offer an attractive educational package for prospective students, depending on the needs of those whom it trains.

Yet, how well do we know students’ needs and how much do we value their opinions when they are offered? The Department for Teaching Staff Training at the Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu (LBUS) has assumed the responsibility for discovering the tough and weak points of its teaching curriculum by assessing students’ opinions towards the educational offer in the pedagogical courses and seminars in pursuit of creating an objective image regarding the quality of the educational acts and the involvement of the teaching staff in these processes. The survey conducted offers the university valuable information about its students’ preferences and expectations, making it easier for them to become involved in the initial training process for the pedagogical profession.

## 2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The students who frequently participate in the psycho-pedagogical study program courses at LBUS come from areas specific to different fields (mathematics, letters, biology, history, economy, law, engineering etc.), with more-or-less clearly defined intentions on the necessity and utility of the training for a future pedagogical career.

The professionalization for the pedagogical career in Romania is done simultaneously with the scientific training according to the speciality and “intersecting with it along the study years at the university” [3]. From here a series of inconveniences appears on several levels: motivational, curricular, institutional, and legislative.

The participation in the psycho pedagogical study program is optional which means that most students will not completely engage in the training as teacher but they rather view the pedagogical career as a ‘plan B’. A minor percentage from

those who frequently participate in the psycho-pedagogical module follows a teaching career after graduation [4]. But, those who remain in the educational system are not always among the best-trained ones. Most of the time, those who choose this path, view the pedagogical career just as a short stage in their life. To be a teacher today can mean for many only an “umbrella” for bad times [1]. Any “ray of sun” from another field of activity thus will cause them to escape from the educational system and implicitly to a loss of some resources.

## 3. PURPOSE OF STUDY

As long as the professionalization of the pedagogical career does not start by addressing itself to a distinct segment from the population of a community and as long as the selection criteria and orientation directions of the youth with vocation for a teaching career are not met, the training in this field will be under the signs of doubt and incertitude. Student’s opinions about the quality of their curses and seminars are not usually investigated. They should be more involved in their own development through the educational process [5].

For this reason, the team of trainers who sustain the training, advisory, and orientation of the youth for a pedagogical career should try to identify the strong and weak points of the curriculum of this type of study program.

## 4. METHODS

We For ourselves, we proposed the students whom we worked with at the end of 2009- 2010 school year to answer some questions on a survey regarding the content of the lectures given and especially regarding the way our educational messages have been perceived and interpreted. The survey was composed of 14 items with multiple answer possibilities [6],(annex 1). The options usually offered to respondents are free text, open responses. Eighty students answered our survey from the 218 who were present at the evaluation exam (36.7% of the students respectively). The respondents belonged to the following university specializations: economics, law, public administration, political studies and security studies, and engineering. Due to the fact that the answers were anonymously given, we cannot identify the number or the percent respectively of the students from each specialization.

The curriculum for the first year of pedagogy is composed of two parts: (1) Introduction to pedagogy, with 5 courses:

Pedagogy – educational science; Education in contemporary society (forms of education, education functions, new styles of education); Educability; Dimensions of education (intellectual education, moral education, aesthetical education, physical education, professional education, technological education, sexual education); The educational system in Romania. (2) Curriculum theory and methodology, with 3 courses: the curriculum concept and its derivatives; the goals of education; the content of education.

## 5. FINDINGS AND RESULTS

Pedagogy is a discipline which studies the educational phenomenon in its infinite sides on every educational level and in every type of school for each age level and with individual characteristics reflected in no less distinct personalities of the teachers' categories. Furthermore, we present students answers following the required topics from the survey.

### a. The themes utility in the curriculum

43.75% of the students, in proportion, appreciated as useful themes those course about education especially the forms of education (formal, non formal and informational), 36.25% the dimensions of the education, 37.5% educability or the psychological development factors (heredity, environment and education), as well as the attitudes towards the education (optimism, scepticism and pedagogical realism). Likewise, the themes regarding the curriculum received appreciation, moreover the curricular documents: educational plan – model, educational curriculum, teaching manual and other auxiliaries, in proportion of 31.25% from the respondents. Sporadically for an interval from 1 to 14 all the themes proposed in the course were mentioned as well as the seminary applications.

At the opposite pole, the themes the students referred to as being boring were the predominantly theoretical courses, i.e., those about the epistemological status of pedagogy as well as the themes about the theory of the curriculum (definitions, historical evolution of the concept, its contemporary acknowledgements) – a set of courses and facts which is sustained through complex language, not easily accessible, being bookish to some extent. 34% of the surveyed students, in proportion, declared that there was not any theme which bored them.

### b. Proposition of new debate subjects

On the third item, concerning themes proposed by the students to improve the syllabus, less than half of the students number did not offer propositions of themes (42.5%), some of the students mistook the pedagogical thematic with the educational psychological thematic, a part of them expressed their wish to have a larger number of hours allocated to the already existing themes, and for the debates regarding the themes; themes which anticipate the subject matter were proposed or which are studied during the following years (pedagogical methodology, evaluation, specialty pedagogy, pupil classroom management/conflict administration and violence prevention), but also themes which are not in the curriculum of the psycho-pedagogical study program for initial training: history of the pedagogy, compared pedagogy, and inclusive pedagogy. Likewise, some students wished there was an approach to themes related to a greater extent to their specializations: relations between politics, the economy and education, judicial pedagogy, and educational policy. The most interesting proposition had in view the realization of some educational projects in schools.

### c. Acknowledgements regarding: clarity, effectiveness, difficulty and information finality

The request for the fourth item is distributed on 4 sub-requests to which we had attributed three scales of appreciation: yes/no/partially. Being a closed item, the surveyed students appreciated that the main objectives and ideas of the course/seminar were clearly presented in a proportion of 88.71% and that only 10% declared that the ideas presented at the course/seminar were partially clear to them. The second item received a major positive appreciation also regarding the allocated time effectiveness: 83.75% from the respondents, and 13.75% expressed their position as „partially efficient”. The third item triggered the highest interest for the professors, that is, the degree in which the hard aspects were clarified along the pedagogical activity development. The situation of this item presents itself like this: 62.75% from the students declared positive, while 31.25% from the students ticked the “partial” position. Four students ticked negatively, that is 5% from the respondents. The most pertinent explanation we appreciate is the fact that among these students are the ones who frequently participate at the courses and seminars. On the fourth item, 62 from the surveyed students appreciated that the objectives proposed at the beginning of any course/seminar were met, and 17 considered that the objectives proposed at the beginning of any course/seminar were only partially met by the professors together with the students. We state that from all the students there was only one who hasn't expressed his opinion regarding this item.

### d. Comments regarding: relevance, novelty, pragmatism, and scientific accuracy

On the next question, each student had the liberty to make a short comment regarding the information obtained at the pedagogical courses and seminars where they frequently participated. To facilitate for them the structure of the comments we offered a few tips: relevance, novelty, pragmatic character, and scientific accuracy. Depending on the “added value” that every student appreciates having received following the participation at these courses and seminars, they positioned in a certain order the offered tips. The students considered that the information with psycho-pedagogical character was relevant not only for creating a general culture, but as well for creating the specialized culture required. From the offered tips, the students appreciated in proportion of 62.5% this information as being useful, 50% from them judged them as being new in their intellectual and emotional landscape. The degree of novelty has not actually consisted in the uniqueness of the information, as explained some of the respondents, but rather in the manner in which they have viewed this information, from other perspectives, with other “cognitive lenses”. Twenty-five percent of the students considered that the information obtained at the pedagogical courses and seminars have practical character in the sense that they will serve them in different life situations. Of course, the fact that most of them wished for a bigger practical impact in the teaching act as such which will occur in the third year of the pedagogical module.

### e. The degree of opinion expression

Item number 6 asked the surveyed students to comment if they felt valued during the semester, if they had the possibility to express their opinions. A categorical “yes”, a dominant we observed at a number of 43 students and depending on their personality we came across different comments.

The majority of students categorically replied that they could express their opinions both at the seminar and even more, that they were permanently encouraged to do this, to produce questions, to build arguments. In some cases, students stated that they are allowed to express their opinions only in this study program and from this reason they feel valued.

Other respondents viewed in the possibility of expressing their own opinions a way of correcting the mistakes, of strengthening the correct answers, of enlarging their perspective through different associations, of auto evaluation. Yet, some students considered that they could not express themselves because of those who monopolized the discussions.

#### **f. On-the-way evaluation: homework**

The next question approached a segment less known at the university level: homework. In the first year (when these teenagers are not yet 20 years old, the school experiences from the pre-university education are still familiar to them. The contact with another teaching system, with other teaching requests and especially with sporadically evaluations, sometimes only final, in the session – constitutes for the majority of them a deep modification of their perceptions. The common school rhythms are now abruptly broken and the teenagers are fighting with a freedom which they do not understand and which therefore they do not benefit of accordingly.

Traditional evaluations of standardized type are insufficient for establishing a direct relationship between the teaching quality and the students' school results. The performances observed through these evaluation forms are influenced by more factors including the previous acquisitions of the pupils, their abilities, the quality of the previously received education, by the social and economical level. Such a type of evaluation does not allow the isolation of influences from other educational environments, non-formal or informal about the pupils' school performances, that "added-value" that is which every pupil carries with him. From this reason we considered that a formational evaluation is absolutely necessary during the semester. Students positively received our offer to realize a number of three themes for home who weighed a great deal at the final evaluation.

The teaching – learning – evaluation strategy problem centred on the student is still critically understood and unaccepted, in fact, by the professors in the university system. Since the extremes have not given any results in any other field, this focus on the student must not be strengthened either. The guidance must be the measure to be applied for all.

The students received a protocol of carrying out the pedagogical activities at the beginning of the semester as well as the course and seminar thematic, their schedule and the evaluation procedure. Homework represented a thorough study of the taught matter rather than its extension. For this reason, the majority of students appreciated them as bearing a medium degree of difficulty. The responsibility of homework situated themselves at the level of comprehension, of the application, analysis, and synthesis, according to the behavioural classes from B. Bloom's taxonomy.

#### **g. The impact of homework in acquiring knowledge**

By the seventh question we also proposed some tips for perceiving the meaning that these themes had on the students: (a) request clarity formulation; (b) difficulty degree; (c) time allocated to resolution; (d) the utility for understanding the

matter; (e) the meaning of homework in evaluation. They answered fragmentarily, according to the way each of them felt the impact of the homework, choosing the most significant variant for them, according to the data below:

(a) request clarity formulation- 62.5%

(b) difficulty degree - medium: 52.5%; high: 5%; low: 13.75%

(c) time allocated to resolution; - medium: 40%; long: 7%; short: 10%

(d) the utility for understanding the matter; clarification: 43.75%; settlement: 10%; assimilation: 3.75%

(e) meaning of homework in major evaluation large: 25%; medium: 5%

#### **h. Qualification of homework in importance within the final score**

In so far as the measures are concerned which the students gave homework for their importance in the final score, these were in high proportion (80%) positive, of the following type: upright, objective, advantageous, correct, motivational, well-founded. 7 students from the chosen, (8.75%) that is have not answered this request and the rest appreciated as having a reasonable, acceptable importance, (11.25%) in the final score.

During the semester the themes were evaluated with the following measures: very good = 1 point; good = 0.75 points; satisfactory = 0.5 points; insufficient = 0 points. We preferred this expression of the value of the homework because it also allowed a qualitative approach of the created product, followed by explanations, completions, short comments not just a punctual feedback.

#### **i. Other arguments**

A few students offered methodical answers, or systematic answers at the six requested argumentations: (1) course presence, motivation to actively participation, or questions rising; (2) the quality of the course/seminar; (3) the availability of teaching staff to respond the needs/interests of the students; (4) orientation towards real life and professional practice in the field of the course/seminar; (5) your recent level of knowledge in the field of the course /seminar; (6) the degree of involvement of the professor in self-training and development.

The majority of respondents offered truncated answers, most of the times only one statement is proven, and at random one or two from the 6 requests. The explanation? Haste; difficulty in focusing; lack of reflexive exercise; lack of interest; impression of uselessness. It is hard to establish a diagnosis.

The first statement requires an argumentation regarding the students' option for this course. The dominant answers were centred on the following arguments: curiosity; enthusiasm of the teachers; well-structured information; the problems raised in the course/seminar – real, recent, well-founded in society; personal and professional interest. We selected several answers:

- I participated at the course every time I had the possibility, because being a teacher seems to me a great responsibility, and besides all this the participation in courses was very enjoyable; the involvement in the courses is owned to the personal interest towards pedagogy;

- I came to the course by curiosity, and the seminar caught more my attention;

- I participated more in seminars because the schedule from the university (specialization) did not allow me to come in time for the courses and I am sorry for that;

- the presence and involvement in the course/seminar is important both for understanding and memorizing the subject matter for the exam but also for the future, as a teacher;

The references about the quality of the course/seminar prove positive value being conjugated with the ideas structure, logical and methodical speech, with power point presentations as well as with the present approached thematic.

There were frequently stated ideas regarding the communicative and emotional availability of the teachers who answered to the questions asked by the students both to the conceptual ones as well as to those related to connected problems. There are also reproaches regarding the high level of complexity of some terms, a language which is not accessible, especially at the course, without immediate practical representations but partially compensated through seminar activities.

The self- evaluation of the level of knowledge in the field of pedagogy answered our expectations: initial level, of apprentice, with openness to new acquisitions. This level was reached, most of the respondents' state, thanks to multiple offered examples, to multiple problem perspectives proposed for dialogue.

The last requested argumentation to this item met, also, with the students' approval. What caught our attention was the fact that they appreciated our constant feed-back request during the performed activities. Likewise, the students appreciated the fact that we wished to know them, to see how they think, and how we can improve the way of how they perceive the world surrounding them.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

Every one of our students started in life with a variety of qualities and contributes to life diversity. The individual differences are the resources which assure prosperity to our university and make the teachers wealthier in their teaching techniques and create a study environment suitable for a

diversity of educational needs [2]. Thus, we explain the differences between the respondents' opinions.

Our case – study proves that the students need more occasions like this one where they have the possibility to express their opinion regarding the quality of courses and seminars at which they take part. The lack of practice and trust in such exercises push us to declare that we owe to cultivate the trust in the teachers - students' relations so that we can balance our exigencies and to adapt intellectually and emotionally to their educational needs.

Approaching students' implication in the training activities proposed in pedagogy we constantly observe in a great measure a positive and encouraging feedback. Apart from outlining an alarming dimension towards the superficial treatment of the preparation for the pedagogical career, from some respondents, the data of the research reveals the high proportion of those who appreciate the value of the effort of the teaching staff and the quality of the training activities. We can conclude with the appreciation that we need the cultivation of a transparency climate in the university environment, of an integrity climate in the relations with the students, of trust, respect and responsibility.

## REFERENCES

1. Cuceș, C., Education – love, enlightenment, perfection, pp. 25-27, Polirom, Iași, România, (2008).
2. Faber, A. și Mazlish, E., How to talk so kids will listen & how to listen so kids will talk, pp. 19-46 , Collins Living, New York, S.U.A. (2004).
3. Iucu, R. B., Teaching staff training. Systems, politics, strategies, pp. 16-24, Humanitas Educational Publishing House, Bucharest, România (2007).
4. Pânișoară, I. O., The successful teacher – 59 practical pedagogy principles, pp. 19-23, Polirom, Iași, România, (2009).
5. Roibu, M., Empathy in education. Modern pedagogical necessities. A guide for the teaching staff from the pre – university education, pp. 21, C New School Collection, Bucharest, România, (2008).
6. Rugg, G&Petre, M, A gentle guide to Research Methods, pp. 141-152, Open University Press, USA, (2007).

Dear students, we are interested to see to what degree the curriculum for the pedagogical discipline meets your expectations for a potential pedagogical career. We invite you to take attitude and be positively critical towards the quality of the pedagogical course and seminar that you frequently participated at during this semester and towards the performance of your teachers in this discipline. We ask you to answer all the questions. Your answers are confidential. There are no good answers or wrong answers to these questions. We wish to know how you feel and what you think of the situations described below.

1. Enumerate at least 3 of the themes presented at the courses/seminars which you have found more useful.
2. Enumerate at least 3 of the themes presented at the courses/seminars which you have thought the most boring/tiring?
3. Propose at least 3 themes that you would like to discuss with us during the course/seminar and which were not among the thematic of the psycho pedagogical studies program from this semester.
4. Appreciate by ticking the right answer if:
  - the objectives and main ideas of the course/seminar were clearly presented to you  
Yes. No. Partially.
  - time allocated was efficiently used  
Yes. No. Partially.
  - the difficult aspects were clarified  
Yes. No. Partially.
  - the proposed objectives in the course/seminar have been met  
Yes. No. Partially.
5. Present a few comments about the content of the teaching at the course/seminar after the following tips: relevance for the students, novelty, practical character, and scientific accuracy, utility.
6. Describe, in some words, if you could express your opinions in the courses and seminars.

7. Comment in a few lines homework, after the following tips: clarity of formulation requests, degree of difficulty, time allocated for their resolution, their utility for understanding the matter; the significance of the homework under evaluation.

8. Qualify the importance of the homework to the final score.

9. Support your opinion by arguments about:

- presence at the course, motivation for active participation, motivation for problem rise;
- quality of the course/seminar;
- the availability of the teaching staff to respond the needs /interests of the students;
- orientation towards real life and professional practice in the course/seminar;
- your present knowledge level in the field of the course/seminar;
- the degree of personal involvement in self formation and development of the teacher;

10. Quantify from a range 1 to 5 (1 very little... 5 very much), how caught you were by the working method that your teacher employed in course /seminar.

course					seminar				
1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

11. If your teacher from the course/seminar had an attitude like:

- a. flexible            Yes. No. Partially
- b. tolerant            Yes. No. Partially
- c. cooperation      Yes. No. Partially

12. Present in some lines your general impression of the course/seminar.

13. Qualify your degree of satisfaction towards the pedagogical course/seminar

14. To what degree you consider that this course/seminar is useful for your professional development?