

**ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT SITUATION IN
ASSESSING TEACHERS' COMPETENCES UPON
COMPLETION OF ACCREDITED IN-SERVICE TEACHER
TRAINING PROGRAMS IN ROMANIA**

REPORT

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I. Introduction

In December 2009-June 2010, the Romanian Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking Association (RWCT Romania) implements the project entitled *Promoting authentic assessment in the Romanian in-service teacher training system*. The project is supported by the Foundation Open Society Institute (Zug).

The goal of the project is to promote an innovative assessment policy in the Romanian in-service teacher training system. This new assessment policy should ensure a significant positive impact of the training programs on the community of learners the trainee teachers work in. The innovative element that we plan to promote is *focus on authenticity of assessment* by the inclusion of *action research* as a recommended dimension in the trainees' learning process, and as a premise of improvement of the performance targeted in the training programs. Furthermore, by including action research in the training process the training program providers obtain information about the impact of their training program.

The objectives of the above-named project are to make policy recommendations to the Romanian National Center for Teachers' In-Service Training [*Centrul National pentru Formarea Personalului din Invatamantul Preuniversitar - CNFP*] based on an analysis of the current situation in the field of assessment of teachers' competences targeted in accredited training programs, as well as the findings from testing the approach based on including an action research dimension in the training programs.

II. Analysis of the current situation in assessing teachers' competences

II.1. Objectives

The first part of the project included carrying out *an analysis of the current situation in the field of assessment of teachers' competences targeted in accredited training programs*.

The *objectives* of the analysis were:

- To analyze policy documents with reference to the assessment of teachers' competences developed in the course of in-service teacher training programs in Romania in order to identify the expectations of the in-service training system in this respect;
- To describe the current practices in assessment used by accredited teacher-training providers in Romania.

II.2. Methodology

The *methods of investigation* we employed included:

- document review,
- primary data collection by means of focus group and survey.

II.2.1. Document review

In order to analyze the policy documents with reference to the assessment of teachers' competences developed in the course of participation in in-service teacher training programs in Romania, and to identify the expectations of the in-service training system vis-a-vis assessment of teachers' competences, we reviewed legal documents that regulate the activities of CNFP¹, as well as publications and reports published within European Union-funded projects whose beneficiary was CNFP.

¹ The Romanian National Center for the In-Service Training of Schools Staff in the Pre-University Education System.

The list of document we analyzed in order to locate information about methods of competence assessment employed in in-service teacher training programs in Romania included:

1. * * * Metodologia de acreditare a programelor de formare continuă a personalului din învățământul preuniversitar, Anexa la OMEC 4611 / 2005 [Methodology for Accreditation of In-Service Training Programs for Pre-University Staff, Annex to the Order of the Minister of Education and Research no. 4611 / 2005];
2. * * * Ministerul Educației, Cercetării, Tineretului și Sportului, Cabinet Ministru, Ordin privind aprobarea Metodologiei de gestionare și arhivare a “Certificatelor de competențe profesionale ale personalului didactic” și ale “Atestatelor de formare continuă a personalului didactic” nr. 3659/22 aprilie 2010 [Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sport, The Minister’s Cabinet, Order regarding the approval of the Methodology for managing and archiving “Certificates of professional competences of the teaching staff” and of the “Documents attesting continuous development of the teaching staff” no. 3659/22 April 2010];
3. Potolea, D., Toma, S. (2007). Comparative Analysis on In-Service Teacher Training Systems in Europe, Country report – Romania, Technical Assistance to support the National Centre for Staff Training in Pre-University Education Phare Programme, *EuropeAid /121446 /D/SV/RO, WYG International Technical Assistance Team, NCTPE/PIU*
4. Janecke, B. (2007). Competențele profesorilor și ale directorilor de licee din mediul rural din România și din alte state din Uniunea Europeană - analiză comparativă. [Teachers’ and Schools Principals’ Competences in Rural School in Romania and Other States of the European Union – A Comparative View], Technical Assistance to support the National Centre for Staff Training in Pre-University Education Phare Programme, *EuropeAid /121446 /D/SV/RO, WYG International Technical Assistance Team, NCTPE/PIU*
5. Janecke, B., Mykytyn, I. (2007) Sisteme europene de dezvoltare profesională continuă a cadrelor didactice. Analiza comparativă [European Systems of Teachers’ Professional Development. A Comparative Analysis], Atelier Didactic, Bucharest.
6. Kovacs, M., Tirca, A., Iucu, R., Ciolan, L. (2009). Ghidul furnizorului de formare continuă a personalului din învățământul preuniversitar [Guide for In-Service Training of Pre-University Education Staff], produced within the PHARE RO 2006/018-147. 04. 01. 02. 02. 01 project; Technical Assistance for the National Centre for Staff Training in Pre-University Education
7. Tirca, A., Kovacs, M. (2009). Recomandări generale formulate în urma vizitelor de monitorizare a programelor de formare continuă finanțate prin schemele de granturi PHARE 2005 și PHARE 2006, [General Recommendations upon the Completion of Monitoring Visits of the In-Service Training Programs Funded by PHARE 2005 and PHARE 2006 Grants], Technical Assistance for Supporting the Activities of the National Center for Staff Training in Pre-University Education, PHARE RO 2006/018-147. 04. 01. 02. 02.01
8. Ulrich, C., Voicu, B., Potolea, D. (2009). Evaluarea impactului după implementarea programelor de formare continuă în liceele beneficiare de cursuri de formare finanțate prin schemele de grant Phare 2005 și Phare 2006: Studiu de impact, [Impact Evaluation upon the Completion of Training Courses Delivered in Secondary Schools with Assistance from PHARE 2005 and PHARE 2006 Grants: An Impact Study], Atelier Didactic, Bucharest.

II.2.2. Primary data collection

In order to be able to describe the current practices in assessment used by accredited teacher-training providers in Romania, we organized a focus group, and carried out a survey among training providers.

II.2.2.1. Focus group

In order to capture the perspective of the beneficiaries about the current practices in assessing the competences that teachers develop as a result of participating in and successfully completing accredited in-service training programs, on January 31, 2010, we organized a focus group including eight participants, members of the Romanian Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking Association. The issues that were raised for discussion:

- a. "Think about an in-service teacher training program that you participated in, other than the Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking Program. Describe how the participants' learning was assessed upon completion of the course."
- b. "What methods and instruments of assessment were used in this training program?"
- c. "When you choose an in-service teacher training program, what influences your choice? What do you read carefully from the description of the course? What is the first thing you look at in the presentation of an in-service training program that is offered to you?"

II.2.2.2. The survey

Within the survey carried out in February 2010, we asked 22 persons representing a variety of accredited in-service teacher training institutions in Romania² to provide us with information that they found relevant about *the manner in which they carry out the assessment of competences acquired by teachers who complete their training program*.

We addressed the question to 14 managers of Teacher Training Houses situated in different counties and regions of Romania, 4 managers of in-service teacher training

² Accredited in-service teacher training providers in Romania include higher education institutions (public and private); Teacher Training Houses [Casa Corpului Didactic], which are public institutions, based in each county, and private education service providers (not-for-profit non-governmental organizations such as associations and foundations, and businesses).

programs provided by universities (from three different universities), and 4 managers of NGO-provided accredited teacher training programs (from 3 different associations / foundations).

II.3. Findings

We have grouped our findings in the following categories:

1. legal requirements as concerns assessment of competencies;
2. current practices:
 - a. CNFP's perspective;
 - b. the training providers' perspective;
 - c. the training beneficiaries' perspective.

II.3.1. Legal requirements

It is the task of the Specialized Accreditation Commission [Comisia Specializata de Acordare – CSA], which is set up for purposes of program accreditation, in accordance with Order of the Minister of Education and Research no. 4611 / 2005, Chapter I, Article 2 within the CNFP, to “evaluate and monitor the in-service training programs for pre-university staff proposed by training providers”.³ Analysis and evaluation of the documents submitted as part of the proposal for an in-service teacher training program submitted by a training provider are also the task of CSA.⁴ It is this same body that bears the responsibility for appointing one of its members to the final evaluation commission (to serve as an observer) that carries out the final evaluation of the training beneficiaries⁵. We can therefore conclude that from the legal point of view, CSA bears the responsibility for ensuring the quality of the accredited in-service teacher training programs, including the choice for participants' assessment, and overall program evaluation that the training providers carry out.

According to the Methodology for Accreditation of In-Service Training Programs for Pre-University Staff, Annex to the Order of the Minister of Education and Research no. 4611 / 2005, Article 20, letter f), the final evaluation of the beneficiaries of accredited in-

³ Order of the Minister of Education and Research no. 4611 / 2005, Chapter I, Article 3.

⁴ Order of the Minister of Education and Research no. 4611 / 2005, Chapter I, Article 3.

⁵ Order of the Minister of Education and Research no. 4611 / 2005, Chapter I, Article 3.

service training programs is carried out “through public presentation of a project or a topic addressed in the portfolio [prepared by the participant] or of a paper prepared for this purpose.” The portfolio and the presentation are graded separately, as follows: **E** (meaning excellent), **FB** (very good), **B** (good), **S** (sufficient) and **I** (insufficient).

From the template provided by CNFP for the *Minutes of the Final Evaluation Commission*, it can be inferred that judgments on the training beneficiaries’ competences may also be made based on the “debates taking place during the final evaluation session”, which may reflect that “the beneficiaries have acquired thorough understanding of the contents and developed the specific competences in accordance with the objectives of the training program.” Another relevant template provided by CNFP is for the joint *Report on Procedural Findings*, signed by the training program manager and the CNFP / CSA delegate, which allows us to infer that the portfolios of the participants should be evaluated, and the evaluation should inform the decision whether the participant may or may not be enrolled for the final evaluation session. The other templates provided for the providers of accredited in-service training programs allow us to draw the conclusion that the bureaucratic aspect of training course management is thoroughly covered. However, there is hardly any reference to the manner in which the training beneficiaries’ competences should actually be assessed.

II.3.2. Current practices

Information about current practices has been obtained from three sources: document review, focus group and survey. We have taken into account perspectives expressed by CNFP, the training providers and the training beneficiaries.

II.3.2.1. CNFP’s perspective

During the preparation phase of the launch of a nation-wide EU-funded project including the delivery of several in-service training programs for school staff, Janecke, B (2007) reviewed teachers’ and principals’ competences, and emphasizes that as concerns in-service training providers for teachers and other school staff, they should be able to specify the competences that their training programs set out to develop, while the beneficiaries should be able to understand the general and / or specific competences that the program they enroll for aims to develop, as well as the manner in which the

major elements of the content contribute to the development of the aforesaid competences. Moreover, as the development of competences requires well-defined learning processes, the training providers have to select appropriate methods and strategies, and be aware that the quality of individual performance depends largely on the trainees' capacity to incorporate the knowledge and skills acquired during training in the everyday activities to be carried out at the school.

The CNFP-commissioned impact study (Ulrich et al., 2009) carried out upon completion of training programs delivered for staff in secondary schools in rural areas of Romania, with assistance from PHARE 2005 and PHARE 2006 grants, which looked – among others – at the consolidation or development of competences among teachers and school managers as a result of their participation in subsidized training programs, points out an interesting aspect referring to the culture of program and project evaluation in Romania, “the processes and procedures of evaluation in the [Romanian] education system are associated with administrative aspects rather than formative assessment, and self-assessment of individual or organizational learning.”⁶ The same study points out that “the beneficiaries of training programs had the task to prepare and present individual portfolios (for evaluation)”.⁷

The above-named impact study also investigated the beneficiaries' perceptions (self-assessment) of the level of job-related competences which they developed during the training course. Most of the respondents stated that they had already had the competences which the courses aimed to develop, or that the training program helped them further develop those competences.⁸ This finding invites the following speculations: a) the training needs analysis was not conducted carefully enough, b) the training programs enrolled teachers regardless of the findings of the training needs analysis, c) the development of competences was not (self)assessed correctly, d) the respondents do not thoroughly understand what the listed competences mean precisely; e) a combination of at least two or all of the above (a-d).

⁶ Ulrich, C., Voicu, B., Potolea, D. (2009). Evaluarea impactului după implementarea programelor de formare continuă în liceele beneficiare de cursuri de formare finanțate prin schemele de grant Phare 2005 și Phare 2006: Studiu de impact, Atelier Didactic, Bucuresti, p. 11.

⁷ Idem, p. 29

⁸ Idem, p. 32

In another CNFP-commissioned document, Potolea and Toma (2007) look at forms of self-assessment of the training participants, and conclude that this generally targets the perceived usefulness of the training programs, while adding, “As a professional and personal development tool, self-evaluation is more often applied at training activities that take place at school and is usually oral when analyzing the lesson observed by the director, didactic commission, school inspector or by specialized inspection commissions (when trying to obtain the tenure certification or one of the teaching expertise degrees).”⁹ Evidence of the developed competences may be identified by direct observation of lessons taught by teachers who have completed in-service training programs. Observation is generally carried out randomly by the school manager and/or school inspectors, who are responsible for monitoring and recording the impact of training programs.¹⁰

In a set of recommendations offered to training providers, as well as CNFP, at the conclusion of a CNFP-commissioned project¹¹, Tirca *et al* (2009) included the following when referring to assessment:

- All the requirements of the course must be made transparent to the beneficiaries so that they can plan individual paths and take responsibility for their genuine professional development;
- The manner in which the competences acquired by the participants will be assessed must be described in detail. Assessment strategies must be better specified and bear more relevance to the competences that are targeted.
- The structure of the portfolio (prepared for purposes of evaluation) must be presented to the trainees in advance, and sufficient time should be allocated for the trainer and the trainee to discuss the items included in the portfolio in one-on-one sessions;
- The items included in the portfolio should reflect the learning process covered by the trainee and the progress made;

⁹ Potolea, D., Toma, S. (2007). Comparative Analysis on In-Service Teacher Training Systems in Europe, Country report – Romania, Technical Assistance to support the National Centre for Staff Training in Pre-University Education, PHARE Programme, EuropeAid /121446 /D/SV/RO, WYG International Technical Assistance Team, NCTPE/PIU, p. 29-30

¹⁰ Idem, p. 30

¹¹ Technical Assistance for Supporting the Activities of the National Center for Staff Training in Pre-University Education, PHARE RO 2006/018-147. 04. 01. 02. 02.01

- Evaluation methods should be combined in order to ensure validity, objectiveness and diversity of approaches; assessment should make more frequent use of portfolios, individual and group projects, thematic essays, preparation of teaching/learning materials, etc.
- A set of more diverse evaluation methods should be included in the training program so as to cover all the competences developed by the trainees;
- The teaching staff should be encouraged to undertake action-research.

From the above, it can be concluded that although the type of assessment that would clearly reveal the impact of the training programs on teachers' improved competences is desirable, there is no documented practice in this respect included in relevant documents commissioned by CNFP in the last three years. Also, there is no policy paper that would articulate CNFP's position as concerns assessment of the competences developed in school staff continuous professional development programs.

II.3.2.2. The training providers' perspective

We asked 22 training providers to share relevant information about the assessment of teachers' competences developed as a result of participation in training programs offered by the investigated providers. Only four training providers (three Teacher Training House representatives, and one NGO representative) replied to our request.

To gain a more complete image, we carried out a document review process of in-service teacher training curricula that we could locate on the website of training providers. The relevant major findings are:

- a. Training providers encourage the beneficiaries to assess the perceived usefulness of the training program.
- b. Training providers ask school principals to state how they will be monitoring the implementation of the teachers' new learning in their everyday activities in the classroom.
- c. Training providers use a variety of assessment instruments: project work (individual as well as group project), quizzes, portfolios, web-based on-line assessment; essays.
- d. After the completion of each module, the participants are evaluated by the trainers, who assess each participant's level of engagement, the relationships they establish within the group of learners, as well as their understanding and application of the

new concepts. For the final evaluation, the participants are asked to prepare a portfolio to include evidence of activities they conduct in the classroom using the new learning from the training program, which should reflect mastery of the concepts (e.g. new teaching strategies). For a period of minimum two weeks, the participants are assisted by the trainers as they prepare lessons that reflect the new learning, during which time the material for the portfolio is also compiled. These portfolios are then presented in front of the evaluation commission. In relation to this approach to assessment, in one training provider's perspective, some of the shortcomings include:

- The teachers do not have mastery of self-assessment of their competences, nor do they have the culture of thorough preparation for external evaluation. This is related to the fact that in recent practice, attending the final evaluation session has been perceived as a guarantee of obtaining credit.
- There is no or limited guarantee that the portfolios have been compiled by the trainee undergoing assessment.
- There is no observable difference between the performance of a trainee that completed the course and obtained the best or the poorest qualificative (see above or Order of the Minister of Education no. 4611/2005).
- The number of trainees who are evaluated on the same day by the same commission is very high, and therefore the discussion the commission engages the trainee in is superficial.
- The mere submission of the portfolio does not constitute a proof of acquired competences.
- The significance of credit points obtained upon successful completion of a course is very low, which may lead to the trainees' lack of interest in developing competences in this manner.
- The quality of the training programs as stated in the paper documentation submitted to the CSA must overlap with the quality of program delivery. "So far, a number of training programs have been completed only on paper." (NGO training provider representative)
- Assessment of the participants' competences should be done by external or independent evaluators, other than the trainers, following a carefully designed procedure. "CNFP should not engage in evaluation (insufficient staff, potential for

- conflict of interest, lack of competence, etc.) (NGO training provider representative)
- Assessment of competences should be done also a 6-month or 1-year period after the completion of the course. A procedure should be developed by which teachers can demonstrate not only that they have the competence, but also that they use it in the classroom.
 - CNFP and the Ministry of Education should understand that a more rigid piece of legislation and more constraints will not lead to better competence acquisition; the central public institutions should try measures that rely on incentives and flexibility.

II.3.2.3. The training beneficiaries' perspective

We investigated the training beneficiaries' perspective in a focus group that we organized for eight members of the Romanian reading and Writing for Critical Thinking Association. The 8 participants in the focus group had the following profile:

- they came from three different cities of Romania (Cluj, Suceava and Baia Mare);
- one was also a mentor working for a training provider other than RWCT Romania;
- three were RWCT trainers;
- three were recent members of RWCT Romania (having joined less than two months prior to the focus group); four had been members for over 7 years; one had been a member for less than 3 years;
- two were primary school teachers; four were language teachers; one teaches social studies, and one computer sciences and other technical disciplines;
- one person was a deputy school principal, the others did not have school management responsibilities;
- all eight were women;
- All had completed at least one teacher training program other than RWCT in the last two years: an ICT beginners' course and three advanced ICT courses; an entrepreneurial education course; a course on how to evaluate students in national examinations; a course on didactics; a course on communication and leadership; a complex in-service teacher training program (*Magister*); a course

for personal development / self-knowledge; a Train the Trainer course; several short (cca 10-hour training programs).

There was a variety of experiences related to assessment that the respondents shared. The major findings from the focus group are:

- a. When the participants are asked to compile a portfolio and are carefully prepared well in advance how to build it well (in a relevant manner), they find that the portfolio represents the progress they make in developing their competences.
- b. When the trainer carefully monitors the participants' progress and shares her findings with the participants, the participants are more likely to be able to assess their own overall progress.
- c. When the trainer does not share the evaluation criteria with the participants from the very beginning of the course, and generally fails to make evaluation transparent, the participants are not able to assess their own learning or to discuss the competences they may have developed.
- d. Portfolios are a common instrument of assessment used in in-service teacher training programs. However, when the portfolio only includes plans but not evidence of delivery and of students' response to the new input by the teacher, then the development of the teachers' new competences is questionable.
- e. The pieces of evidence included in the teachers' in-service training portfolio are partly prepared in the training workshop. Feedback from peers and from the trainer increase the sense of achievement by the trainee, and help the trainee become more aware of the competences they develop. The absence of feedback causes frustration in the trainees.
- f. Lack of follow-up on training sessions negatively influences competence development. Follow-up is an opportunity for sharing with a wider audience and feedback, which are both essential for competence development.
- g. When the evaluation commission does not engage in meaningful professional discussion with the trainees that are being assessed, it is a frustrating experience for the trainees.
- h. Lecture-type training is inefficient in terms of competence development.
- i. When competences need to be demonstrated during the training program, that is the most effective way of acquiring a new competence.

- j. When beneficiaries of in-service teacher training programs choose a course, they generally look at the title, the trainers' names, whether the course has been accredited, rather than the specific topics or the competences. "Some of the courses have clearly worded competences, but I really doubt whether I will develop them all." (Focus group participant, language teacher).

II.4. Conclusions

- a. In policy documents of the institutions in charge of accrediting and managing in-service training programs for teaching/ school staff, there is little indication of clear awareness that competences can only be developed if there is authentic assessment in place.
- b. Recommendations have been made to the relevant institutions regulating in-service training programs; however, policy-papers are missing in this respect. While there is a great amount of documentation on the bureaucratic aspects of course administration, policy documents that articulate genuine participant assessment (of competences) are missing.
- c. Although the training programs address the development of competences and in the documentation submitted for approval by CNFP aspects related to assessment are covered, assessment in fact focuses on knowledge acquired by the trainees rather than on the competences they developed / mastered as an outcome of the training.
- d. Practice indicates that the training program providers use a variety of assessment instruments, which however do not necessarily ensure a valid and accurate assessment of the competences. The providers encourage school principals to monitor the changes that occur in the classroom as a result of the teachers' participation in training programs, but this does not mean that the principals in fact do it effectively. The lack of a genuine culture of professional development in the schools leaves room for the speculation that this recommendation made by CNFP or the training providers is rarely acted upon. In general, after the evaluation of the trainees, the training providers stop monitoring whether the competences developed by the teachers are actually used in everyday activities.

- e. The participants who are interested in the development of their professional competences feel the need of authentic assessment, and for guidance and feedback upon applying the competences in real classroom situations.
- f. Lack of the authentic assessment of the trainees may lead (in extreme situations) to a number of transferable credit points accumulated by the teachers as a result of completing in-service teacher training without any improvements in the teachers' classroom-based activity.

III. Recommendations

Although it is not the purpose of the present paper¹² to formulate complex recommendations, some emerge logically as a result of the conclusions drawn above:

- CNFP should develop a policy to ensure that authentic assessment is applied in all in-service training programs;
- The concept of authentic assessment should be better anchored in the overall assessment system of teachers' professional performance;
- Authentic assessment should be promoted through direct communication with the trainees, provision of constructive feedback, which contributes directly to the trainees' professional development;
- Training program providers should be supplied with practical solutions how to carry out authentic assessment.

¹² For a more complex set of recommendations, see *Policy recommendations: Promoting authentic assessment in the Romanian in-service teacher training system* (forthcoming).