

TRAINING OF TEACHERS: EFFICIENCY AND PERSPECTIVES*Hussam Samara Wattad, Maia ȘEVCIUC**Universitatea de Stat din Moldova*

Nowadays we understand better than anytime that we live in a changing world. In order to cope with future, educational and professional training systems, generally, and teacher training, in particular, must be adapted in order to offer a large amount of knowledge and to develop competencies that are necessary in real life. Specialists in education must understand different complex situations which may change unpredictably. In this context, acquisition of knowledge and competencies training to future teachers must be accompanied by accepting own responsibility in society and broadening the horizons.

Keywords: *teacher, teachers training, initial training of teachers.*

FORMAREA CADRELOR DIDACTICE: EFICIENȚĂ ȘI PERSPECTIVE

Astăzi înțelegem mai bine ca oricând că trăim într-o lume în continuă schimbare. Pentru confruntarea cu viitorul, sistemele de învățământ și de formare profesională, în general, cel de formare a cadrelor didactice, în particular, trebuie să fie adaptate pentru a oferi o bază largă de cunoștințe și pentru a dezvolta competențe necesare vieții active.

Specialiștii în educație sunt solicitați să înțeleagă situațiile complexe care se pot schimba în mod imprevizibil. În acest context, achiziția de cunoștințe și formarea de competențe la viitoarele cadre didactice trebuie să meargă în pas cu lărgirea orizontului și cu acceptarea propriei responsabilități în societate.

Cuvinte-cheie: *cadre didactice, formarea cadrelor didactice, formarea inițială a cadrelor didactice.*

The teacher training apparatus focuses on preparing the teaching novice in the disciplinary, didactic, and pedagogical realms. Teacher training is defined, *inter alia*, as an occupational socialization mechanism, in which new workers learn the norms and values of the profession [32]. The training process is a crucial component in the shaping of the teacher’s professional identity [13]. Nearly no one would dispute that wise teacher training is a condition for the betterment of the school educational system [27], and that it is a most significant factor in teaching quality and the level of the teachers [25].

A full spectrum of positions exist regarding the question of “where” in connection with the student of education – in seminaries, training institutions, academic frameworks etc. Nevertheless, it is the consensus among those involved in teacher training that there is a need for quality professional experience frameworks, and, indeed, in various countries there is a broad array of such frameworks.

Nevertheless, the discussions about professional experience in the training of teachers (ITE) always center around a variety of theoretical, political, and/or practical questions, which, in the end, have no clear answers.

Over the years, the varieties of teacher training courses have undergone changes and variations, both in order to adapt them to changing circumstances, and due to dissatisfaction with achievement [3]. As a result of evaluation tests conducted in recent years, there have been changes in emphases and methods.

Training for teaching as a profession combines many diverse tracks of study together with teaching experience, and involved in the process are universities, colleges, teaching seminaries, and schools. By nature of the matter, the curriculum of each teacher training institution is unique, as it is the product of an array of influences whose source is in the educational vision of each institution, bureaucratic requirements whose source is in the governmental bodies responsible for the educational system, attributes of the training faculty, attributes of those studying in the training program, and the social and cultural framework in which the training facility operates [11]. The encounter among the institutions involved in such training can be productive, and hold the potential for augmenting teacher training, especially homeroom teachers. In Israel, as in many countries throughout the world, teacher training is a precondition for receipt of a teaching license [14].

The teacher training programs are meant, on the one hand, to develop the novice’s abilities and ensure a minimal skill level for functioning as a teacher, and, on the other hand, to serve as a tool for screening the candidates through acceptance standards and requirements.

Over the years, there have been reforms of the teacher training study tracks. The most obvious change has been a growing trend of academization of teacher training programs, and the requirement to have an academic degree. This process, in the main, has worked to augment the professionalization of the profession. This

stems from a need for professionalization of the teacher on an academic basis, the assimilation of scientific disciplines, and the raising of the educator's self-image and public image. Indeed, considering the low esteem in which the teaching profession is held, this trend of academization can serve to redefine the image of the teacher, in her own eyes, as well as in the eyes of others [16, 27].

In fact, Shulman [33] is of the opinion that teacher training will remain irrelevant without professional training institutionalized in institutions of higher education, with strict standards of the types of knowledge required of teachers, and the meeting of uniform, extremely rigorous standards of knowledge and teaching skills.

Studies of educational training programs have shown that such programs have an important influence, first and foremost, on the improvement of the quality of school teachers as a means of promoting achievement in the schools as measured through standard assessments. In an international study of special education teacher training, it was found that adapted content can equip the teachers with insights and tools for special education [30]. Moreover, suitable training influences the endurance of teachers. The odds that beginning teachers with no training will leave the teaching profession are four times greater than the chances of teachers who underwent training [26].

Teacher training programs are currently numerous and diverse. This diversity is expressed in acceptance standards, the manner of practical experience, the duration and location of training, and the methods and study content employed [10]. The programs have changed and developed over the years, mainly in light of the reforms and changes in requirements every few years in the educational systems. The role of the teacher, in the age of computers and the modern culture of knowledge, is also undergoing changes in order to fit the changing needs [10]. Challenges are also being presented to the training institutions by the needs of a global reality with high intercultural mobility [31].

Hargreaves [18] defines the current era as post-professional, or postmodern. What characterizes it is a dissonance between augmented standardization processes that harm teacher autonomy, on the one hand, and a demand for creativity, openness, emotional intelligence, and the adoption of innovative teaching methods, on the other. Teachers must adjust to changes occurring among the students and to changes in teaching patterns, while adapting to more personal education [22].

As the case may be, in order to properly acquire education as a profession, one must undergo suitable training. The discussion below will focus on this topic.

Many definitions of the concept "profession" appear in the theoretical literature. It is said to be based on the imparting and acquisition of knowledge, and on extended training; a profession defines professional standards; it allows for the autonomy of the individual professional and for the activity of the professional group; a profession has an orientation toward the client or service, and develops a corresponding sense of accountability and commitment; a profession further wins official recognition from various bodies, and develops professional codes of ethics [24].

There exists a consensus that professionalization is a necessary precondition for improvement of the quality of education. This is accepted by policy makers, educational systems, and the community of teachers [14].

Teaching as a profession is a great challenge. The complexity of the knowledge and skills required by it demands the integration of many kinds of knowledge alongside mastery of skills and proficiencies. In the age of knowledge, this is all the more true [23]. Teachers, like other professionals, are involved in locating knowledge that will assist them in solving dilemmas connected with normative and ethical questions that arise out of their very use of professional knowledge [34].

In the past, the academic literature has suggested a special approach addressing the unique complexity of the professional knowledge of teachers, classifying such knowledge in a distinct category called the "epistemology of practice", or "wisdom of practice" [34, 9, 28]. This approach sought for this category a place of distinction alongside the three standard epistemologies: positivist, interpretive, and critical [29]. The object of this epistemology is mainly the integration of theory and practice, which represents an urgent challenge also for the training apparatus. This matter is consistent with the now classic ideas of Dewey [15] regarding the identification and analysis of practical and theoretical principles.

The proliferation of standards, and the standardization of education licensing in many countries, creates a dynamic contrary to the approaches promoting teaching to the level of a profession, as the training institutions seek to enable their graduates to succeed in licensing exams, and thus dedicate a significant proportion of

training to this purpose. The prevalent trend in teacher training is, in fact, to move from processes of “education and teaching” to “practice” in performance of skills [27]. In some of the training programs in the most prestigious institutions in the United States, it is stated explicitly that the training program prepares the students for passing the state licensing exams. In critiques of the training programs, and in the conclusions of research scholars and education authorities, a call is rising to move away from this technical and superficial approach, and demands are being made to base the methods of training also on academic knowledge, to impart the trainee a conceptual approach and a basis for perspective [12, 19, 8]. Levine [21] argues that teaching is indeed perceived as a profession that should be trained for with high-quality training that can meet the competition of all the alternative tracks and systems that are attracting more and more candidates, and that the academic institutions and universities must reorganize and dedicate resources and quality that currently exist only in a few programs that have been proven effective.

Teacher Training Programs and Their Adaptation to Teacher Development

In the UNESCO report [31] a number of attributes were put forward regarding the professional development of teachers. These included knowledge, skills, positions, and values that teachers must begin to develop already during the initial stages of training, while continuing to improve during their actual employment as teachers, until finally reaching a level of expert teacher. These attributes can be enumerated as follows: knowledge in general pedagogy; knowledge of the field of disciplinary content; knowledge of pedagogical content; knowledge of context that relates to the student’s family background; a repertoire of metaphors that enable the bridging of theory and practice; knowledge in respect to external assessment of learning; knowledge of strategies, techniques, and tools that create and preserve learning environments and learning communities that enable effective learning; knowledge, strategies, and positions required for working with children in multi-cultural communities and immigrant-absorbing communities, which are characterized by great diversity of cultural, social, and language background; knowledge and positions that support social and political justice, as social realities turn the teachers into crucial social agents, and there are countries in which they are the main agents of social change; knowledge and skills enabling the implementation of technology in curricula, and in routine classroom work.

Initial Training

Initial Training and On-the-Job Training

Teacher training in Israel, as in the world at large, is usually based on two central components: initial, pre-service training, and later in-service training. Results of studies conducted over the years, reflecting problems and failures in education, have introduced to critical discourse questions regarding both pre-service training, and the concept of “professional development” of working teachers. The post-modern and technological era, with its innovations in computers and access to knowledge, have presented new challenges to teacher training institutions [10]. Research of teacher training and educational systems has focused in recent years on the development and design of teacher training programs based on a theoretical, academic perspective, involving concepts such as constructivist learning, critical pedagogy, multiculturalism, development of innovative learning environments, as well as approaches that emphasize the need for adapting the training system to needs in the field, learning communities, and the perception of teaching roles and teacher training in terms of quality and accountability. Various – even conflicting – approaches exist in respect to training programs, but more and more there is agreement that initial training is not sufficient. This reflects an understanding that teaching is not a skill or capability that can be fully acquired in a pre-service training institution. It is, rather, a complex of teaching knowledge, skills, positions, and perceptions that are acquired mainly on the job subsequent to initial training and accumulation of experience. These abilities are developed and improved over the years, through conscious and unconscious processing and drawing of conclusions, in the individual level and on the systemic, conceptual, and academic levels. On this backdrop, different directions have developed, and, inter alia, there has been a growing institutionalization of training programs at the stage of entry into the workforce, with the object of assisting new teachers in their initial stages of introduction into the system as teachers, and reducing teacher dropout levels at this stage [5].

What is not up for debate in the academic and practical discussion is the matter of continuity, and the criticality of continued development and study for teaching novices after their initial training. The assumption in principle is that a connection must be maintained between the initial training and the professional development of the teacher over his entire life [6]. Assimilation of the continuity approach is crucial already directly following the initial training period [17].

Initial Teacher Training and its Assessment

Teacher training is based on formal and informal learning processes in various learning environments that sometimes are closely connected, and sometimes not. There exists a problem of disconnection of content, between theory and practice, during training. Matters are worse after training, when the teacher is confronted with the classroom reality.

Internship During Training

Discussions of professional experience in initial teacher education (ITE) continually revolve around a variety of theoretical, political, and/or practical questions that have no clear answers. Indeed, the scholarly literature makes much of discussions of teacher training and the process of the teacher's entry in education employment. In order to make it through the first year on the job, and be absorbed by the system, starting teachers need assistance and professional support as part of the transition to professional independence. In the academic literature, great importance is attached to the support of teachers in their first year of teaching. The year of internship is accompanied by a mentorship process, whose purpose is to support interns and promote their learning process. Success in this year is a condition for receipt of a teaching license [4]. Accompaniment by mentors during the year of internship can contribute to the interns absorption into the school and class. The mentoring teachers assist the interns in dealing with professional socialization difficulties at the stage of entry into teaching work.

The academic literature has dubbed the entry stage as the "survival stage". This stage is characterized by much involvement with "myself as a teacher" and the teacher's needs. Later on, after teachers acquire a certain mastery of the circle of the "I", they become capable of focusing on the "student" and his or her needs, and on relations of teacher-student-learning environment.

Berliner [7] has described the teacher at the stage of entry into the classroom as a novice teacher. The need to deal with teaching difficulties as they set out on their way causes beginning teachers to be focused on themselves, and to invest most of their energies into developing survival mechanisms. Like other novices, beginning teachers also usually have a one-dimensional, inflexible vision that means that principle for performance of tasks must be clear to them and must correspond to the rules they have learned. Since they are busy with understanding and deciphering the complexity of the school in which teach, in general, and of their class in particular, they need to wait in order to develop the capability of seeing simultaneously the class, and the individuals in it. Thus, they tend not to be sensitive to the need for different solutions to match circumstances and context, and their judgment in forming orders of priority does not necessarily always match the reality. Therefore, actions that are routine for experienced teachers rob them of much time and energies. Moreover, unfamiliar circumstances are likely to cause them to err, and thus they focus on themselves and their own performance, while feeling a sense of commitment to meeting the requirements of the school's cultural codes. Beginning teachers display a great sensitivity to the way they are perceived by the students, parents, their colleagues, their superiors, and administrators; they are biased toward social acceptability, and focus much on efforts at building a personal and professional image that will be acceptable to all.

The first year of teaching is mainly described by the professional literature as a reality shock, as a year fraught with tension, in which the beginning teachers deal with building their self-identity and professional identity, and sometimes feel a gap between expectations and ideals, theories they have learned and the everyday reality. They are involved in the acquisition of professional experience in the "real world", and the complexity that characterizes teaching sometimes arouses feelings of uncertainty, impotence, doubts, questions, and dilemmas, that weaken their self-esteem.

The year of internship in the framework of teacher training, which combines built-in support and the presentation of challenges, makes the process of entering the teaching profession easier, assists in the absorption of new teachers, and in their integration in the school culture. A deep familiarity between mentors and interns, and the mentors' awareness of the needs, expectations, and perceptions, of the interns, represent a precondition for proper planning of the guidance program. Moreover, studies show that teacher participation in guidance during absorption and mentoring also lowers the pace of erosion and reduces the rate at which teachers leave the field. Meeting the requirements of the year of internship is a necessary condition for acceptance to employment in the educational system in some countries throughout the world, while in Israel it is even a condition for receipt of a teaching license [4]. The teacher training system, and the system for absorbing teachers at work, work together in running the internship program in Israel. The internship program includes three aspects: an

internship workshop, guidance by a mentor who accompanies the interns during the year of internship, and a component of formative and summary assessment regarding the interns' performance. The internship workshop takes place in an institute for the training of education workers, and its goal is to facilitate a dialogue of peers, and to provide emotional and professional support for the intern teachers. The process of guidance and accompaniment of the intern is carried out by a mentor teacher, with experience of at least four years, of which at least two must be in teaching the grade that the intern teaches. The mentor teacher is also a partner, together with the school principal and the Education Ministry supervisor, in the element of formative and summary assessment [4].

In the framework of teaching studies, the institutions are obligated to include content regarding ethical-moral aspects of the educator's work; teacher-student relations; cognitive development of children and adolescents; written and spoken discourse in teaching-learning procedures; theories and approaches to teaching and learning; integration of information and communications technology [10]. Planning, organization, management and assessment of the learning; teaching-learning processes for students with different needs and from a different socio-cultural background; culture and national heritage studies; completion of courses in the subjects: language of teaching, English studies, and computer literacy, at an exemption level.

It is expected that in a time of technological changes, the need of update and the need of continuous training of teachers will be increasing [1, 2]. Thus, no matter how good the theoretical preparation would be, the selection and use of relevant knowledge in solving new situations will appeal to a range of intellectual skills and higher order learning skills, to a higher order mental structures, because of wider requirements of adaptation and mobility.

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