Professionalism in the Education System Today

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Abstract

The pre-service and in-service training are the premises of a professional development pathway set to encounter actual diverse needs and challenges of the teaching profession. The responsibility for continuous development firstly belongs to the education practitioner, and this perspective raises a series of questions at individual level: what expectations have the society and the community from an educator?, what competences do I have to develop in order to successfully manage classroom situations and to correctly design, develop and evaluate adequate education situations?, what support do I need and who could offer it? Today, the professional of the education system is proactive, open to innovation, anchored in the technological, pedagogical and academic actualities, available to collaborating and sharing with colleagues. The present paper tries to reveal some of these aspects of the continuous professional development in the actual context, being centred on the curriculum habilitation and on the added value brought by the the ICTs, as the up-front elements of the education practitioners' development path.

Keywords: teaching staff, continuous professional development, ICT skills

1. Pedagogical setup

The profile of an efficient education activity raises a series of challenges for both the institution – in terms of capacity and readiness – and for the staff involved – in terms of preparedness, knowledge, skills and specific competences to cope with wide range of issues from communication and technical type to pedagogical and managerial ones. Usually, the new technologies are seen as having a great potential to surmount a set of limitations which characterise conventional instruction; therefore, when we are talking about quality and efficiency in education, it is expected that the learning experience and outcomes to be higher in the education situation assisted by ICT, being they offline, online, self tutored, in fully integrated virtual campuses and so on. In this view, a complete elearning experience has several attributes which rely on a proper design and implementation:

- the learning sessions with digital support, especially the long ones, must be as interactive as possible and must emotionally involve the participants into learning;
- the new elements in the learning path, together with the innovative interaction ways have to be gradually introduced, and described based on the traditional, known experiences;
- the learning support and the feedback offered to participants must be in-time and on-topic; the tutor must monitor each learner’ activity and to guide its learning towards achieving the education goals, as much as possible in the cognitive and socio-affective “zone of proximal development”;


• from the design phase, there must be specified some alternative specific ways to support participants with different learning rhythms and to include/encourage learners with different cognitive capacities;
• motivation of participants must be sustained through special methods and techniques;
• the learning rhythm must be constant, without long interruptions; accent should be put on variated, sufficient learning tasks, with clear deadlines;
• cooperation between participants (to collaboratively solve various tasks) must be encouraged and supported; equally, the autonomy in learning must be promoted.

Summarising, the following general scheme should be brought into attention of developers and instructional designers, but as well to the attention of course authors and support personnel involved in the elearning activities:

**Figure 1. Added value of ICT in education and training: a view upon the curriculum components**

### 2. Instructional design
At questions of whom?, which facts?, which moment, approach or instrument we owe the efficiency of teaching learning process?, the education sciences literature reveals different factors which in certain conditions increase the quality and the efficiency of instruction. These studies reveal some elements, principles, stakes which has to be taken in account for an efficient instruction design. These principles represent a sort of conditions, attributes or instructional standards (of the largest generality) for the designing and evaluation of activities from educational process.
A consistent orientation toward learning objectives, a clear structure of content, a guided learning, clear working tasks which allow student to check his acknowledgements, pre and post thematic organizers, a varied difficulty background of exercises together with their solutions (complete, uncomplete or multiple), illustrations which contribute to content understanding and text attributes which facility searching, organization and integration of knowledge are required, too. From the specificity of presented elements, some important conclusions can be drawn, regarding to efficient education characteristics: a) first, the instruction can be conceptualised in pedagogical (educational sciences) reference frame, its attributes can be creatively promoted/uptaken in educational practice; b) second, an efficient instruction represents not only the result of teacher acknowledge, but his art/ability to use a strategy, method, procedure in proper moment and in agiven situation (Gage, 1978; Bîrzea, 1998); c) third, the instruction approach requests decision making from teacher, an objective situation analyse and turning to account the professional competence and available resources; d) fourth, the educator has to consider/see the student as an autonomous person, with individual features with makes him different.

3. Roles and tasks of todays’ education practitioners

As many studies are indicating, the performance of the staff involed in elearning activities is highly correlated with the level of support received from the management, including the extent to which the procedures are regulated in specific documents and institutional policy papers. It is desirable that within the institution would exist a collaborative, stimulative environment, in which the personnel cooperate towards a better understanding of the nature of the tasks implied by the new technologies, as well as towards a more efficient practice within virtual educational platform. Motivation, implication, involvement – these are the dimensions supporting a high quality work, which are occuring in time, in a both constant and dynamic socio-professional medium, online or offline.

Main categories of competences necessary for dealing with the elearning situations are four:
- academic – knowledge, abilities and attitudes specific to the study domain;
- pedagogical – knowledge and capacities to design, develop and evaluate a learning situation;
- managerial – skills necessary to organise learners, resources, time and tasks;
- technical – ICT/ digital skills.

The big challenge for the education practitioners acting in virtual environments is to surpass the novelty not only through adequately use of the technologies, but also through knowledge and use of adapted virtual education practices. The technical aspects consist in appropriate use of some instruments such as forum, blog, wiki, bookmarking tools, collaborative documents – which suppose some hours of hands-on training. The pedagogical dimension is much more complicated, regarding development of some specific competences towards: a learner-centred approach, collaborative learning, continuous support and counseling, online assessment, motivational techniques and so on. Here is a list of tasks and roles associated with education staff in the virtual environments:

- design of educational activities
- organisation of the intructional process and context
- analysis of resources and instruments available
- choose of didactic strategies and methods
- design of instructional alternatives
- prevention of interruption and distractions
- facilitation of learning
- ensuring good conditions for learning and communicating
- provoking thinking, challenging previous knowledge/ prerequisites
- formulating answers
- stimulating debates
- encouraging students, motivating them to keep going
- suggestion of new paths for deep learning and alternative solution searching
- assistance, monitoring, assessment
- animating discussions, giving hints
- guidance, counseling
- prevention, management and capitalising upon education crisis situations
- decision and asking for opinion, proposal of themes and tasks
- coordination, organising groups and learning teams
- learning support
- moderation, communication.

Figure 2. Categories of competences for the teaching staff

A detailed list of roles and tasks of a teacher is difficult to build. Anyway, when looking at the most activities in the classroom, it is quite clear the these roles and tasks are not linear, and therefore the skills and competences to be developed through preservice and inservice teacher training programmes are almost impossible to address without continuous practice and without solid grounding into nowadays technological and pedagogical frameworks.

Figure 3. Some roles and tasks of the teacher
The characteristics of an efficient education situation in the 21st Century are highly correlated with a proper set of skills and competences that the teaching staff should be acquainted with. A complete vision of the transformation in the set of skills necessary to education staff working on the virtual environments would include pedagogical and academic competences, filtered and refined through the present technological context, projected in a “savoir faire” which makes today the difference between good educators and the others.

References


