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Pedagogy of diversity in teacher training

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Abstract

The present work outlines a series of arguments that support the need for awareness and involvement of teacher trainers in the development of competences for diversity from the stage of initial training. The work also proposes an analysis of knowledge, skills, attitudes of a cognitive, social, emotional nature, self-knowledge capacities, ethical values, etc. as structured ensembles that can be dynamically trained for the purpose of training and developing the competences for diversity of teachers. A sequential presentation of the Professional Standards for teachers from Romania, Great Britain, Australia and France from the perspective of diversity and inclusion offers some benchmarks for an educational practice that promotes equal opportunities for education and development of all children, regardless of differences in the socio-economic status, language, culture/personality, race/ethnicity, religion, abilities or disabilities, learning styles, aspects of personality etc. that differentiate them.

Keywords: diversity pedagogy, teacher training, competence for diversity.

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On diversity and teachers' diversity competence

Diversity in student classes is a reality that we cannot dispute and which, perhaps for too long, has not been given due attention by specialists - researchers, theorists, practitioners alike, to shed light on its positive impact on training and development, but also the risks it can induce in the same process, if teachers do not have the specific skills.

In this regard, we recall the work of Gert Biesta - *The beautiful risk of education* - (what a spectacular juxtaposition of terms!) in which the author emphasizes the idea of the need to value diversity in school: he does not focus on the risks that would lead to failure in education - as the lack of methodical training of the teacher or the failure determined by the fact that education is not carried out according to the latest data of science, but subjects attention to one of the most difficult aspects to control in the educational space, which outlines a certain vulnerability of education - that of human encounter. The author supports the idea that in education we cannot eliminate all risks, but those that come from human diversity, from human relationships, are the most complex and, fortunately, give beauty to education.

Each child is unique and valuable, has needs/interests/values that differentiate him from others, has his own pace of development, a different potential for learning, has a personal way of communicating/responding to challenges. „Children go through similar stages of development, but at different rates. We should not expect all children to reach the same standards at the same time or at the same level of performance." (Ionescu, 2010). Also, the uniqueness of the child is closely related to the multiple areas that diversity can cover - from gender, socio-economic status, language, culture/personality, race/ethnicity, religion, abilities, learning styles or disabilities etc.

On the one hand, we can talk about diversity from the perspective of its many benefits, and on the other hand from the perspective of the difficulties faced by teachers who lack diversity skills in the classroom.

But what is diversity competency? It is the competence to work with different students (coming from different backgrounds,

cultures, holding different values and beliefs, etc.), to manage complexity and value diversity in multiple educational contexts.

Diversity competency „includes the knowledge and the skills to appreciate unique individual, group, and organizational characteristics, embrace such characteristics as potential sources of strength, and appreciate the uniqueness of each." (Cooper, C.D, 2022) We believe that teacher training for diverse and inclusive environments must focus on several essential aspects; among these we dwell on self-knowledge capacities, cognitive and metacognitive capacities, social capacities and ethical competences.

- *Self-knowledge* is an essential process in the formation of competences for diversity. Self-awareness exercises provide a strong self-awareness of one's own norms and values, beliefs, attitudes, experiences, prejudices/right or wrong judgments, etc. what defines their way of thinking, feeling and acting in relation to others (in this case, with children/students). Personal and professional ethos influence how diversity in classrooms is understood. (Jeder, 2014) Self-knowledge, self-reflection, metacognitive capacities, communication and sharing with colleagues and other categories of specialists in the school environment support the process of awareness of the variety and diversity of the children/students on whom the teacher will intervene educationally, but also the awareness of the need for self-regulation in relation to them.

These challenges allow a deeper understanding of the world and the complexity/diversity of living environments, of the uniqueness of the families from which the children/students they educate come from, who define themselves as people through their own unique beliefs, values, and traditions.

The purpose of these trainings is to „develop an understanding of how the dynamics of difference can cause miscommunication, misinterpretation and/or misevaluation of others' behavior and/or affect the learning process. Candidates learn to anticipate possible tensions and conflicts that may develop when dealing with differences in students" (Ryan, Rowan, 2021)

- *The cognitive abilities* of the teacher are also essential in the process of supporting learning for all children/students in the class, regardless of what differentiates them. Training/development of "information processing capacity, critical thinking and problem solving, creativity,

communication, argumentation, reasoning and metacognition" will be pursued (Lakkala S.& Kyrö-Ämmälä, 2021); the future teacher will understand that every child is valuable, that he has needs/interests/values that differentiate him from others, that he has his own pace, a different learning potential, that he has a personal way of communicating/responding to challenges; the ability to know and understand closely the individual/particular needs of each child/student and the ability to intervene promptly, adapted and personalized educationally, to holistically approach educational issues in the context of diversity, the ability to flexibly adapt psycho-pedagogical and didactic strategies, is formed, to transform and adapt flexibly and opportunely the ways of educational work etc.

- *The social capacities* of the future professor are also in the attention of the trainers. It will be aimed to practice effective communication with the children from the heterogeneous groups of the class, but also with their parents/tutors, with the specialists from the multidisciplinary teams (counsellors, psychologists, therapists etc.) The teacher's faith in the children's abilities, in their ability to learn and progress it is the basis of a high-quality education/training. In this context, teachers will „focus on what the child can do and not on what he can't do" (Belonging, Being & Becoming) on establishing high expectations regarding his learning achievements, on building a positive self-image (known as the fact that those who are different generally have low self-confidence), providing confidence, constant feedback and generally using the tools of positive pedagogy.

On the other hand, there is a need for „a reflection on the creation of flexible classrooms sensitive to diversity. Leveled lesson plans are also produced which address the needs of various different groups." (Lakkala S.& Kyrö-Ämmälä, 2021)

-Ethical skills. Competence for diversity is built on the foundation of the ethical dimension. It is ethical values that actually weld knowledge, support appropriate attitudes and energize teachers' skills. Respect for children and their rights, commitment and responsibility, empathy, tolerance, equity are just some of them. (Jeder, 2011, 204).

Competence for diversity in the Professional Standards for Teachers

The need for skills for diversity in the exercise of the teaching profession is explicitly stated at the level of the Professional Standards for the teaching profession.

For illustration, we refer to several education systems that place visibly in the list of basic skills, those for diversity. We are referring here to the Romanian, British, Australian and French systems.

The standards for the teaching profession in Romania indicate that:

„The teaching staff promotes social inclusion by offering all children equal opportunities for development and learning, respecting the values based on human rights, the principles of an open democratic society, promoting tolerance for what is different by respecting diversity:
- Promotes respect for diversity due to gender, race, religion, ethnicity, culture, language, family structure, socio-economic level, age, abilities.
- It proposes activities that capitalize on the diversity of children and families.
- Creates equal development opportunities for children with special educational needs.
- Communicates with all children in a warm, respectful tone that gives confidence, emotional comfort, safety, security.
- Mediates conflicts between children with the aim of promoting understanding, mutual respect, acceptance and respect for diversity."

(Gliga, 2002)

In the British educational system, the *Professional Standards for Teachers Core* level states the following:

Achievement and diversity
Understand how children and young people develop and how the progress, rate of development and well-being of learners are affected by a range of developmental, social, religious, ethnic, cultural and linguistic influences.
Know how to make effective personalised provision for those they teach, including those for whom English is an additional language or who have special educational needs or disabilities, and how to take practical account of diversity and promote equality and inclusion in their teaching.
https://www.rbkc.gov.uk/pdf/standards_core.pdf

In Australin Professional Standards for Teachers, also mentions, the competence for diversity.

„Focus area 1.3 Students with diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds:
- Demonstrate knowledge of teaching strategies that are responsive to the learning strengths and needs of students from diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds.
- Design and implement teaching strategies that are responsive to the learning strengths and needs of students from diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds.
- Support colleagues to develop effective teaching strategies that address the learning strengths and needs of students from diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds.
- Evaluate and revise school learning and teaching programs, using expert and community knowledge and experience, to meet the needs of students with diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds." (https://www.aitsl.edu.au/standards)

In France, „*Référentiel des compétences professionnelles des métiers du professorat et de l'éducation"* refers to student diversity states the following:

"Teachers and educational staff, pedagogues and educators in the service of the success of all students (...)
Consider student diversity
- To adapt their teaching and educational action to the diversity of students.
- Working with resource persons in order to implement the "personalized schooling project" for students with disabilities.
- Detects signs of school dropout to prevent difficult situations." (https://www.education.gouv.fr/bo/13/Hebdo30/MENE1315928A.htm?cid_bo=73066)

Therefore, the attention paid to diversity and competence for diversity in training for the teaching profession is substantial in various education systems; and for that is why teacher training programs must focus on this extremely current and important issue in the context of a complex, extremely diverse world, where change appears as a constant.

Conclusions

Because "teachers in all parts of the world report a lack of confidence in working with learners that they or their communities or employers consider "diverse" and/or "at risk" (Mayer et al. 2017), we can say that training competence for diversity must be seen as a necessity in the teacher training process. Changing the mentality of teachers, opening up to the different, new, otherwise, overcoming stereotypes, prejudices, awareness of one's own implicit attitudes, responsibility for the diversity in student classes, but also diversity in teaching, the rich repertoire of didactic strategies and their adaptation to the styles and the peculiarities of the students, the promotion of multiculturalism, the interaction with all students, regardless of what differentiates them etc. are appropriate strategies for building diversity competence.

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****Australian Professional Standards for Teachers*
https://www.aitsl.edu.au/standards

***Belonging, Being & Becomingthe. Early years learning framework for Australia.

***Professional Standards for Teachers Core. (in England) https://www.rbkc.gov.uk/pdf/standards_core.pdf

***Référentiel des compétences professionnelles des métiers du professorat et de l'éducation
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***Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture, UNESCO https://www.coe.int/en/web/reference-framework-of-