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VALUING STUDENT'S LEARNING STYLES
IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF PROFESSIONAL SKILLS

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Abstract

Identifying and understanding the teaching and learning styles is an essential aspect for increasing the educational and professional performance of the teaching staff and implicitly of the students. Awareness of their own teaching style leads teachers to the efficiency of the activity of adapting the didactic strategies to the diversity of pedagogical situations. Also, identifying the predominant learning style of students is a way of highlighting real learning opportunities, an action that helps teachers to better understand their students and to guide them in conscious learning. Within the current article we want to underline the importance of the learning style of college students for the development of professional skills, but also for the personal development. Identifying the predominant learning style of the college students, can help the teacher to outline an overview of group preferences and to select the right strategies to convey knowledge, skills and attitudes in the field of training. We present an example of a situation within the activities corresponding to the subject entitled 'Individualized and differentiated teaching and learning strategies', during which we conducted a small investigation for identifying the learning style of our students. The VARK questionnaire was used for identifying the learning style of college students.

1. Introduction

The process of teaching as well as the learning one is oriented on the educational project of the activity hold in the classroom, which is the result of a continuous reflection and application approach. The educational act, guided by the ability of students to acquire knowledge, skills and cognitive attitudes, will take into account the systematic knowledge of the teaching and learning activity. Through their status, teachers adequately facilitate their student's learning process, designing and implementing learning strategies and strategies focused on what is learned from what is being taught.

To determine the intelligence coefficient of people, experts have developed and applied IQ tests. People have accepted these IQ tests and, for a long time, they have considered it the best way to measure one's intelligence. However, tests cannot predict the educational or professional path of the respondents. The results of the IQ tests have shown that they are not perfect and a plurality of things cannot be captured, they cannot assess the multiple categories of skills that people demonstrate and use. Due to the numerous shortcomings associated with these multiple intelligence tests, Dr. Gardner questioned the supremacy of the IQ test, and suggested that these don't represent a realistic measure of a person's intelligence (Armstrong, 2011, p. 8).

The theory developed by Howard Gardner focuses on the various categories of abilities used by people in different contexts and assumes that intelligence is the ability to solve topical issues or to achieve certain culture-validated products (composing music, poetry, etc.). The author rejects the idea that intelligence is reflected by how people respond to the questions of the tests. The elitist results, the performance in easily rendering some theories, don't emphasize a person's intelligence. Being smart means being able to respond in different ways to a requirement, referring to different types of intelligence.

Gardner highlighted eight types of intelligence: verbal, musical, logical, visual, intelligence of the movement, social, personal, and intelligence of nature, underlining that all types of intelligence are different but equally, each type of intelligence can be explored, amplified and developed (Armstrong, 2011, p. 10).

Identifying and understanding the teaching and learning styles is essential for increasing the educational and professional performance of the teaching staff and implicitly of the students. Awareness of teacher's own teaching style is one of the prerequisites that lead to the efficiency of the adaptation of educational strategies, to the diversity of pedagogical situations. Educational achievements highlighted by professional skills require the selection, combination and appropriate use of knowledge, skills and other acquisitions of values and attitudes to successfully solve a specific category of professional situations that is specific to a particular field of work.

In the Law of National Education no. 1/2011, as amended and supplemented, ANNEX 1 - List of definitions of terms and expressions used in the law (http://edu.ro/), in point 15, there is provided that: "Professional competences are a unitary and dynamic assembly of knowledges and skills. Knowledges are expressed through the following descriptors: knowledge, understanding and use of specific language, explanation and interpretation. Skills are expressed through the following descriptors: application, transfer and problem solving, critical and constructive reflection, creativity and innovation"(Bocos, Răduţ, Taciu, Stan, Chis, & Andronache, 2016, p. 55).

In both active and interactive learning, creative productive, thinking and imaginative capacities are employed, we can turn to mental structures, operator structures and cognitive structures that the student has and which he uses as instruments in supporting a new learning." (Cerghit, 2006, p. 70).

Interactive training is associated with a higher learning style that is achieved through the intense efforts of learners, helping by their own forces to achieve educational goals, involving interactive environments, also active and creative learning environments that enable students to reflect on their own knowledge, to ask, to talk about, to propose, discovering, and so on.

Interactive learning involves learning based on collaboration, communication, creating a confrontation of ideas, opinions, and also creating learning situations centered on the willingness and willingness of preschoolers to cooperate, on their active and direct involvement, on the social interaction of group members. Through active learning we tend to gradually enable preschoolers in becoming able to elaborate individual learning projects, to assume their responsibility, to become aware about them, to apply, assess and improve, monitor, manage and self-regulate learning by gradually acquiring autonomy in the learning and training field (Bocoș, 2013, p. 45).

2. Identifying the predominant student's learning style, focusing on teaching skills

For all students to pass on exams and then to succeed at work, we need to determine the appropriate learning style so we can help them acquire new knowledge through appropriate methods and tools. The basis of this differentiated and individualized learning is to diagnose the traits that differentiate individuals and establish the role of each individual in order to achieve maximum individual performances (Cucoș, 2006).

Also, identifying the predominant learning style of students is a way of highlighting real learning opportunities, an action that helps teachers to better understand the students they work with and to guide them in conscious learning. The interactive-creative learning imply that "Educators are being asked today to continuously promote effective learning. And not just effective learning, but participative, active and creative learning" (Neacșu, 1990, p.12).

The solution for the active involvement of students in learning is determined by the understanding of the preferences for learning and at the same time the style of each student, with positive or negative influences on performance. Students become more responsible, more autonomous, more independent with useful skills and attitudes for the rest of their lives, for school and social success.

In this aspect, within the seminars at the master level, at the discipline Individualized and differentiated teaching and learning strategies, one of the priority goals was to identify the learning style, followed by the task directed towards the pupils of the classes that the college students teach.

3. Specific strategies of learning styles (activities, applications)

Through this study we aimed to highlight the necessity of choosing the strategies for the transmission of information based on the learning styles, which requires a good knowledge of the group of students and the flexibility of the content by the lecturer. Thus, we wanted to identify the students' learning style from

the master and encourage them to use the predominant learning style in acquiring new information. In order to identify student's preferences, they were invited to participate in filling in an electronic questionnaire - VARK.

This analysis incorporates the answers obtained from the centralization of data from the VARK questionnaire. The results of the VARK questionnaire revealed that the group's preferences for learning styles are visual.
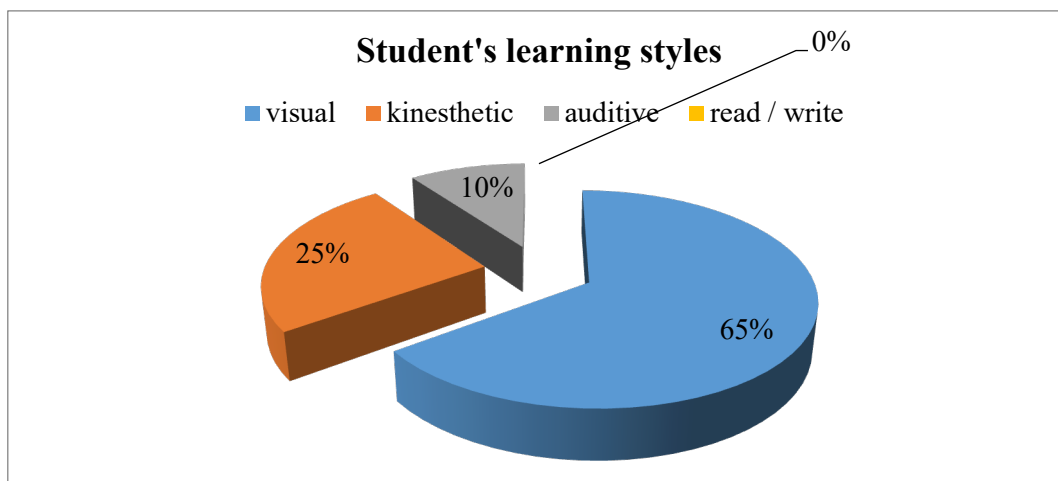
Figure 01. Student's learning styles

The graphically presented data reveals the significant percentage for the visual learning, thus 65% of the 34 enrolled college students obtained 56 points, followed by 25% kinesthetic learning where 20 points were scored, hearing, 10% where they got 14 points, and reading / writing learning 0 points. This underlines that: students prefer the overall picture of something they learn, so they are rather oriented towards a holistic approach rather than a reductionist one in their learning. They are often attracted to the way an object looks. They are interested in colors, shapes, designs and they can place the object in their environment. In order to retrieve the information, visual learning strategies seem very different from other styles, such as highlighting, using different colors, graphics, photos, video tapes, posters, PowerPoint presentations, sketches, symbols, etc.

Identifying the predominant learning style of the college students, highlighted by the results, helped us to outline an overview of group preferences and helped us in selecting the right strategies to convey knowledge, skills and attitudes in the field of training. Visual intelligence refers to learning and thinking in images, paying attention to small details, replacing words with images (Armstrong, 2011, p.79).

Based on the data analysed and specific statistical processing, we presented a series of data on the relationship between student's learning styles identified by applying the VAK questionnaire. These results were valorised by the trainer in the college students' educational activities. At the end of the semester, students were evaluated, based on the predominant style of completing the questionnaire, an evaluation of more than 50% of the evaluated students that achieved the maximum mark, indicating the effectiveness of highlighting and capitalizing on the prevailing learning styles.

The valorisation of the learning styles has been perceived as a useful and facilitating activity, designed to teach college students how to use intellectual tools and discipline perspectives to think, that can

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use numerous strategies. Students have embraced not only basic concepts but have been actively involved in learning and will issue valuable judgments on the topic of study.

Students were also encouraged in identifying the learning strategy with pupils in the class they teach. Identifying the learning style of classroom pupils influenced the organization of educational activities in relation to their predominant learning styles, learning being provided through interactivity. Effective strategies are found in targeted interventions of drawing up activity projects with respect to predominant learning styles at the level of the pupil group. Interactive learning aims at direct or mediated interrelation with both the educator and colleagues or others and also some transformative processes on the studying material.

Strategic teaching favours the acquisition by children of both declarative and procedural and strategic knowledge. The last two types of knowledge, namely the procedural and strategic one, call for the mechanism of superior thinking and encourages the gaining of autonomy in learning. Strategic teaching shapes student's learning strategies and intrinsic motivation to progressively acquire more and more complex knowledge. Activated teaching is a strategic teaching, based on results and principles formulated as a result of research on cognitive psychology, which puts the preschool pupils in the center of the learning process (Radu, 2004, p. 24). The optimization of the communication can be achieved by systematically using interactive methods and observing inhibitory trends that may occur within the group.

4. Conclusion

Individualized and differentiated learning, recognizes the student as a person with his own representations of the situation, a diverse pedagogy that proposes a variety of steps, thus opposing the "identity myth" of uniformity, of the false democracy that all must work in the same pace, the same duration and following the same itineraries. This pedagogy constitutes the theoretical and practical foundation of the struggle with school failure, with any form of exclusion" (Przesmychi, 1991, p. 10).

Modern pedagogy aims to find methodological and content landmarks suitable for capitalizing on the potential of each subject. In order to establish the most efficient methodological guidelines, it is necessary to have a good knowledge of the pupil's educational background or a good self-knowledge of the one who wants to be educated. This involves identifying the predominant learning style of the learner.

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