

THE EFFICIENCY OF TEACHING ACTIVITY THROUGH REFLECTIVE PRACTICE*

Emil LAZĂR¹

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Abstract

Reflective practice is a valuable resource, still underexploited, which can bring important benefits to the teacher and, implicitly, to the pupils, ensuring school success and, subsequently, professional and social.

Reflective action involves the desire to engage in self-assessment and self-development, which must become constants of the professional practice of the teacher.

It also requires flexibility from teachers, rigorous analysis and awareness of the impact and effectiveness of their own work in relation to the specifics and beneficiaries of its work, students.

This study is about teachers' awareness of the fact that the continuous improvement of the quality of the educational process involves, first of all, reflection on it. Reflective practice should become an intrinsic component of educational practices, a situation that requires the instrumentality of teachers with a set of knowledge and skills necessary for this endeavour, but also the development of a set of tools to assess the impact of the activity of didactic staff on the learning carried out by students, as an expression of its effectiveness.

This research investigates respondents' opinions on the importance of knowing their own impact of teaching on school progress and student learning and aims to identify tools for measuring/ assessing the impact of teachers' activity on pupils and developing transversal skills on improving professional performance, self-control and reflective analysis of their own activity.

Key words: *Reflective practice; Tools; Measuring the impact of teachers' activity on pupils.*

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¹ Senior Lecturer, PhD, Teachers Training Department, University of Craiova, Romania, e-mail address: lazaremile@gmail.com

1. A culture of practice and reflective research in the teaching profession

Beyond initial and continuous training for the teaching profession, teachers must understand that the efficiency of the teaching activity necessarily involves reflection on it.

Each teacher wondered, and not only once, in various situations of professional activity, what is the effectiveness, the impact of his pedagogical intervention on the school progress of the students.

Numerous studies and reports carried out in recent years indicate a clear decline regarding teaching skills and attractiveness of this profession, correlated with shortcomings in teacher training. In this respect, the European Commission's recommendations concern both initial and continuing teacher training and stress the importance of promoting policies to all Member States focused on a culture of practice and reflective research in the teaching profession, (European Commission, 2007, p. 56).

R. Marzano (2015, p. 19) shows how a teacher can establish educational objectives and assumptions about them, monitor the school progress of students, increase their involvement in the learning process by establishing rules and procedures in the classroom and respecting them, establishing cooperative relationships between students, communicating high expectations, help to acquire new knowledge (objective, external logical knowledge), to deepen it and to test hypotheses about new concepts, through self-control, self-appreciation of one's own cognition (subjective knowledge, internal perceptions, one's own experience).

In this respect, the teacher continuously monitors, evaluates and reconsiders his own educational practices, proves knowledge and use of methods of conducting research-action in the class of students, in order to optimize his own teaching style and responsibility, openness and full involvement in the activity, dialog with other teachers on the different learning contexts they offer to students.

The teacher's reflection on his/ her own activity is a set of metacompetences, closely related to the skills profile acquired through initial training, based on values, expectations, contexts in which he carries out his activity, value judgments, knowledge and professional skills of the teacher.

Teacher's reflective practice represents a conscious, deep, assumed, responsible analysis of the teaching activity, during and at the end of it, followed by the adoption of informed decisions regarding its control and adjustment, in order to achieve the proposed educational objectives.

From these perspectives, the teacher's reflective practice is not an easy approach, but, on the contrary, a complex one, that engages all teacher's resources – cognitive, methodological, emotional, etc. - in order to improving his own teaching activity, with beneficial effects on the learning process and its results.

In order to become a reflective practitioner, the teacher has to get involved in a step-by-step approach and use specific methods and tools.

Reflection on one's own activity is a necessary skill for a teaching activity and essential for a teacher's professional development.

The most important factor of a high-performing school is the effective type of teacher, which could have a significant influence on students' learning. And that's why the question: How could we recognize a qualitative teaching act and what are the tools used in this assessment?

J. Hattie, (2014, p. 36) considers that the most suitable answer is that the most effective way of thinking about the role of teachers is for teachers to perceive themselves as evaluators of their own impact on students. That is, to have a system of thought appropriate to the impact they wish to have on student learning and the possibility of „seeing and evaluating this impact”, (Hattie, 2014, p. 41).

The way teachers reflect on their role in achieving student learning „can produce high levels of collaboration, trust and commitment to assess effects on students”, (Hattie, 2014, pp. 343-344).

What is to be looked for within present context is the assessment of the nature of teachers' thinking about the impact on students' learning, which must be significant. This is a reflective practice based on professional and personal control grids.

2. Research on the capacity of reflective analysis of teachers on teaching activity and tools for measuring its impact on school progress of students

We are talking about the reflection on the teachers' own activity, on the impact of the teacher's involvement on the students' learning, about the tools they use to realize this reflection. The teachers' reflexive practice (a skill as part of a set of competencies relevant to the teaching profession) is a tool to assess the impact of their work on the school progress of students.

Therefore, **the aim of this research** is to identify the respondents' views on reflective practice, as an expression of the capacity for reflective analysis, self-assessment and self-control over teaching activity, its contribution to the development of teachers' professional skills, to the key European competences developed with priority among pupils (as an expression of the educational objectives of the discipline), to the benefits of reflective practice from a personal and professional perspective and of students, to the importance of knowing their own impact on school progress and student learning, to the tools for measuring/ assessing the impact of teachers' work on pupils.

In this regard, **objectives** have been formulated, as procedural steps/ steps to achieve the research goal:

- Gathering, processing and analyzing information on teachers' reflective practice, as an expression of their capacity for reflective analysis, self-assessment and self-control over teaching activity;
- Investigating respondents' opinions on the importance of knowing their own impact of teaching on school progress and student learning;
- Identifying tools for measuring/ assessing the impact of teachers' activity on pupils and developing transversal skills on improving professional performance, self-control and reflective analysis of their own activity;

The general hypothesis of the research is:

Teachers' reflective practice strongly contributes to the assessment of the impact of teachers' work on pupils' learning and the teacher's reflection on its role and teaching activity greatly influences student's school progress.

In this investigative approach, the examination based on the research questionnaire was used as a quantitative method.

The questionnaire-based investigation complied with the specific methodology and the applicability criteria. The questionnaire was developed in omnibus type, aiming at researching several topics (reflective practice of teachers, knowledge of the teaching impact on school progress and student learning, key European competences developed with priority among students, the usefulness of respondents' participation in a training program aimed at developing transversal skills on improving professional performance, self-control and reflective analysis of their own activity).

The questionnaire applied to the 272 teachers from school units in Bacău county included 12 items (8 with predefined answers and 4 items with open answers).

We believe that the sample meets characteristics similar to the populations from which it was extracted, both in terms of educational establishments and their managers, so it can be said that we have *representativeness* through the chosen sample and that it is statistically significant.

The sample to which the opinion questionnaire was applied had the following characteristics:

- By the level of the pre-university education unit, 39 of the respondents (14%) work at the pre-school level, 84 (31%) at the primary level, 93 respondents (34%) at the secondary level and 56 respondents (21%) at the high school level.

- By the residence environment of the school unit in which you operate, 39 of the respondents (14%) carry out their activity at the pre-school level, 84 (31%) at the primary level. 34%, representing 93 respondents, out of a total of 272, carry out teaching activity at secondary level and 56 (21%) at high school level.

- According to the curriculum areas, the respondents teach as follows: 44% represent the 121 teachers who answered the questions in the questionnaire and who teach subjects in the curricular area „Language and communication”; 38 of the respondents (14%) teach subjects in the curricular area „Mathematics and Natural sciences”; The curricular area „Man and society” is represented by 29 respondents, that is 11% of all;

For the other curricular areas, the percentages are below 10%, as follows:

- „Advice and guidance” – 24 respondents (9%);
- „Technologies” – 20 respondents (7%);
- „Physical Education and Sport” – 11 respondents (4%);
- „Arts” – 7 respondents (3%);

Primary education is represented by only 16 respondents (6%) and pre-school education by 6 (2%). This small number can be justified by the fact that most teachers and educators have higher education, choosing to select the curricular area belonging to the bachelor field.

▪ According to the didactic degree, the respondents present themselves as follows: 40 respondents (14,70%) have achieved completion in education, 42 (15,44%) have didactic grade II, and 188 (69,11%) didactic grade I. Only 2 respondents (0,73%) completed their PhD.

The main profile of the respondents may be composed/ designed as follows: Teaching staff from the pre-university education unit of the state, from the urban environment, of the secondary level, with the first didactic degree, who teaches a discipline within the curricular area language and communication. He is an experienced respondent at the department, knowledgeable of educational practice.

The replies to the questionnaire items revealed the following points of view:

➤ The prevailing opinion on reflective practice, as an expression of the capacity for reflective analysis, self-assessment and self-control over the teaching activity carried out, refers to *self-assessment/ self-analysis (58 respondents)*, *the ability to reflect on one's own actions (36 respondents)*, *a phenomenon that requires time and needs to be pursued (24 respondents)*, *complex, creative, modern activity (22 respondents)*, *research-action, analysis, reflection, interpretation, professionalism (20 respondents)*.

The following answers are also valuable: *useful, beneficial activity, efficiency, proficiency (2 respondents)*, *permanent awareness of the activity with students (9 respondents)*, *a good tool (4 respondents)*, *the ability to modify and adapt methods (11 respondents)*, *critical thinking, self-criticism, reflective journal (7 respondents)*.

At the opposite pole of opinions is *scepticism (1 respondent)* (Table 1):

Table 1. The answers to point 1

- do not respond/ they have' heard about this concept
 - the ability to reflect on one's own person and actions
 - complex, creative, modern activity
 - self - assessment/ self-analysis
 - useful/ beneficial/ efficient - efficiency/ streamline
 - a phenomenon that needs time and has to be observed and sustained by a mentor, to guide, to supervise
 - permanent awareness of teaching activity, critical thinking, permanent understanding and analysis of the teaching action
 - feedback
 - professionalism/ part of the competency profile
 - research - action, analysis, reflection, interpretation to produce change at personal level or in school
 - general education
 - assessment
 - a required practice for the permanent development of teaching
 - implementation of the results of the reflexive analysis of one's own activity
 - the ability to interact and communicate with social and pedagogical environment
 - analysis/ to analyze
 - practice that transforms behaviors/ shapes and develops skills/ abilities/ critical thinking/ self-evaluation
 - ongoing learning/ adjustment, intensive/ thorough study
 - a good tool/ an interesting practice
 - contributes to an efficient management of the problems that occur during planning
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➤ **At item 2, to what extent do you consider that reflective practice contributes to the development of teachers' professional skills?**, 89 of the respondents (33%) considered that reflective practice contributes to the development of teachers' professional skills to a very large extent; 164 respondents (60%) responded to a large extent; for 4 of the respondents (1%) reflective practice contributes to the development of teachers' professional skills to a small extent, and 15 respondents (6%) considered that reflective practice contributes to the development of teachers' professional skills at a moderate level.

➤ **At item 3, from the perspective of the taught discipline, what are the key European competences that you think you can develop at your students?**, the respondents considered that, from the perspective of the discipline they teach, they manage to develop the following key European competences: 225 respondents (83%) - personal, social and learning skills; 151 respondents (56%) - cultural awareness and expression skills; 128 respondents (47%) - literacy skills; 121 respondents (45%) - citizenship skills; 114 respondents (42%) - digital skills; 89 respondents (33%) - skills in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM); 64 respondents (24%) - multilingual skills; 61 respondents (22%) - entrepreneurial skills.

➤ **At item 4, while teaching, do you pay special attention to the training and development of skills in students?** the participants in the study replied: *To a very large extent* – 162 respondents (59%), *to a large extent* – 108 respondents (40%), *to a moderate extent* – 2 respondents (1%), *to a small extent* – no respondents (0%), respectively *not at all* – no respondents (0%).

➤ **At item 5, during teaching activity, do you pay attention mainly to delivering information to students?** the participants in the study replied: *To a very large extent* – 88 respondents (32%), *to a large extent* – 104 respondents (38%), *to a moderate extent* – 75 respondents (28%), *to a small extent* – 5 respondents (2%), *not at all* – no respondents (0%).

➤ **At item 6, choose from the list below 3 benefits of reflective practice:** respondents considered school progress of pupils – 165 respondents (61%); teaching improvement – 149 respondents (55%); awareness of personal values – 123 respondents (45%); change management at personal level – 107 respondents (39,33%); turning into a critical thinker – 106 respondents (38,97%); advanced problem-solving skills – 89 respondents (33%); improved organizational skills – 87 respondents (32%).

➤ **At item 7, to the question about the importance of ones knowing the impact of teaching activity on students' learning and school progress, you answered with ...?**, respondents considered this aspect very important – 173 respondents (63,60%), important – 94 respondents (34,55%), moderately important – 3 respondents (1,10%), for 1 respondents (0,36%), knowledge of the impact of their activity on learning and school progress is of little importance, and for another respondent (0,36%), knowledge of this impact is the least important.

➤ **At item 8, „name 3 types of tools you use to measure the impact of your teaching activity on the students”**,

- 155 respondents (56,98%) mentioned their assessment through *evaluation sheets, oral/written samples and evaluation tests*;

- 122 of the respondents (44,85%) mentioned *the questionnaire* or its forms: satisfaction questionnaire, feedback questionnaire;

- 96 respondents (35,29%) use *traditional methods and tools*: conversation/dialog, systematic monitoring/observation, applications, exercise, worksheets, explanation etc.

Along with the three instruments, respondents also mentioned:

- 75 respondents (27,57%) use *complementary and modern methods and tools*: debate, diagrams/schemes, essay, play, learning through technology, case study, etc.

- 48 respondents (17,64%) mentioned *portfolio* as a commonly used tool for measuring the impact of the teaching activity on students;

- 27 respondents (9,92%) considered that *deliberation/ reflection* on what is happening in the classroom in order to identify the good aspects and those that need to be remedied is the tool used to measure the impact of the teaching activity carried out on pupils;

- 27 respondents (9,92%) mentioned the projects method (thematic, educational);

- for 19 respondents (6,98%), the *activities, works, practical and melodic applications* are the tools used to measure the impact of the didactic activity on pupils;

- 18 respondents (6,61%) have taken *self-assessment* into consideration;

- 18 respondents (6,61%) considered representative for measuring this impact, students' *degree of interest and participation in activities, the initiative and the empathic attitude* they show during teaching activities.

At the opposite end, with a percentage of less than 5%, we can find:

- 13 respondents (4,77%) replied that the tools used to measure the impact of the teaching activity carried out on students are those aimed at *organizational, planning, coordination and collaboration skills*;

- 13 respondents (4,77%) considered that *generating a relevant content, creativity and personalized learning* are the right tools with positive impact on teaching activity, and, in order to achieve this, 2 respondents mentioned *teachers' continuous training, professional development through teaching degrees* as very important;

- 12 respondents (4,41%) considered the way students *learn and their learning experiences*, which aim at *an observable school progress*, and 24 of the respondents (8,82%) mentioned this progress as the tool that best measures the impact of teacher's activity;

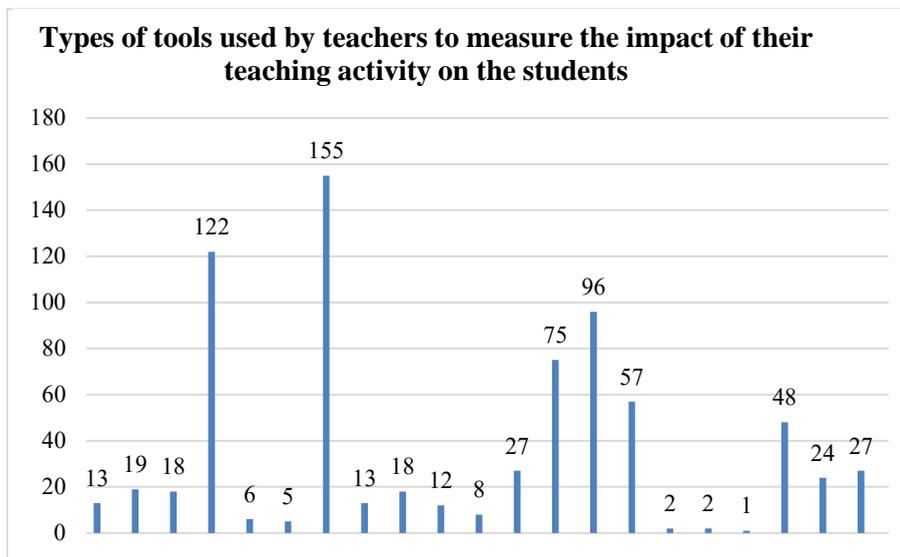
- for 8 respondents (2,94%) *measuring psychomotor skills, intelligence and skills* using *tests* (personality, intelligence, etc.) is the right tool to get feedback on the impact the activity has on students.

- 6 respondents (2,20%) mentioned *communication* or its forms: verbal, nonverbal communication;

- 5 respondents (1,83%) use tools specific to *student-centred education/inclusive education*, and

- 57 respondents (20,95%) did not answer this question, (Figure 1):

Figure 1. The answers to item 8



3. The conclusions of the research

The answers provided by the respondents prove all meanings they give to the concept of *reflective practice*: from the reflection of the teacher so as to adopt a critical position or a critical attitude toward his own practice and that of his peers, engaging in a process of adaptation and permanent learning, to the self-assessment of the teaching activity, from „*What did I intend to do during the lesson?*” „*What have I accomplished?*” „*How can I improve my performance?*” to „*Knowing how to evaluate the quality of the teaching act, from the perspective of modern didactics*”, from the reflection before, during and after the teaching act, in order to realize to what extent, the teacher, the context, influences the students’ learning process in analyzing their own impact on the results obtained by the students.

Thus, there can be identified constants such as: *teacher reflection, critical attitude toward one’s own practice, adaptation and ongoing learning process, self-assessment, influence of the student’s learning process.*

These constants correlate with the fact that *reflective practice contributes to a very large extent to the development of teachers’ professional skills.*

From the perspective of the taught discipline, among the categories of competences, *personal, social and learning skills* included in the school curricula are developed as a priority. In conjunction with similar responses, *cultural awareness and expression skills, literacy skills, citizenship skills*, can be interpreted as *critical appreciation of one’s own resources, codes of behavior, constructive communication, expression and understanding of different points of view, proactivity, motivation and determination to achieve ones goals, seeking*

opportunities for education and career, acquiring literacy – writing, reading, numeracy, ICT – required for learning, managing one’s own learning, critical reflection on learning goals and targets, motivation to continue learning (European key competences description, Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the European Commission, 2006/962/EC, p. 23).

From this we can understand the preponderance of the teacher’s concerns for selecting the categories of competences from curricula that aim at *critically appreciating their own resources, proactivity, motivation and determination to achieve their objectives, critical reflection on learning goals and targets* in relation to the students.

This is because the respondents *pay very high attention to the training and the development of student’s skills*, mainly to *the transfer of information* during their didactic activity.

Previous assessments can be understood according to *the benefits achieved by the practice of teacher reflection on their own activity*: school progress of students, improvement of teaching, awareness of personal values, change management at personal level, transformation into critical thinker, advanced problem-solving skills, improved organizational skills.

These benefits aimed both *teachers’ and students’ perspectives*. Thus, addressing the issue of the impact of teacher’s activity on the pupils’ school progress is a benefit for both categories involved in the teaching process: teachers and pupils.

Knowing the impact of the teaching activity on students’ learning and school progress, is *a very important aspect for the respondents*. This kind of impact is measured and appreciated through/ with traditional assessment tools: *assessment report, oral/written samples and assessment tests, satisfaction questionnaire, feedback questionnaire, conversation/ dialog, systematic observation/monitoring, applications, exercise, worksheets, explanation*, but also through complementary and modern methods and tools: *debate, diagrams/ schemes, essay, play, learning through technology, case study, portfolio, project method*, but also through *the degree of interest and participation in activities of students, the initiative and the empathic attitude* they demonstrate during their teaching activities, *the measurement of psychomotoric skills, intelligence and skills*, using tests (personality, intelligence, etc.).

A small group of respondents mentioned that *reflection/ pondering* over what is happening in the classroom in order to identify positive aspects and those that need to be remedied, is the tool used to measure the impact of the teaching activity carried out on pupils (about 10%).

This percentage should be understood in association with the act of *generating relevant content, creativity and learning personalization* (about 6%), *continuous training of teachers, professional development through teaching degrees*, as being very important.

The analysis response percentages reveal the *little use of teacher’s reflection on their own activity as a tool for assessing the impact of the didactic approach on the school progress of students*.

The answers provided to the questionnaire items have identified the *next directions study*:

- It is necessary to present the *concepts specific to reflective practice, metacognitive self-control skills and reflective analysis of one's own activity* in order to improve teachers' professional performance;

- Teachers know theoretical aspects, but they need practical-applicative approaches *adjusted to competences from curricula*;

- There are different levels of understandings of teacher reflective practice as an expression of the impact assessment on student learning and on their own effectiveness, as there are many tools to assess this impact; this is why *it is necessary to be developed an integrative model of good practices for assessing the impact of teachers' work related to students' school progress, for a common understanding of the meaning given to the concept of impact on learning, to present tools for measuring/ appreciating this impact*;

- We can observe the presence of metacognitive skills for reflection on the teachers' own activity; but it is necessary *to define the benefit of reflection tools on their own teaching activity* and to integrate them for improving their professional activity;

- Moreover, during the period of suspension of face-to-face school, according to the studies carried out during the pandemic, the teachers encountered important difficulties from a professional perspective: using online platform facilities to reconfigure learning units in a virtual environment, organizing interactions with students, ensuring a good balance between synchronous and asynchronous online activities. Here, the capacity for reflection can streamline the work of teachers by assessing its impact on students.

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