

ERD 2016: Education, Reflection, Development, Fourth Edition

Markers Regarding the Organization and Conduct of the Observational Teaching Practice

Dana Jucan^{a*}

* Corresponding author: Dana Jucan, orian_dana@yahoo.com

^a Faculty of Psychology and Sciences of Education, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

Abstract

<http://dx.doi.org/10.15405/epsbs.2016.12.34>

Teaching practice is a discipline that is part of the mandatory, core disciplines. During the teaching practice, the students conduct activities of assisting and teaching in preschool and schools. Their activity is coordinated by the teaching practice coordinator, together with the mentor – the preschool teacher or the primary school teacher. The first stage of the practice consists of the assimilation by the students of the fundamental theoretical elements and, also, their familiarization with the primary instruments necessary to perform the teaching practice. Observational practice aims for the familiarization of the students with the specific of the didactic activities in preschools and schools. The teaching practice pursues the formation and development of practical competencies for didactic design, as well as the practice and execution of endeavors specific to the teaching – learning – evaluation processes. Throughout the course of the observational teaching practice performed in schools, the students will realize direct observations of the teaching activity, they will analyze and assess the observed lessons, they will assemble a teaching practice portfolio, and will undergo an oral examination for this discipline. The present study exhibits the opinions of students after finishing their teaching practice.

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Keywords: Teaching practice; observational teaching practice; students; direct observations; teaching practice portfolio.

1. Introduction

Teaching practice is a discipline that is part of the mandatory, core disciplines, consisting of the activity undertaken by the students under the guidance of the teaching practice mentor and of the teaching practice coordinator, designed to verify the applicability of the theoretical knowledge acquired by the students during the instruction program.

The curriculum for the Pedagogy of Primary and Preschool Education specialization includes, at the present time, the discipline of teaching practice during the second year of study, namely in the third semester in the form of observational teaching practice in preschool, at all levels, and in the fourth semester in the form of observational teaching practice in school, from the preparatory grade through the 4th grade. Furthermore, during the third year of study, the discipline teaching practice takes place during the fifth semester in preschools, at all levels, and during the sixth semester in schools, encompassing the preparatory grade through the 4th grade.

Commencing with the 2016-2017 academic year, teaching practice will be a mandatory, core discipline, as early as the first year of study.

The teaching practice for the students in the Pedagogy of Primary and Preschool Education specialization encompasses the following elements (Jucan, & Chiş, 2013):

- The research element refers to the documentation and planning of the activities. This component is realized by the teaching practice coordinator, in cooperation with the students.
- The didactic component consists of the observational practice and teaching practice (including the evaluation and auto-evaluation). This component is realized by the students, the practice coordinator, and the mentor.
- The complementary component is comprised of the conducting of differentiated activities, extracurricular activities, the counselling of students with special educational needs, but also of educational management activities.

The students of the Pedagogy of Primary and Preschool Education specialization undergo several stages in the realization of the teaching practice. There is a preliminary stage to the teaching practice, through which the assimilation by the students of fundamental theoretical elements is assured, as well as their familiarization with the main instruments necessary to the realization of the teaching practice proper. During the stage dedicated to the observational practice, the purpose lies with the familiarization of the students with the specifics of the teaching activities in preschool and school. The sequence dedicated to the teaching practice aims at forming and developing the practical competencies of didactic design, and at the conducting and exercise of the endeavors specific to the processes of teaching – learning – didactic evaluation (Jucan, & Chiş, 2013).

2. Observational teaching practice in primary school

Our considerations refer to the modality of organization and conduct of the observational teaching practice, undertaken during the fourth semester, in primary schools, at all the grades. The activities undertaken by the students within this context are as follows (Jucan, & Chiş, 2013):

- The direct observation of the teaching activity, making use of observation sheets. The didactic activity is accomplished by the teaching practice mentor, while the students observe and take notes.
- The analysis and evaluation of the activities/lessons observed, making use of the analysis sheets for the activities/lessons. The analysis and assessment of the activities observed is done by the mentor, together with the students.

- The assembly of a practice portfolio. Following the observations and assessments completed, the students will realize specific materials, exhibited in a personal portfolio.
- The evaluation of the teaching practice portfolio.

In what concerns the core competencies of the students for this discipline, we mention the fact that they must be familiar with the specifics of the lessons in primary school, based on the level and age of the pupils (Bocoş, J., Jucan, D., 2007, 2008). Furthermore, the students will know how to create a daily, and a weekly schedule, in accordance with the psycho-pedagogical requirements of its realization. The students study and analyze the planning and design documents specific to primary education, they know all the types and categories of lessons particular to primary education, as well as all the stages specific to each of these. Furthermore, the students also know the psycho-physical and socio-emotional particularities of the young pupils. The students familiarize themselves with the main educational documents (curricular documents or legislative documents), as well as their mode of employ within the didactic design activity, they explain and simulate the modality of design, of organization, and of conduct of the different lesson types, for different disciplines (Glava, A., Glava, C., 2002). The students identify the different roles that the teaching staff has within the educational institution, and implicitly within the classroom, as well as within the school community. The students develop a project for an optional discipline and they actively participate in the different educational activities organized in the school and outside of it, while also manifesting interest towards the activities they undertake themselves in school and with the pupils (Păun, E., Ezechil, L., Metode și tehnici de coaching folosite pe perioada practicii pedagogice, suport de curs, modulul 3, Proiect POSDRU).

Regarding the specific competencies of the students of the Pedagogy of Primary and Preschool Education specialization, these cover the familiarization of the students with the scientific content of the disciplines that are part of the primary school curriculum, as well as the familiarization with the competencies aimed at by the curriculum (Florea, N. V. 2014). Furthermore, the students know the system of professional competencies specific to the profession of primary school teacher. The students develop their ability for the observation (both general and focused) of the didactic activities of the mentor, of the extracurricular activities, but also of the pupils' behavior; they solve some situations specific to class management (Iucu, R. B. 2005). Also important is the development, in students, of empathy, as a cornerstone of efficient communication. The development of the students' communication skills is also in discussion, within their relationship with their mentor, colleagues and the pupils.

The contents dealt with by the students during their observational practice relate, primarily, to the knowledge of the stages of curricular integration. Furthermore, the students will realize the presentation of the curricula specific to the primary education. The students will learn the methods of realizing yearly plans and unit plans for the grade/grades at which they conduct their teaching practice (Păun, E. 1990). The students will know and realize the presentation of the child development profiles for the ages of 6 through 10. The students will know to analyze the design of a didactic activity. Furthermore, the students will conduct a critical analysis of the teaching, learning and evaluation activities undertaken by the mentor in the classroom (Păun, E., Ezechil, L., Metode și tehnici de coaching folosite pe perioada practicii pedagogice, suport de curs, modulul 3, Proiect POSDRU).

3. The assessment of the observational teaching practice in primary schools

Regarding the method used for the evaluation of the students, the assessment is achieved through observations made by the mentor and by the teaching practice coordinator. Furthermore, the students will assemble, during the semester, based on the observations done in class, a teaching practice portfolio, which will include:

- The yearly activity plan for the grade at which the student realizes his teaching practice;
- The semester activity plan for the grade at which the student realizes his teaching practice;
- The design of a curriculum plan for an optional discipline;
- The realization of an analysis of the school based curriculum at the school where the teaching practice takes place;
- The observation sheets for the lessons that the student observed (12 lessons)
- The analysis sheets for the lessons that the student observed (12 lessons)
- The psycho-pedagogical characterization sheets (5 sheets)
- Evaluation test for the pupils (a minimum of 5)
- Other didactic materials relevant to the didactic activity in school.

In order to investigate the manner in which the teaching practice in schools was conducted, we have realized direct observations of the students' activity, we have conducted conversations with the teacher mentors. Moreover, for the correctitude and accuracy of this information, we have deemed it necessary to apply a questionnaire to the students of the second year of the Pedagogy of Primary and Preschool Education specialization, a total of 67 respondents.

We were primarily interested in determining the activities with which the students familiarized themselves during their observational teaching practice, and in the teaching style that they observed in schools. Another aspect aimed at by the questionnaire items refers to the method of realization of the practice portfolio. We were interested in the sources the students used for the assembly of their portfolio and the documents that required the maximum intellectual effort. Furthermore, we endeavored to discover which were the elements of the portfolio that the students managed to develop individually.

Even a summary commentary of the obtained data reflects the fact that out of all the activities undertaken in schools, the students familiarized themselves, during their teaching practice, only with the teaching - learning activity of the mentor. Worrying is the fact that, on the item pertaining to their familiarization, during said observational teaching practice, to didactic activities (the development of a schedule, the teaching-learning activity, the evaluation activity, the selection of a textbook, the development of unit plans, the integrated curriculum approach, the use of various didactic methods, etc.), all the students have answered that the only activity they familiarized themselves with is that of teaching - learning. This aspect leads us to call attention to the fact that, as of yet, the teaching staff is still focused on solely this type of activity, to the detriment of the other, equally important, didactic activities.

We have also analyzed the manner in which the students have answered the item pertaining to the style of teaching that they have observed in school. Unfortunately, we have determined that the primary school teachers are still focused on traditional teaching, by discipline. Over half of the students

questioned (60%) mentioned the fact that they observed a traditional teaching, in the classroom, by disciplines.

For the realization of the teaching practice portfolio, all the students have mentioned that they had enlisted the help of the primary school teacher of the grade at which they realized their teaching practice. Other sources used in the assembly of their portfolio, which the students have stated, are: the internet and the personal experience of each of them.

We note the fact that the documents of the portfolio that required the maximum intellectual effort from the students were the yearly plan and the objectives for the integrated activity. The students stated that the only documents that they were able to realize individually were the observation and analysis sheets.

It is interesting to note that the students have declared that they would have needed a much higher number of teaching practice hours, even though the number of mandatory hours was 56.

4. Conclusions

The formation of the psycho-pedagogical competencies of the students of the Pedagogy of Primary and Preschool Education specialization is achieved through a set of specialized disciplines, theoretical classes, but also through the teaching practice activity, all of these distributed across the three years of the Bachelor level (Chiş, V., 2005).

In terms of the curriculum, we note that, in what concerns the students, the current model meets the needs for their theoretical training and teaching practice, and is compatible with the European systems.

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