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Good practices and innovations during the realization of the practical training of the pedagogy students

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Abstract. The practical training is a significant and obligatory part of the whole training process of the pedagogy students in the specialties for the educational and qualification degrees of Bachelor and Master and of the post-graduate qualification trainees. The professional and practical training of the students obtaining the professional qualification of teacher is regulated in the Order for the unified state requirements for the higher education obtaining with the professional qualification of teacher [5].

The study is focused on the attitudes and the evaluations of the mentor-teachers because they are the direct bearers of the necessary professional qualities to be acquired by the students. They are also the subjects of the good pedagogical practices and to a great extent of the innovations. The mentor-teachers determine the nearest perspective for the student progress and they form the following interaction: student /trainee teacher/ - training teacher /mentor/ - pupil, where the practical education results are manifested.

Methods of the study: inquiry investigation, mathematical and statistical analysis.

Results and conclusions: The study shows that the training teachers support the up-dating of the student practical training putting the accent on the activity and the motivation of the trainee teachers. An important result of the study is the positive attitudes of the training teachers toward the partnership with the higher school in the context of the whole life learning and their own professional development.

1. Introduction

The practical training of the pedagogy students of the educational and qualification degrees of Bachelor and Master is subjected to the whole vision concerning the student quality preparation integrating the scientific and theoretical, the practical and the investigation preparation. On the other hand the practical training is an element of the whole academic process of the quality management providing as well requiring a continuously developing collaboration with the potential employers - schools, kindergartens, personal development centers and other partners in the social and pedagogical sphere.

The good practices in the practical training are based on the traditions and they are complemented by the trends toward modernization in the conditions of the dynamic and changing educational sphere with a focus on the future student realization on the labour market.

The European qualification frame, respectively the National qualification frame of the Republic of Bulgaria put the accent on the creation of the professional competencies described as follows:

For Bachelor:

- collect, classify, evaluate and interpret data of the respective domain in order to solve concrete tasks; apply the acquired knowledge and skills in new or unknown conditions and demonstrate the capacity for analyzing in a wider or interdiscipline context;
- use new strategic approaches;
- form and express his own opinion concerning the social and ethical problems arising during the working process.

For Master:

- collect, work on and interpret the specialized information necessary for solving complicated problems of the studied domain;
- integrate a wide spectrum of knowledge and information sources in a new and relatively unknown context;
- make well based evaluations and find solutions in a complicated environment of various interactions;
- demonstrate capacities for adequate behaviour and interaction in the professional and/or specialized environment;
- demonstrate capacities for solving problems by integrating complex knowledge sources in the conditions of insufficient available information in a new unknown environment;
- have the capacity to initiate changes and manage the development processes in complex conditions being engaged with important scientific, social and moral problems arising during the working or educational process [3].

In the Practical Training Strategy the *innovative trends* are defined as follows: “The innovative trends are an expression of the ambitions of the management policy of the Faculty of Pedagogy to overcome some deficits of the practical training in the new conditions. The increasing competition on the labour market is a precondition for attracting more numerous and more various partners of the Faculty of Pedagogy for its realization. There is a necessity of innovations useful not only for the students and the academic teachers but also for the partner institutions” [4]. Emphasis in the special preparation of the students is the building of transversal competences through the transfer of skills in the professional environment [6].

2. Methods of the study

The main used investigation methods are the following: analysis of the specialized sources in the domain of the practical training of pedagogy students as well as the normative documentation /scholar plans, rules for practical training in Trakia University, the Republic of Bulgaria, European qualification frame/, inquiry investigation. The criteria of the obtained result analysis are the following: functions of the base element of the practical preparation; functions of the training teacher; factors for the successful realization of the interaction mentor – trainee teacher; factors for the successful professional activity as a mentor; recommended good practices and new forms of the pedagogy students practical training; self-evaluation of the mentor-teachers.

3. Results and analysis

The quoted scope of a professional competence proves that **it is built mainly in the process of the complementation and superstructure between the theoretical knowledge and the practical realization** – a process that begins in the higher school and continues during the whole teacher’s professional way.

That is why *the good practices* in the practical training are related mainly to the *overcoming* of the isolation and the separation between the academic and the practical preparation which is realized by the following:

- Optimal planning of the practical training forms so that the lectures and seminars together with the theoretical component are “pierced” by a strongly underlined practical purpose.
- Theoretical base and argumentation of all practical forms of education.
- Wide-spectrum practical preparation by the competence development in order to acquire continuously thematically new skills in a dynamic professional environment.
- Creation of a mutually acceptable and useful collaboration with the facilities of the Faculty of Pedagogy, a mutual atmosphere of confidence between the academic teachers – managers of the practical training and the practical mentors of the students.

The good practices of the practical training are based on the clear and regulated functions of the participants:

Personal participants:

- student /full time and correspondence training form/;
- practical mentor /teacher, tutors, pedagogical adviser, special needs pupils' teacher, speech therapist and other pedagogical specialists in the educational institutions;
- academic teacher – manager of the observation, the current practice and the before diploma practice; scientific adviser of a master diploma work.

Group participants:

- student group;
- accepting institution/organization;
- academic teachers of the Faculty of Pedagogy.

As Doncheva says [2] „... the interaction between the university teachers, the training teacher, the school director /kindergarten director/ and the educational authorities is a key item for the methodological training high quality achievement. The question is related to the regulation of the relation between the higher school and the base institution.”

Among the above mentioned personal and group participants in the practical training the mentor's role is showed up who on the one hand is a live bearer of the desired professional qualities and on the other is a subject of the good pedagogical practices and to a great extend of the innovations. The mentor-teachers determine the nearest perspective of the student's progress and they form the interaction student /trainee teacher/ - training teacher /mentor/ - pupil, where in fact the practical education results are manifested. This interaction has one more dimension related to the student's *work under supervision* during the current and the before diploma practice – the student's work under the supervision of the practical mentor /mentor-teacher/.

The results of the inquiry investigation made with 22 mentor-teachers show the following trends: the functions of the base element of the practical training are determined as organizational, mentor, supporting emotional environment creation, partnership with the university and choice of future employees.

The degree of coordination between the rank evaluations of the inquired mentor-teachers has been determined, i.e. how near /far/ are their criteria and preferences concerning the significance of the different functions of the base elements and the training teachers. For this purpose **the concordat coefficient W** has been used [1].

The results of the inquiry investigation made with 22 mentor-teachers show the following trends:

- the functions of the base element of the practical training are determined as organizational, mentor, supporting emotional environment creation, partnership with the university and choice of future employees. The data statistical analysis shows a low degree of coordination / $W = 0.008$ / in the given answers;
- as more significant among the training teacher's functions are the following: give pedagogical and methodical directions to the trainee teacher; support him emotionally and personally; assist the communication between the trainee teacher and the pupils and their parents; correct et evaluate the trainee teacher's activity / $W=0.57$ /;
- the most important factors for the successful realization of the interaction between the mentor and the trainee teacher are the following: the team work capacity, the educational environment, the academic preparation of the mentor and the trainee teacher; the communication skills of the mentor and the trainee teacher / $W=0.13$ /;
- the main factors for the mentor's successful professional activity are defined by the inquired persons as follows: the practical preparation, the communication preparation, the team work preparation and the theoretical preparation;
- the self-evaluation analysis of the mentor-teachers' satisfaction level of the work with the trainee teachers shows the following results: 36% of the inquired persons indicate the level 3 according to the scale from 1 to 5; 46% - 4 and 18% - 5;

- the self-evaluation analysis of the mentor-teachers' satisfaction level of the work with the academic teachers according to the scale from 1 to 5 shows the following results: 18% - 4; 82% - 5;
- the analysis of the level of the personal satisfaction and professional development of the activity of the inquired person as a mentor shows the following results: 27% - 3; 27% - 4 and 46% - 5.

4. Discussion

The inquiry investigation as well as the interviews made with the mentor-teachers /with an average stage of 7 years as mentors/ direct to the following ideas concerning the updating of the form and the content of the practical training.

First: development of stable relations with the base elements of the practical preparation by enriching the interaction forms:

Attracting directors of the base elements and mentor-teachers as guest-teachers in the Faculty of Pedagogy in order to realize the practical training.

Attracting directors of the base elements and mentor-teachers in author's, scholar and scientific projects including those for the educational scientific degree of Doctor.

These forms of attracting in the whole academic process represent also an indirect support and stimulation for the partners' organizations to become more dynamical and more adaptive scholar organizations namely by their role of practical training elements.

Second: Diversification of the practical training environment

Complementation of the *formal supporting environment* of observation, current practice and before diploma practice/stage in an *informal environment* – attracting of new non-governmental civil structures which have a relevant object of activity similar to the educational qualifications for practical training, stimulation of the students' initiatives. The combining of the formal and informal environment and the students' independent preparation for practical training creates conditions for a variety which is one of the indexes of the quality and efficiency management of the observation, the current practice and the before diploma practice in order to improve continuously and maintain stably the high quality and efficiency. The practical training quality improvement signifies also a guarantee for an open and constant access of the students not only to the professional and practical knowledge, skills and competences but also to the acquisition of *worldly knowledge* with a view to their actual and future different social roles. The part of the students who carry out their before diploma practice in kindergartens and schools in their native places and in Bulgarian schools abroad, increases.

Third: Integration and interactive methods use as well as methods and strategies based on the information and communication technologies. This innovative trend in the practical training is not only and solely induced by the necessity of harmonizing with the new trends in general in the context of the main European and national documents and practices. The *virtual environment* creation for a high quality practical training paralleled and/or integrated with the objectively real environment based on the *eLearning* concept is generated also by the real penetration of the information and communication technologies in the education process strategies. Most part of the facilities of the Faculty of Pedagogy of the Trakia University work already partially in a virtual and electronic environment – virtual class room etc. The trend to create short *video-clips* of fragments of the students' current and before diploma practices is close by its technical parameters. Besides the direct service of the practical education quality management, all this strengthens the development and practical character of the lecture and seminar part of the students' training. This form provides an optimal relation between the students' theoretical and practical training.

Fourth: The innovative potential is in the *self-evaluation and evaluation of the student's achievements* in his current practical training and his before diploma practice by a way providing a direct relation with the state practical exam. For this purpose, besides the innovation of the evaluation of the students' scholar achievements in the practical training it is necessary to give a new meaning also to

the format of the state exams, including the state theoretical oral examination. A useful practical instrument is also the student's portfolio.

Fifth: The next dimension of the practical training quality management puts the accent on the *relative part of the students' investigation activities* especially in the Master education and qualification degree. This direction coincides with the main documents of the European Commission and their national equivalents – provoking the interest and including more students in the scientific and research projects.

5. Conclusions

- The mentor-teachers support the up-dating of the students' practical training putting the accent on the activity and the motivation of the trainee teachers.
- During the interaction mentor-teacher – trainee teacher – academic teacher the contemporaneous trends concerning the mobility, variety and dynamics of the education environment conditions are manifested in unison with the quality requirements.
- An important result of the study is the positive attitudes of the mentor- teachers toward the partnership with the higher school in the context of the whole life learning and their own professional development.

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