

INITIAL TEACHER TRAINING TODAY. BUT TOMORROW?

Dorin Herlo, PhD
“Aurel Vlaicu” University of Arad
dorinherlo@gmail.com

Abstract: *This work appeared after the “initial teacher training” has become a national public consultation theme, with the belief of improving this component of national academic study. One hopes to get to a conclusion on the quality of the future teachers’ training, by the Psycho-pedagogic Module or the Didactic Master study program, through the specialists’ debates. At present, both systems of initial teacher training function, and this work presents various points of view on this fact.*

Key words: *Initial training, psycho-pedagogic module, didactic master’s study program, educational policies, financing.*

Introduction

“... the greatest catastrophe of a society, especially the modern one, is a mind little trained... Who can train a mind well?” (Mircea Flonta)

The teachers - this would probably be the implied answer any reader had in mind!!! But who trains them to train “others” mind? Other teachers! So, is the concern for the initial teacher training natural? Obviously, yes!

Nowadays, there are three ways to achieve the initial teacher training. For preschool and primary school through *Pedagogy of primary school and preschool* specialization, for special school – *Special psycho-pedagogy* specialization, both of them within the Faculty of Educational Sciences, while for teachers of all other specialties, through the study programs of their faculties (Romanian language, Mathematics,...Sports and Physical Education) together with the *Psycho-pedagogic Training Program to Certify Competences for Teaching Profession*, organized by the Departments for Teacher Training Staff or the accredited Psycho-pedagogic Specialized Departments, of state or private universities.

Content

Since 1989, within the dynamics of the Romanian society and somewhat correlated to the European systems, the initial teacher training has come through many stages and changes, but hasn't formed by a substantiation of value even until today.

Taking onto account the evolution of the decisions on educational policies for the domain of initial teacher training, we can see that:

- In 1995, by Law no. 84 was decided the Departments for Teacher Training Staff as academic specialized structures for psycho-pedagogic teacher training by a 290 hours Module, having courses and applications;

- In 2004, by Law no. 288, art.9, para 5th and 6th differentiated the psycho-pedagogic training of future secondary school teachers who studied Module I – 30 credits, by that of future high school teachers, who had to study Module II – 30 credits;

- In 2008, by OM no. 4316, completed with OM 3158/2010, this progression was stressed and it was clearly postulated that the Psycho-pedagogic study program for initial teacher training was realized on two levels – 1st level, with 30+5 credits for future secondary school teachers and 2 level, with other 30+5 credits for future high school teachers;

- In 2011, by Law no.1 and then OM 3841/April 2012, was decided the introduction of didactic master study program with 120 credits, and by 2014, moving on liquidation of the study programs of Departments for Teacher Training Staff;

- In September 2012, by OM 5745, the decisions previously determined were extended the Psycho-pedagogic Training Program to Certify Competences for Teaching Profession (level I and II)

- In 2014, by OUG no.49, both methods of teacher training, either by psycho-pedagogic program 1st and 2nd level or by didactic master program were validated. [1]

So here are a succession of too many major changes which seriously influenced the system of initial teacher training.

Taking into account the evolution of our educational system, I can say that the method of initial teacher training depends on a few key factors:

- *the will of policy-makers, especially in educational policies.*
- *Academics' respect and responsibility for young teacher training, but also for self-training/transformation in order to build up trained minds (not full heads),*
- *the students' selection system through admission for professorship,*
and
- *the financing of education system.*

The will of policy-makers would be seen in their obvious desire to make a teacher's status become a socially very respectful one and financially quite attractive. I am sure that, in this way, the quality of the education would rapidly increase, as the people from the system work with enthusiasm, creativity and initiative to accomplish the "trainees' journey" on the path of knowledge and its appliance in everyday life, having a positive attitude.

The academics' respect and responsibility, within the academic autonomy, *to train minds* (the students' ones) *to reflect, to introspect and to have an applied external reflective speech*, is the next key factor. Within the same respect and responsibility lies, *the professors' path to perfection/excellency, according to the dynamics of real world, to develop their capabilities* (competences, resources, desire to apply) *to stimulate the student* not only to explain or demonstrate.

The students' admission system by a *thorough exam*, to select the candidates with a vocation for education, would be very useful, although the existing admission system for certain specializations, including the psycho-pedagogic study program, comprises at least an interview besides the baccalaureate exam results.

Eventually, the financing of education is at the basis of decision making in educational policies. If a transformation an education paradigm is really wanted, *the politicians have to seriously follow their own decisions (6 % of PIB) for the financing of education.*

Dotted issues above, lead to detect the nuances of how the initial training of teachers can be done and how quality is reflected in "their body".

Now, in a flexible, dynamic world, with various options according to necessities, both methods for initial teacher training are useful in the Romanian education system – *Psycho-pedagogic Training Program to Certify Competences for Teaching Profession (psycho-pedagogic module) 1st and 2nd level, studied together with the main specialization (Bachelor's degree, Master's degree)* and *Didactic Master study program, studied after the Bachelor's degree, with the possibility for Doctor's degree in educational sciences.*

For the time being, *the parallel system is more useful*, in my opinion. Why?

- It is done together with the student's "development" in specialization;
- It is gradually done;
- The students' progress can be adjusted during three years (1st level) and then consolidated during the next period (2nd level, together with the scientific or professional master study);
- It implies lower costs/student;
- The universities have already gained a valuable expertise in the field.

On the other hand, the initial teacher training would comply with the legal regulations, but it gives the possibility, at a national level, to modify, to refine the actual curriculum. If I were to suggest some amendments to the current curriculum for psycho-pedagogic module, 1st level, to increase its applicability and quality, I suggest introducing:

- **1 h/week of observation internship for the 1st year;**
- **2h/week of applicative internship for the 2nd year and the 1st semester of the 3rd year** (unlike only 3h/week in the 3rd year);
- **1 week of applicative internship (24 hours), in the 2nd semester of the 3rd year**, instead of 3h/week (2nd semester of the 3rd year has only 12 week of didactic activity).

This suggestion determines - for the 1st year only 1 hour plus/week (28 h/year); for 2nd year 2h/week (56h/year). The students of the 3rd year would have only 2h/week (28 hours) for the 1st semester and 24 hours one week in the 2nd semester, versus 3 hours/week (78 hours/year). The total hours of internship would increase from 78 (level I at present) to 136, which would be a growth in quantity but also an improvement of the quality of students' knowledge and it would be beneficial for the 1st level graduate.

The number of hours/student/week is not exaggerated (the older generations had even 41 hours/week) if we want to build up trained minds. The training can be achieved within the education reality, not only in academic agora or ivory towers.

On the other hand, the financial effort to cover the costs of internship during the years of study wouldn't be too high, but it will bring added value to the initial training of the future teacher and his personal development. It is obvious that this suggestion implies dedicated mentors, who also, have to be paid. But I am sure that all the costs would fit in the 6% of PIB financing of education.

As many graduates (Bachelor's degree) want to study a scientific or professional Master study program in their domain, we cannot forget about their right to become teachers, especially if they have graduated from the level I of psycho-pedagogic module. That's why I think that the alternative level II of the module, postgraduate system, should be kept.

During a recent workshop in Paris for the "Consumer Classroom" European Project (www.consumerclassroom.eu), I had the opportunity to talk to almost all the national coordinators present at the workshop, from the 28 EU countries. The method of training the future teachers was one on the themes. I described to them our method of parallel training, both for the domain of specialization and the psycho-pedagogic domain (module, level I-II) for future teachers, and the colleagues from Denmark, Malta, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Poland and Ireland considered it very good, taking into consideration what a didactic Master program is supposed to be.

The didactic Master program is an elaborated form of study (a form of deepening studies), but the decisions on educational policies haven't observed it. It is still considered to be a part of the initial which can replace the module. This Master program is a part of initial training, but an elaborated/deepened one, so, it may replace only the level II of the module. So, ***for the initial teacher training we can accept convergence between level I of the psycho-pedagogic module – studied during the bachelors studies – and the post graduate didactic Master program and level I of the module***, but not full replacement of the psycho-pedagogic study program with the didactic Master program.

The didactic Master program, as it is now, is an elaborated/deepened study both in the main domain and in the psycho-pedagogy domain. But what elaborated/deepened study can a MA do, when he hasn't studied level I of the module?

Maybe the didactic Master program will be the path for the “elite” of future teachers, as it offers them the access to Doctor's studies but not necessarily needed now in secondary education system.

From another perspective, the initial teacher training needs a ***good psycho-pedagogic training of the students***, but also, ***a good training in their main specialization*** too. The one who cannot master his specialization cannot teach his future trainees.

So, we need a system of ***teachers who “wisely seed and patiently harvest”*** (A. Cury) [2], and they can be trained if they have ***inspiring trainers (professors) who share values of knowledge and not only transfer knowledge, trainers to guide them in and through “true stories” of culture***, no matter its form. Trainers (professors) who ***stimulate students to apply knowledge in a diversity of situations***. Trainers (professors) who ***engage students in various educational projects***. In order to achieve this it is absolutely necessary for ***policies makers to bend over the two human resources implied in initial teacher training - trainers and trainees -, especially by financing***.

Conclusions

In a democratic educational system, with clear regulations, one can propose alternative methods for initial teacher training, on different levels of candidates abilities:

- Specialization by bachelor's degree + psycho-pedagogic module level I – for secondary school;
- Elaborated/deepened study by scientific or professional master's degree + psycho-pedagogic module level II – for high school, vocational school and university;

- Specialization by bachelor's degree + psycho-pedagogic module level I, followed by didactic Master's degree (elaborated/deepened studies in specialization and in psycho-pedagogy) – for all levels of teaching.

- All these situations require that the psycho-pedagogic studies (level I and II) as well as the Master studies (either scientific, professional or didactic) to be accredited by ARACIS.

- There are, also, specialists (F. Voiculescu, Ș. Iosifescu) [3], [4], who, on medium and long term, have a different view for initial teacher training, - a university structure of the type “Faculty for Teacher training” (or “School for teachers”). “Generalist teacher for early childhood education, primary and lower secondary education - at undergraduate level - and specialist teachers for upper secondary education, tertiary education and adult education – at master level” [4]. This would mean organizing faculties within the accredited universities, which would have the whole cycle of study: bachelor's, master's and doctor's degrees for teachers training.

I think that a serious (strict) selection of candidates for initial teacher training system is absolutely necessary for either of the alternatives, because, there is the general idea, that everybody is dissatisfied in school, its way and methods, that it is behind the socio-economic evolution.

That is why *we need both good students*, selected by their vocation and motivation for becoming teachers, *as well as good teachers* (trainers) who would train them.

In other words *we are asked to train reflective, flexible teachers, willing of transformation not only changing, adaptable to the world they live in, but mostly to the world they will live in*. If we truly want our nation's value revival not only the spoliation of the political class, we all feel *the necessity to keep in the educational system “the most valuable minds”*. In order to achieve all this, *we need political will, proper financing and a constructive attitude. Romania needs competent, motivated, independent, respected teachers and who are encouraged to learn!*

References

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