

PORTFOLIO OF PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE – AN ESSENTIAL ELEMENT FOR PREPARING QUALITATIVE STUDENTS AS FUTURE TEACHERS

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Abstract

The problem of professional practice documentation is extensive and more complex, connected and mutually interdependent with important new problems such as the development of new curricula, the structure of professional practice within the curriculum, the concept and division of roles between leading actors to this structure. Preconception of the documentation was conditioned by the construction and application of new curricula with 3-year timeframe of the study due to Bologna Charter. In the curricula that we are applying we usually combine serial to weekly practices extending from the second to the sixth semester. The documentation should not only rely on the reallocation of roles but should have a linearity, a continuous climbing, in terms of evolution or professional development of student to teacher status, with complex skills. This documentation should cover in the same time the organizational side of pedagogical practices, their content, evaluation of students on the basis of skills that a teacher should possess. On the other hand, he had to support and be aligned with the rest of school documentation, subject matter and teaching fields which are reciprocally linked.

Firstly: The documentation of professional practice will increase the responsibility of all parties involved in this process,

Secondly: The documentation will clearly define roles, will sanction the rights and duties of everyone (mentor teachers, student and tutor).

Thirdly: will help, orient, facilitate interactive parties in this process

Fourthly: A documentation with theoretical and practical character is required.

Student's portfolio is a document that will involve the student's development, achievements gained within the academic environment and workplace, which contains the outline for teaching, learning and assessment process. The assessment is made based on the student's portfolio, the purpose of which is to favor co-evaluation and self-assessment and to centralize all the assessments made during the school year in order to be taken into consideration in determining the final outcome

Keywords: *Portfolio of professional practice, the documentation of professional practice, student's portfolio*

Introduction

Educations' Faculty in Albania, offer study programs in teachers preparations in different profiles through a three year period of study which is Bachelor. In this study programs, pedagogical practice is seen as an integral part it. Teaching practice is an integrated form of learning, seen as a time

period where students work in the field of study in order to be trained applying their theoretical knowledge earned in lectures before they can be integrated in the real world of teaching (Kiggundu and Nayimuli, 2009). This give them the opportunity to practice teaching in a real context. Students perceive it as “the bases of their preparation in their profession” (Menter, 1989:461), in order to practice and gain experience. Conant (1963:142), in relation to teachers education in America stresses that “in an unconditioned way, the basic element of professional education is Pedagogical Practice (teaching). Practice is evaluated by the University of Fort Hare, Department of Education as “crucial for a successful determination of studies..” as “central point of graduation in teachers education” Irvine, Westaway and Shafer, 2004). Even Farrell (2008) determines pedagogical practice as “one of the most important aspects in teachers education and formation”. Teaching practice can be different forms depending on the institution. Some of them send their students in teaching practices once a week, others do it more than a semester. Despite the form of organization, teaching practices aim to involve students in the profession of a teacher. Student teachers have the opportunity to judge “the real art of a teacher profession before being part of the real world of teaching” (Kasanda, 1995).

Nature of Pedagogical Practice

Bachelor program of “Teachers of preschool education” & “Teachers of elementary education” are part of the Department of Teaching Methodology, in the Faculty of Education “Aleksander Xhuvani” University, Elbasan. This study program is a three year period and the discipline of Professional Practice (PP) is compulsory in this period of study program. Practice (PP) takes place in elementary schools and kindergartens in the city of Elbasan through an agreement between the university and Educational Directory in Elbasan. It is planned to take place in two forms: (1) Serial Professional Practice (PPS) and Weekly Professional Practice (PPJ). Pedagogical practice is named serial (1) when it has to do with serial visits at schools once or twice a week and it is named Weekly when students stay at school for one week or more (Turku, 1998)¹.

Serial Professional Practice takes place at the second year (third and fourth semester) and the third year (fifth semester), once a week four hours a day. Through SPP students should accomplish observation of the lesson hours and integrated in the preparation of the basic materials and activities as a teachers’ assistant, work in group with pupils, be able to fulfill schools’ documents, to compose and work with program plane, organize extra-curricular activities and be in touch with parents and community, take place in every subject and field part of a daily lesson, assist in

¹ Turku, A. (1998) Guide e praktikës pedagogjike, fq 20

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analyzing and reflection over lesson hours in cooperation with the teacher in charge for Professional Practices and professor of Department Teaching Methodology. Weekly Professional Practice takes place in the third year (sixth semester) every day, four hours per day, for eight week. This practice put the student in a teachers' real position with all responsibilities of a real teacher in front of school directory, other teachers, parents and pupils fully practicing the teaching process. Tutor teacher is always present as an observer and counselor. The problem of the documents related to the professional practice is wide and complex, depending from other new problems related with development of new curricula, the structure of professional practice as part of the curricula, concepts and divisions of roles between the principal parties of this structure.

Period before changes:

During the time period of the three years of study, for the branch of Elementary School, professional practices had 8% of the study time and elements that could be included as practice were:

1. observation in specific subjects
2. fifth semester pedagogical practices named 0/3
3. 8 weeks pedagogical practice

The first and second were passive, while the third was the basic in the formation of teaching skills. Documents were incomplete, not to say they didn't exist at all. As part of didactics there were lectures of subjects, assessment was just as the other subjects with lectures and seminars. Practices 0/3 had no documents at all prepared for the students, teachers and professor.

For the practice during 8 weeks the only document prepared were a three pages of instructions which determined what a student should do during this period.

There were no helping or normative materials. Everything was based in the existing literature once in special didactics, oral instructions by the professors and transmission of experience from professors to students. Assessment was made by a grade that the tutorial teacher in the school were the student accomplished his practice puts to him with a standard characteristics. 90% of the cases, students had a maximum evaluation.

The new conception over documentation was conditioned with the development and application of the new curricula with a three years study period of time according to the Bologna Charter. In the application of the new curricula we apply a combination of serial practices with the weekly one expanded in a detailed manner from the second semester to the sixth one every week four hours.

Documents had to do not only with the division of roles, but it had to be linear, in a continuous development, evolution and professional development of students till they reach the teachers' status, forms with complex skills. At the same time, this document had to cover the organization part of pedagogical practices, their content, students' evaluation over the abilities they must gain as future teachers. To the other part, it had to fulfill and do along with the other parts of schools' documents, subjects' field which have a reciprocal connection to one another.

Study Questions

Why was the need for documents' renovation?

First: Professional Practice Document will raise the responsibilities of every parties involved in this process.

Second: Documents will determine roles, authorization, rights and obligations to everyone involved in the process (mentor teacher, students and tutors)

Third: It will help, orientate, facilitate the parties cooperate with one another

Forth: There was the need for a document with theoretical and practical character

Treatment of the professional aspect of students is fulfilled with his portfolio, which is well organized and legal for everyone that want to read it. It is a document which registers students' development, gained skills inside the academic environment and work place, which contain teaching frames, learning and evaluation process. Evaluation made to the students is based in this portfolio, which aims to favor co-evaluation and self-evaluation, also centralize every evaluation made during the school year so that they can come to a final evaluation.

Conclusions

Diversity and documents' perspectives. Improvers' portfolio

A very important aspect of documents is the evaluative one, which should be considered continuously, change and be impartial.

Daily practice, execution and usage of composed documents till now, should highlight positives sides, its values which are:

- Latitude and escalation of the problem
- Accuracy and clarity

- Punctuality toward students and teachers competences

During the professional practice time, students must fill in its portfolio with the best experiences.

Portfolio contains:

1. Annual subject plan
2. Objectives for students achievements
3. Daily plan for lesson hours
4. Lesson hours and chapters tests
5. Curricular projects done by students
6. Examples of the usage of different teaching sources by the students
7. Examples of methods used by the students to form in pupils the abilities of:
 - creative thinking
 - critical thinking
 - group work
 - teaching management from different sources
 - work done with pupils with difficulties in learning etc.

Despite this, students fulfill the “report” with reflections over his experiences during the professional practice with his success and failure. This report is a reflection of the student over his experience during the professional practice, his relationship with pupils, teachers, parents and his professional progress.

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