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EFFECTIVE STUDENT ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES IN
PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE

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Abstract

Pedagogical practice is a mandatory educational discipline, and it consists of the activity undertaken by the students specializing in Pedagogy of Primary and Pre-school Education, guided by the practice mentor and the professor coordinating the practice. The purpose of pedagogical practice is to check the applicability of the theoretical knowledge gained by the students during the formation program. This article refers to the specific components of pedagogical practice of students specializing in the Pedagogy of Primary and Pre-school Education and presents how the practice is organized and how the activities are conducted in detail. In what regards the evaluation of the students, this is done by means of observations carried out by the mentor and the coordinating professor. Moreover, during the semester, based on the observations and their activities, students will compile a pedagogical practice portfolio. This discipline is very important for the teaching career; therefore, we consider it is important that the final evaluation of the students should combine an oral exam with a written test and a presentation of the practice portfolio. The present approach seeks to verify the effectiveness of these evaluation strategies in the field of Pedagogical Practice, for students who will become teachers.

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1. Introduction

Pedagogical practice is an educational discipline in the category of compulsory subjects, consisting of the activity carried out in kindergartens and schools by the students specializing in the Pedagogy of Primary and Pre-school Education, under the guidance of the practice mentor and the coordinating practice teacher. The pedagogical practice aims to develop the specific skills of a teacher for primary and pre-school education over the course of three years by completing practical internships in kindergartens and schools (Jucan & Chiş, 2013).

2. Problem Statement

For the students specializing in the Pedagogy of Primary and Pre-school Education, the system of teaching practice has the following structure: an *initial, preliminary stage* through which the students assimilate the fundamental theoretical elements required, *the observational practice* where the aim is the familiarization of the students with the specifics of the didactic activities in kindergartens and schools, *the teaching practice* which aims to train and develop the practical competencies of didactic design and practicing the specific steps of the teaching-learning-evaluation processes.

The guidance and the actual achievement of the teaching practice is ensured by the coordinating practice teacher, namely a specialized teacher of the Department of Education Sciences who has the following attributions: facilitates the relationship between the management of the kindergarten/school, respectively the teaching staff – mentors and students, provides the students with all the theoretical and methodological support necessary for the pedagogical practice (provides the specific documentation), evaluates and approves the activity/lesson plans for each student prior to the actual teaching activity, analyses and evaluates together with the teacher-mentors the didactic activity carried out by the students, keeps records in the school documents and evidence of the students' results and their practice portfolios. The mentors ensure: the weekly assignment of students to the different groups or classes of pupils, the planning of the didactic activities realized by the students during the semester, the specialized guidance of the students throughout the pedagogical practice, analyses, directs, and evaluates the didactic activity carried out by each student during the teaching practice.

Regarding the specific competencies developed by the students from the PIPP (Pedagogy of Primary and Pre-school Education) specialization, we mention that one of these competencies refers to the management of the instructive-educational process and of its specific activities in primary and pre-school education. The learning outcomes specific to this competency specify that the graduate: designs instructive or educational intervention programmes for primary and pre-school education, in order to carry out educational interventions with compensatory, corrective, ameliorative, educational role, etc., designs educational activities and educational situations for primary and pre-school education in order to obtain learning experiences beneficial to the pupils, conducts and carries out educational activities specific to primary and pre-school education, respecting the didactic norms, in order to reach the pre-established educational goals, is responsible for the management of the teaching resources (human, communicational, curricular, material resources) (Muste, 2016), taking into account their mutual inter-influence, performs the required documentation, selection, processing, adaptation of the curricular content, capitalizing on the

current educational paradigms (focusing on the pupils, focusing on skills, curricular approach, integrated approach, differentiated teaching, the paradigm of virtual education, etc.). Another competency concerns the management of the class of students and the group of pre-schoolers. The results of the specific learning of this competency specify that the graduate: applies and adapts the teaching strategies to the particularities of the class of students / group of pre-schoolers (particularities of age and individual, general level of training, knowledge and skills, etc.), the graduate can develop methods for the differentiation of the teaching by adapting the structure, content and organization of the didactic activities and the didactic and evaluative strategies to the psychophysical particularities of the age and the individual particularities of the students in order to satisfy their educational needs and to support them in the instructive-educational process with the aim of reaching their cognitive and learning potential maximum, he supports pre-schoolers and pupils in the learning process and mediates this process by offering them support in interactions with the object of knowledge, in developing skills and in acquiring their cognitive independence and uses educational strategies, methods, techniques and tools for observing, monitoring and evaluating the learning processes, learning outcomes and school progress of pre-schoolers and pupils in a formative sense, in order to optimize the educational processes. During the teaching practice in kindergartens and schools, students become acquainted with the main activities carried out by the teachers, identify the attributions of the teacher specified by the job description, analyse the main curricular documents necessary for the didactic activity, develop the necessary tools for the didactic activity, they correctly design the didactic activities and carry out the projected didactic activities.

The observational pedagogical practice takes place over two semesters (first semester and second semester) and includes a set of preparatory activities for the second stage – the teaching practice. The specific objectives of the practice refer to the assistance and direct observation of the instructive-educational activities carried out by the educators / teachers in the group and in the classroom, the analysis and evaluation of the observed activities / lessons, using the analysis sheets of the activities / lessons, the participation in the specific complementary activities in kindergarten and school - extracurricular activities, teacher councils, methodical circles, lectures with parents, etc. The activity carried out by the students during the internship consists in observing the didactic activities led by educators and teachers and how they solve certain current problems; recording the observations in their practice notebook, participating in the analysis of the didactic activities and other assisted activities, analysing the curricular documents and identifying the resources used in the group / class where the pedagogical practice is performed, studying the structure of the documents drawn up by educators / teachers (schedules, records, characterization sheets, projects of didactic activity / lesson plans, etc.) and how they are organized, identifying and describing the specific way of planning and carrying out the activities over a day, a week, a semester in kindergarten / school, designing and developing support materials for the didactic activity: worksheets, evaluation sheets, didactic games, etc., observing the behaviour of pre-schoolers/students during activities and breaks, analysing the structure of the psycho-pedagogical characterization of pre-schoolers/students used in the respective institution, studying the extracurricular activities programmes and participating in them, developing a programme for an optional subject.

The pedagogical teaching practice (undertaken during the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth semesters) aims to: familiarize students with the specifics of didactic design and planning, offer students concrete

learning situations in which to practice student-centred learning, to develop the student's competency to evaluate the pre-schoolers or pupils in the group/class they've been assigned to. In the teaching practice, the students will develop sequential or integral projects for the optimization of the didactic activities they have assisted in, they will carry out didactic activities with their assigned group or class, they will analyse and assess the activities/lessons with the use of the appropriate activities/lesson analysis sheets, they will check the homework, supervise the play time and games of the pre-schoolers/pupils, etc.

The evaluation of the students during their pedagogical practice is first and foremost a continuous assessment all throughout the practice, carried out by the mentor and taking into account the following criteria:

- active participation in the activities of the pedagogical practice;
- the content and the scientific, psycho-pedagogical and methodological value of the materials written regarding the instructive-educational activities they have assisted in and carried out themselves;
- the quality of the didactic activities they have planned and carried out.

Furthermore, the students have to create a practice portfolio that includes a set of documents elaborated entirely by the student: activity observation sheets, planning activities per year / semester / month / week / day, activity analysis sheets, psycho-pedagogical characterization sheets, evaluation tests, etc. The content of the pedagogical practice portfolio is evaluated according to:

- the quality of the materials that make up the portfolio presented at the end of the pedagogical practice;
- the quality of the analyses and observations recorded in the observation sheets of the assisted activities.

3. Research Questions

What are the most efficient assessment strategies used for the evaluation of student performance in the discipline of Pedagogical Practice?

4. Purpose of the Study

In our approach, we aim to identify the assessment strategies used to evaluate the school performance of students in general, but especially in the discipline of Pedagogical Practice, and we also aim to find out to what extent these strategies are effective or not.

5. Research Methods

For this we applied a semi-structured interview to the students of the specialization Pedagogy of Primary and Pre-school Education, year II and III of study, for a total of 182 subjects. The interview included several questions regarding the evaluation strategies used by the teachers. For illustration, we present and analyse the answers obtained to two of the interview questions.

6. Findings

First of all, we were interested in the form of evaluation most often used by teachers in educational practice. The answer options offered to the students were: oral evaluation, written evaluation, practical evaluation.

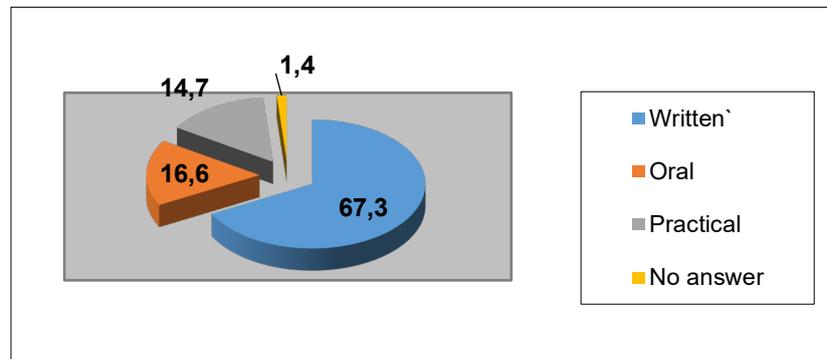


Figure 01. Student answers regarding the form of evaluation most often used in educational practice

Analyzing the students' answers to this question, we found that the form of evaluation most often used by teachers is the written assessment (67.3% of the answers), with the practical evaluation being used in 14.7% of cases. Also, the oral evaluation method is used in 16.6% of cases (Figure 1). We consider that the form of written evaluation is preferred by faculty teachers, most likely, because of the very large number of students specializing in the Pedagogy of Primary and Pre-school Education. In this situation, the written examination requires less time than an oral examination would.

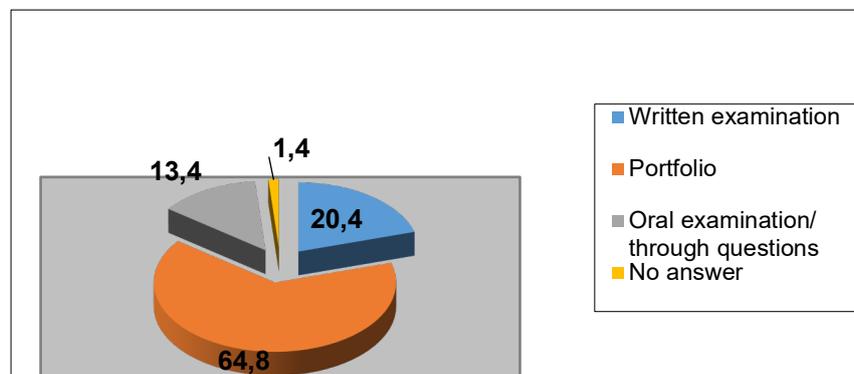


Figure 02. Student answers regarding the preferences on the evaluation methods in the discipline Pedagogical practice

In the case of the evaluation in the discipline Pedagogical practice, 64.8% of the students prefer the portfolio, 20.4% of them would prefer a written evaluation, and 13.4% the oral evaluation through questions. Interestingly, 20% of students would like to be evaluated in writing in this subject (Figure 2).

We mention that up to this moment, the evaluation of the students in Pedagogical Practice has been carried out, on the one hand, by the mentor throughout the practice and, on the other hand, through a final evaluation carried out by the coordinating practice teacher, namely an oral examination through questions and also by presenting and evaluating the practice portfolio. We preferred the oral version of evaluation

because it verifies the degree of knowledge acquisition, the correctitude of said knowledge, the degree of skills formation, the ability to interpret and process data, the operationality of the acquisitions, the applicability of the contents learned by the students (Stan, 2001). We also chose the assessment of the practice portfolio because the essential element of this method is the active involvement of the student in the creation, collection and selection of materials that meet the purpose of the portfolio (Ungureanu, 2001). This fact gives the portfolio an important educational value, in addition to its evaluative value; students discover and learn about themselves in the process of developing the portfolio and in the reflections, they are thus required to make on the products of their own learning.

Considering the results obtained from the interview, but especially because of the importance of this discipline for the professional training of the students, we mention that we intend to introduce the written evaluation for this particular subject. As such, students will have a written exam with a weight of 40% of the final grade, 20% for the oral examination, 20% for their portfolio presentation, 10% for the mentor's evaluation. We mention that through the written exam we intend to check the organization and coherence of the informational content assimilated by the students, highlighting the applicability of the theoretical subjects studied (Dulamă & Ilovan, 2015, 2017; Dulamă, Ilovan, Bagoly-Simó, & Magdaş, 2019) and the psycho-pedagogical language used by the students. The actual level of preparation of the students cannot be identified by using a single method, a single technique or a single evaluation sample (Manolescu, 2006). The slide towards didactic monism should be avoided, as it does not allow for an accurate and objective assessment and evaluation.

Regardless of the evaluation method used in the assessment of the students' knowledge, we consider it useful to place particular emphasis on the development of the student's practical thinking (Peculea, Andronache, & Bocoş, 2017), requesting reasoned answers, based on logic, trying to give the moment of verification a formative content (Iucu, 2001). The contribution of the evaluation to raising students' level of knowledge must be looked at under different aspects, it only fulfilling its purpose under the conditions of the creative application of the principles of modern teaching (Dulamă & Ilovan, 2016), of achieving unity between the students' capacity for intellectual activity and the effort required of them (Jucan, 2009).

7. Conclusion

Following our investigative approach, we found that the objective didactic evaluation of students is required to be continuous, systematic, flexible and, as such, based on a variety of assessment methods, techniques and tests – evaluation strategies. The process of assessment requires a lot of pedagogical tact; a climate of mutual trust and equity; natural integration of evaluation into the didactic, teaching-learning activity; providing systematic positive reinforcement; balancing the manners of rewarding and sanctioning students; argumentation of grades; stimulation and support of self-evaluation etc. (Bocoş & Jucan, 2019). We will pay great attention to how we will design and apply the most effective assessment strategies in the discipline of Pedagogical Practice, taking into account permanently the impact of the objective/subjective evaluation of the students in what concerns their knowledge, as well as in their personal development.

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