

Journal Plus Education, ISSN: 1842-077X, E-ISSN (online) 2068 – 1151

Vol. VIII (2012), No. 1

EDUCAȚIA-PLUS
JOURNAL PLUS EDUCATION



Volumul VIII, Nr. 1/ 2012

Journal Plus Education

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JOURNAL PLUS EDUCATION



Volume VIII, No. 1/ 2012

**QUARTERLY JOURNAL, PUBLISHED BY
“AUREL VLAICU” UNIVERSITY, ARAD**

VOLUME VIII, No.1 MAY 2012

Journal Plus Education (JPE) is an official peer-review quarterly journal, issued by the Faculty of Educational Sciences, Psychology and Social Work, “AUREL VLAICU” UNIVERSITY, ARAD, which is also published online.

Journal Plus Education (JPE) is evaluated by CNCSIS IN B+ category (BDI)

http://www.cncsis.ro/userfiles/file/CENAPOSS/Bplus_2011.pdf

Coverage

- ***CNCSIS classification B+ category***
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**EDUCAȚIA-PLUS
JOURNAL PLUS EDUCATION**

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Volumul VIII, Nr. 1/ 2012

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**ISSN: 1842-077X
E- ISSN (online) 2068 – 1151
Editura Universității “AUREL VLAICU”
Arad, 2012**

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PERFORMER-AN AMBITIOUS PROJECT

Gabriela KELEMEN, PhD
University “Aurel Vlaicu” Arad

Abstract: *The Master`s programme called PERFORMER aims at developing competences for the profession of psycho-pedagogue for early education and young learners, so as the educators and teachers to be able to create various learning contexts, very stimulating, adapted to children`s/pupils` individual needs and offering them different options, allowing them to choose among alternative learning occasions and opportunities.*

Keywords: *master`s programme, psycho-pedagogue, professional competences, compatibility*

1. Argument in favour of a new Master`s programme

The contemporary society is confronted with a series of major problems that inevitably affect education. These aspects require the training of specialists able to deal with these issues of a ever-changing society (Antonesei, L., Popa, N.L., Labar, A.V.). The training of specialists in education becomes a must, starting with the pre-schooling period aiming at preventing school failure, school abandonment and assuring the children`s integration in the compulsory educational system. A proper training of future teachers, true professionals in education is required in order to be able to fulfil these tasks. They have to be trained to adapt traditional and modern educational strategies to children`s educational needs and to make them optimal for training (L., Trif, 2010). Therefore, the coherent organization of higher education, according to the Declaration of Bologna, is fulfilled in two cycles that provide the graduates with necessary competences to practice their job. At the graduation of the first cycle of the Faculty of Education Sciences, Psychology and Social Work within Aurel Vlaicu University, Arad the students acquire sufficient competences to practice their job, according to COR for teachers in pre-school and primary school education. Through the Master`s programme PERFORMER, cycle II we try to create a formal framework, based scientifically and with a high applied relevance. Its aim is to develop necessary competences for educational activities at early ages and young pupils, by using activities proper for the age of pupils. The students will develop competences necessary to practice their job as psycho-pedagogues for early education and young learners. So, the master`s degree is proper for the graduates of cycle I of the Faculty of Education Sciences, Psychology and Social Work that wish to develop new competences in the field of early education and young learners.

On a global level, the period of time for early education is from conception to the age of 8. This is the period when the most rapid development of brain takes place, and young learning prolongs to the age of 10. Education in this period of time is very important because if the process is neglected in this stage, it becomes more expensive

and difficult to balance the losses. A better world for children is a world where all children can enjoy childhood – a period dedicated to playing and learning, when children are guided and educated with affection, when their rights are promoted and protected without any discrimination, when their safety and wealth come first, so as to help them develop in harmony and dignity.

Education in these stages involves:

- Assuring a physically and affectively secure environment, stimulative from a cognitive and social point of view for all children, irrespective of their gender, ethical group, religious beliefs;
- Considering age and individual characteristics of children to ensure maximum of development potential in each child;
- Being aware of the importance this stage has for the overall development of a child, and providing quality based educational services.

The need for a master's programme that handles thoroughly the issue of early education and offers new professional competences is determined by the results of scientific research regarding education at the level of early education and young learners.

In childhood the source of learning is the diversity of experiences (cognitive, social, emotional, physical) that the child experiences. That's why it is very important to encourage his natural exploring, experimenting curiosity needs and the desire to communicate and interact. Such a vision on a child modifies also the conception upon the essence of the educational process that has to be viewed as an interaction between subjects, between two active parts. We have to consider the trainee as a partner in his/her own development and to facilitate his learning track. This leads to the need of training teachers that fulfil didactic activities at this age.

2. The characteristics of the Master`s programme PERFORMER

The PERFORMER project – *Perspectives of formation through a master`s programme of specialists in the field of early education and young learners* on a superior quality level, is a project financed by the Social European Fund through Sectorial Operational Programme Human Resources Development 2007 – 2013, priority axis *Education and training in support for growth and development of knowledge based society*, major intervention area, *Quality in superior education*. This project aims at elaborating and implementing a master`s programme that is compatible with the requirements of ARACIS – Romania, ISPEF – Italy and to create a profile of competences for the profession of psycho – pedagogue for early education and young learners. By structuring the PERFORMER master`s programme we will elaborate a profile of competences that the master degree student will acquire throughout his two years of study. So, the master`s degree that we want to implement wants to build up a profile of competences in agreement with ARACIS standards, ISPEF model and PERFORMER structure.

3. Innovative aspects of the project

Fulfilling these standards, we can outline the specific objectives of this master`s programme:

- The extension of fundamental conceptual system specific to early education and young learners and its adjustment to the specifics of preschool and primary school

education in order to achieve a holistic and flexible vision upon the institutionalized educational act at that age;

- Understanding the necessity to approach learning through games, a fundamental activity in childhood, specific way of acquiring knowledge at an early age and passing on to specific learning activities;

- Diversifying competences necessary to carrying out educational activities in different fields of knowledge: language and communication, sciences, as well as to the formation and development of abilities, skills and attitudes towards learning.

- The graduates` ability to successfully implement child/pupil centred educational strategies and to develop the communication and relating abilities of children;

- The graduates` ability to use certain educational practices regarding psycho-pedagogic counselling and solving situations of educational crisis;

- Professionalizing pre-school/ primary school teachers in the field of developing educational projects, educational partnerships and educational marketing so as to involve as many educational factors as possible in children`s education.

- The development of an inter and trans-disciplinary vision of learning at young ages and early education in accordance with the directions of National Curriculum.

4.The fundamental objective of the master`s programme aims at *professionalizing in the field of early education and young learners through the development of a functional system of competences based on knowledge and specific abilities to the field of speciality, as well as the development of a system of attitudes that would allow proper and efficient adaptation to imminent changes in pre-university education, especially pre-school and primary school education.*

The university that develops the programme is “Transilvania” University from Brasov and partners are „1 Decembrie” University from Alba-Iulia, „Aurel Vlaicu” University from Arad and Istituto di Scienze Psicologiche della Educazione e della Formazione Roma (ISPEF), Italy.

The transnational partnership was made in order to make use of the Italian partner`s experience in the field, by adjusting the experience to our conditions and by increasing the quality of curriculum construction. This will lead to the awarding of a certification from ECE (European Center of Education) along with the master`s degree diploma, which is a real gain for master`s students. This certification confers an international acknowledgement of the acquired competences for the graduates of this master`s programme.

The vision of this project involves a new approach to formation based on the four pillars of modern pedagogy: to know, to do, to be and to communicate. Starting from these desiderates, which are considered innovative by the entire academic world, we will try to put them into practice and not use them only theoretically. This way, their usage will bring about the development of creativity and didactic autonomy of trainees. As a consequence, the competences of the master`s programme *Psycho – pedagogy of early education and young learners* have been outlined. The curricular construction is balanced, with six modules a year and 60 credits, containing 24 disciplines and 120 credits. Each semester has type A, B, C and D activities (according to ISPEF):

- Area A of formation of the ISPEF model named *Area Lezioni in Aula e Seminari*;
- Area B of formation – *Apprendimento E-learning e ricerca in internet* (E-learning and internet research);
- Area C of formation – *Stage di sperimentazione et di interveto in ambitoprofessionale* (Experiential strategies and strategies of intervention in the professional environment);
- Area D of formation – *Documentazione et revisione dei percorsi formativi. Stesura della Relazione finale* (Documenting and monitoring of formative paths. Writing of Dissertation).

Regarding the collective learning activities - mainly courses (C) and seminars (S) - Romanian model operates mainly with standards of $2C+1S=3$ hours/week (namely 42 hours per semester) and of $1C+1S=2$ hours/week (namely 28 hours per semester), resulting in an average per semester of *35 hours/discipline*, which at 6 disciplines per semester leads to an average of 210 hours/ semester and 42- hours/year. *The ISPEF Model* operates with an *average per semester of 30 hours/discipline*, which at 6 disciplines per semester leads to an average of 180 hours/ semester and 360 hours/year, namely less than the Romanian model with 30 hours/semester and 60 hours/year. Under these circumstances, the only option to maintain constant the value of credits (expressed in number of hours) is to diminish the number of hours allocated for independent/individual learning activities. The curriculum of the master`s programme abides the modular manner of organization of contents and teaching-learning activities applied by ISPEF. Therefore:

- the study disciplines and the learning activities are grouped in 12 modules (6 modules per year), each module containing two disciplines and being credited with a package of 10 credits; - within each module, the first discipline (scheduled in the first semester) has a highly theoretical character or/and of fundamental training in the field, and the second discipline (scheduled in the second semester) has a practical/applied character; this difference is marked also by the forms of didactic activity, for the first discipline being allocated 2 hours of lecture and one of seminar, and for the second one, only one hour of lecture and 2 hours of seminar.

Professional training was designed as a distinctive module (with distinctive disciplines, normed in the academic curricula), in order to adjust the ISPEF model to internal practices (national), that regulate two hours of training in the didactic norm. This was possible by redistributing certain hours from those comprised in *area C of formation– Stage di sperimentazione et di interveto in ambitoprofessionale* (Experiential stages and stages of intervention in the professional environment).

To follow internal (national) standards that require a minimum number of optional disciplines, We have listed in the curriculum three optional courses (a share of 13,34%) without giving up on any discipline agreed with ISPEF, to follow internal (national) standards that require a minimum number of optional disciplines.

Below, we list the academic curriculum in its current form:

YEAR I

Modules	Disciplines	Discipline's code	I Semester									II Semester									Total/year	No of credits		
			Collective didactic activities				Independent/ individual activities					Total	Collective didactic activities				Independent/ individual activities						Total	
			C	S	LP	Total	B	C	D	Total	C		S	LP	Total	B	C	D	Total					
1. EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY	The advanced study of education in the community	MET1101	14	14	-	28	36	31	30	97	125	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	125	5		
	The educational design in the relationship of the educational institution with the community	MET1201	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	14	28	-	-	42	36	17	30	83	125	125	5	
2. COMMUNICATION AND INTER-PERSONAL RELATIONS	Advanced theories in the psycho-pedagogy of communication	MET1102	28	14	-	42	36	17	30	83	125	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	125	5		
	The handling of the dynamics of interpersonal relations in childhood	MET1202	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	14	14	-	-	28	36	31	30	97	125	125	5	

3. THE METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH IN EDUCATION	The methodology of research and the management of research projects in education	MET1103	28	14	-	42	36	17	30	83	125	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	125	5	
	Methods of quality research	MET1206	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	14	28	-	-	42	36	17	30	83	125	125	5
	Measurement and data analysis	MET1207	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
4. PSYCHOLOGY OF DEVELOPMENT	Thorough studies in the psychology of child and young pupil	MET1104	28	14	-	42	36	17	30	83	125	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	125	5	
	The management of psycho-cognitive processes of learning in childhood	MET1203	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	14	14	-	-	28	36	31	30	97	125	125	5
5. PSYCHO-PEDAGOGIC DEVELOPMENT	The methodology of psycho-pedagogic intervention	MET1105	28	14	-	42	36	17	30	83	125	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	125	5	

	The handling of psycho-pedagogic intervention strategies	MET1204	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	14	28	-	42	36	17	30	83	125	125	5	
6. EDUCATIONAL TRAINING (experiential stages)	Training - Plan of actions with children and pupils	MET1106	-	-	-	14	14	-	-	111	-	111	125	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	125	5
	Training – evaluation and interevaluation of experiential training	MET1205	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	28	28	-	97	-	97	125	125	125	125	5
TOTAL I YEAR			126	70	-14	210	180	210	150	540	750	70	112	-28	210	180	210	150	540	750	1500	60		

YEAR II

Modules	Disciplines	Discipline's code	Semester I										Semester II										Total/year	No of credits	
			Collective didactic activities				Independent/ individual activities				Total	Collective didactic activities				Independent/ individual activities				Total					
			C	S	L	P	Total	B	C	D		Total	C	S	L	P	Total	B	C		D	Total			
1. EDUCATIONAL AND DIDACTIC PLANNING	Educational planning of activities with the group/classroom	MET2101	28	14	-	-	42	36	17	30	83	125	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	125	5
	The management of personalized	MET2201	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	14	14	-	-	28	36	31	30	97	125	125	125	5

	curriculum																						
2. DECIMOLOGY AND EVALUATION	Decimology – comparative perspectives	MET2102	28	14	-	-	42	36	17	30	83	125	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	125	5
	Methods of complex evaluation of child and group/classroom	MET2202	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	14	28	-	-	42	36	17	30	83	125	125
3. PSYCHO-PEDAGOGY OF INTERVENTIONS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION	Planning of interventions in special education	MET2103	14	14	-	-	28	36	31	30	97	125	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	125	5
	Coordination and evaluation of interventions in special education	MET2203	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	14	28	-	-	42	36	17	30	83	125	125
4. SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION AND MANAGEMENT OF QUALITY	Thorough studies in the sociology of education	MET2104	28	14	-	-	42	36	17	30	83	125	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	125	5
	Quality management of educational organizations	MET2204	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	14	28	-	-	42	36	17	30	83	125	125
5. COMPLEMENTARY MODULE OF OPTIONAL DISCIPLINES	The competence profile of educators for children from 0 to 6 years	MET2106	28	14	-	-	42	36	17	30	83	125	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	125	5

We observe that besides courses and seminars in lecture rooms, stress is laid also on individual research, e-learning activities and pedagogical training. The modular curriculum contains 24 syllabi, all elaborated according to ARACIS standards for Romanian accreditation and the same syllabi, elaborated according to ISPEF standards to make them, compatible with international standards. The syllabi were elaborated by teachers nominated by all three partner universities (8-10 teachers from each university) and afterwards reconsidered and improved in a 5 days workshop at “Transilvania” University from Braşov. This meeting between the implementation teams and teachers that will hold lectures and seminars within the master`s programme was of real help. It was a true experience exchange, pointing out the strong points of this master`s programme and contributing to the overcome of difficulties of such an ambitious project. It is desired that all three universities would teach on the same syllabus.

The final product of this master`s programme will consist of 25 master`s graduates in each partner university that will acquire competences for the profession of *psycho – pedagogue for early education and young learners*. At the end of two years of study, the student will obtain his master`s degree if he acquired all credits with the minimal grade 5 (five). The ISPEF certification will be obtained only if all credits were acquired with minimum 7 (seven). Therefore all graduates can obtain the master`s degree with minimum five, but not all can obtain an ISPEF certification. On the other hand, the master`s student with grades 9 and 10 will have the right to publish his dissertation on the web site. The ISPEF certification will be obtained through a strict monitoring of each master`s student that will argument the acquired competences by means of tests, individual portfolios with all papers, projects, maps, etc.

This master`s programme is characterized by some distinctive facts that turn it into an innovative academic model:

- ❖ Courses and seminars in lecture rooms;
- ❖ Learning focused on e-learning system and on-line research;
- ❖ Personalized experimenting and intervention stages;
- ❖ Strict monitoring of activities and products.

5. Professional Competences Aimed By The Master`s Programme Performer

- The planning, fulfilment and evaluation of specific instructive – educational activities from the perspective of integrated learning;
- The planning, implementing, evaluation and coordination of educational projects, specific to early education;
- The planning, elaboration and fulfilment of strategies to facilitate the transition towards school specific learning activities;
- Initiation and revaluation of professional projects as well as of certain innovative projects in the field of early education;
- Psycho-pedagogical counselling of children and parents from the perspective of school and social adaptability.

6. Knowledge

- A thorough knowledge of the problematic of early education and young learners, of the theoretical, methodological and practical developments specific to the programme; the proper usage of psycho-pedagogical language associated to this problematic area.
- competences
- the competence to analyse and interpret the professional standards of *psycho-pedagogue for early education and young learners*
- the competence to analyse, interpret, compare different elements of educational policy with national and/or European character in the field of *psycho-pedagogue for early education and young learners*
- the competence to analyse and interpret different theories and methodological orientations regarding the specific of *early education and young learners*
- the competence to use field related knowledge to explain new situations occurred when fulfilling and affirming *early education and young learners*;
- the competence to use professionally the psycho – pedagogic language associated to planning and fulfilment of *early education and young learners*;
- the competence to convert theoretical knowledge and methodological orientation acquired to plan successful educational activities
- the competence to reflect upon different functions, roles and responsibilities of a *psycho-pedagogue for early education and young learners*

7. Abilities

7.1. The integrated usage of the conceptual and methodological apparatus, with incomplete information, in order to solve new theoretical and practical problems

- The competence to use a rich methodological apparatus to solve creatively different didactic tasks specific to early education and young learners
- The competence to generate in a group of pre-school children, psychological moods favourable to a natural, freely consented learning, without constraints and stress.
- The competence to use the conceptual and methodological apparatus with psycho-pedagogical character to fulfil a complex, multidimensional and integrated education
- The competence to use different pedagogical tools to sustain and promote early education and young learners in the context of a reform in the educational system.

7.2. The proper usage of criteria and methods of evaluation, in order to form valuable judgements and to fundament constructive decisions

- The competence to correlate psychological and pedagogical criteria in evaluation
- The competence to focus on identifying individual development, on product and on the process when evaluating

- The competence to use the results of the evaluation to improve educational processes
- The competence to fundament decisions based on valuable judgements also accepted by other educational factors involved in early education and young learners (family, school, community)

7.3.Elaboration of professional and/or research projects using in an innovative manner quantity and quality methods

- The competence to elaborate research projects with psycho-pedagogical character focused on the investigation and improvement of facts and processes specific to early education and young learners
- The competence to use in an innovative manner the acquired psycho-pedagogical knowledge
- The competence to convert the results of psycho-pedagogical research into successful educational practices.

Conclusions

The master`s programme that we propose has some essential features that turn it into an innovative construction. It fully takes into account the division into semesters, all disciplines and learning activities being structured in semesters. We offer a synthetic, but in the same time complete description of the programme of study, where the disciplines are grouped in the following categories: compulsory, optional, facultative. We have mentioned the number of credited hours for the two main categories of learning activities: collective didactic activities (that require the students 'attendance) and independent/individual learning activities. The profile of all developed competences will allow the graduates to diversify their didactic strategies. They will integrate the most proper didactic strategies in the planned, organized and carried on learning activities with pre-school and young pupils.

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