

Evaluation of the professionalization of the primary teacher in the attention to the diversity of learners

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this article is to present the results of the evaluation of the professionalization of the elementary school teacher as a variable for the professional and human formation in the attention to the diversity of learners present in the classroom; it focuses on the permanent formation as a need for the improvement of the pedagogical professional performance. The studies presented are the result of a doctoral thesis in process, the results obtained from the synthesis analysis, bibliographic studies, interviews and surveys provide the possibility and opportunities for the short, medium and long term transformation of the professional practice of the primary school teacher.

Keywords: Professionalization; Elementary Teacher; Performance Improvement; Elementary Education.

Introduction

The professionalization of elementary school teachers is a high priority in Cuban education today, considering that elementary education is in its third transformation process. It is undeniable that since the revolutionary triumph in 1959, Cuba has created a robust educational system that is admired by many countries.

In order to sustain this educational system, a group of professionals is needed to reach higher and higher levels of teaching professionalization, put into practice in a more efficient pedagogical professional performance, in correspondence with the diversity of students present today in elementary schools.

The topic addressed is of research interest in different spheres (international, national and regional) in which the province of Matanzas is no stranger. The diversity of students with special educational needs associated or not to a disability is becoming more and more present in elementary schools every day, for such reasons, teachers with a professional pedagogical performance more adjusted to the new times are required.

The educational attention to this diversity of learners implies that the current Elementary Education teacher assumes a permanent pedagogical position that includes the cultural, gender, developmental and learning differences of children, adolescents and young people as the basis for increasingly inclusive practices. This is why it is of vital importance to train a more competent elementary teacher, who stimulates and develops the personality in a comprehensive manner, based on a basic and specialized preparation within the framework of the broad profile of the career (Milanés, 2020).

In the case of the Bachelor's Degree in Primary Education, this broad profile currently allows to have a graduate who meets certain requirements to exercise coeducation and work in a school open to diversity, as well as to achieve a differentiated attention to their students, from a basic and specialized preparation, adjusted to the diversity in the classroom, but in many cases this is not achieved in its entirety.

In this sense, it is urgently necessary to achieve a professionalization of the primary teacher in the educational attention to these students, where the education professional develops the necessary skills and abilities to undertake such a complex task.

Development

It is important to recognize the need for the professionalization of elementary school teachers as a response to the achievement of educational attention to the diversity of learners. In search of concreteness and contextualization about the professionalization of the Elementary Education teacher, the studies carried out by international and national authors are systematized, such as: Añorga, (2012), Rodríguez, (2015), Gato and

Madera, (2017) Milián et al., (2017), Martín, A. and García, I (2018), Rivero et al., (2019), Ruíz and Santos de León, (2020) and Enrique et al., (2021).

The aforementioned authors agree in considering the professionalization of the elementary teacher, as a special pedagogical process, which has its genesis in the initial training, goes up to permanent training, is aimed at improving the professional pedagogical performance and has a continuous development, with a humanistic character.

The topic finds continuity in the institutional research project: "The preparation of Elementary Education teachers for the educational inclusion of students with special educational needs in Matanzas province". The inquiries carried out during the study of the topic, allowed the identification of existing limitations in the preparation of the elementary teacher, in relation to the professionalization for the educational attention to the diversity of students present today in the elementary school.

As part of the transformations taking place today in Elementary Education as a result of the ongoing process of improvement, an education professional is needed with certain special knowledge, new modes of action, based on scientific methods, contextualized to the new scenarios represented by the group of learners he/she serves, so that professionalization plays a very important role in this process.

The analysis of the ideas expressed by the aforementioned researchers allows us to determine points of convergence in which professionalization as a process makes possible the design of training processes for professionals under certain practices, in school contexts, which accentuates the dialectic relationship between these contexts and others that oppose each other.

They also value professionalization through three main dimensions: the deep mastery of theoretical knowledge that sustains the profession, a dialectic relationship between thinking and doing, governed by human values, and a solid cognitive independence.

In the same direction, they consider that professionalization as a process should contribute to the formation and development of the professional mode of action, from a solid understanding of the role, tasks and functions, expressed in the characterization of the object, the logic and methods of science, the logic of the profession and a given historical context. This process influences economic growth and material welfare, can help society to identify its problems and potentialities; it contributes to the humanization of the learner and his or her training for the world of work.

As another essential aspect, they emphasize the need for requirements such as: active and conscious attitude to achieve learning goals of the subject in training, practical-research training, training in different scenarios (school and community), self-regulation, linking study with work and theory with practice, among others.

For these authors, the fact of assuming professionalization as a process facilitates the transformation of the problem of the integral formation of the professional, without ignoring the relationship between the scientific-professional and the social conditioning factors, in addition to considering the establishment of didactic models for the teaching-educational process (essential relations, laws, systems of principles). These positions, in relation to professionalization as a process, become a guide to understand the professionalization of elementary teachers.

It is also argued that professionalization, by becoming a way to solve society's problems, acquires three fundamental dimensions: professional mastery of theoretical knowledge, a dialectical relationship between thinking and doing, governed by solid values, as well as a solid cognitive independence, which helps society to identify its needs and potentialities, contributes and facilitates the modeling of the process of training professionals in correspondence with the profile.

This article assumes the idea that the professionalization of the teacher

It is a special pedagogical process, aimed at improving the professional pedagogical performance, based on the diagnosis of their educational needs and potentialities for the appropriation of knowledge, skills, attitudes and pedagogical values that allow them to place themselves at the height of their time and the ever-growing demands of society (Barbón and Añorga, 2017. p.6).

According to Valcárcel et al., (2014), a teacher is considered to have reached high levels of professionalization, when:

- reaffirms himself as the protagonist of the teaching-learning process;
- takes individual and collective responsibility for the needs of the students and the school;
- is able to discuss absolutely in all spaces and contexts about possible solutions to professional problems;
- is able to make timely decisions on the strategies to be adopted in the solution of professional problems;
- becomes a researcher and innovator;

- is capable of self-improvement;
- is able to analyze his or her performance and correct it;
- has a precise and gradual knowledge of the needs of his learners;
- accumulates a great and effective work experience, with an adequate management of the teaching-learning process;
- has a thorough command of the contents of his or her teaching profession;
- identifies at all times and in any context with the teaching profession he/she performs;
- feels and expresses motivation for the work he/she performs;
- is socially recognized by the beneficiaries of his or her professional teaching practice;
- shows a high pedagogical ethic;
- applies the knowledge acquired during the continuing education process in the pedagogical practice.

The evaluation of the professionalization of the elementary teacher for the attention to the diversity of learners present in their classroom, was carried out through indicators determined from those proposed by Valcárcel et al., (2014), for this study a study group was used represented by 24 elementary teachers belonging to different schools in the municipality of Matanzas: (José Antonio Echeverría(6 teachers), Yes For Cuba (15 teachers) and Julián Alemán (3 teachers) who attend a total of 8 learners with special educational needs in the period November 2022 February 2023. The seven indicators determined for this study were the following:

- Control of their own professional training needs
- Mastery of the content of the profession related to special educational needs care
- Accurate and gradual knowledge of the needs of their learners.
- Timely intervention through appropriate strategies for the solution of professional problems.
- Appropriate use of computer and communications media.
- Use of scientific research methods to study the causes of the problems present in their students.
- Participation in scientific events for the socialization of the results of their research.

These indicators were evaluated with the categories **Fully Achieved, Partially Achieved and Not Achieved**. A table was prepared to record the evaluations obtained in each of the indicators by the teachers of the different schools.

Analysis of the behavior of the indicators in the categories that were evaluated to determine the level of professionalization achieved by the elementary teachers in the attention to the diversity of students.

In 9 of the teachers (37.5%), it was evaluated as **Fully Achieved** that they have complete control of the improvement needs in relation to the attention to students with special educational needs, the teachers refer that actions are planned to master the particularities of the students, the design of self-improvement strategies with the objective of improving their professional performance. Seven elementary school teachers are considered as **Not Achieved** (29.1%) and 8 as **Partially Achieved** (33.3%). As a tendency, it is necessary to work in order to achieve a greater self-control of the training needs of elementary teachers in terms of the attention to students with special educational needs.

Referred to the mastery of the content of the profession related to the attention to the educational needs of the learners they serve. This indicator shows that 15 of the teachers (62.5%) report having difficulties in identifying the educational needs of the learners, an issue that makes it very difficult to make decisions in the solution of professional problems, only 9 of the teachers (37.5%) show certain knowledge in relation to the attention to the special educational needs of the learners; for this reason, this indicator is evaluated as **Not Achieved**.

In the indicator "Accurate and gradual knowledge of the needs of their learners" the tendency is in the category of **Not Achieved** in 18 of the teachers for 75% of the sample under study.

Timely intervention through appropriate strategies for the solution of professional problems. It can be seen that 6 of the teachers (25% of the total of 24 teachers who were the object of the research) have a precise knowledge of the needs of the students they serve and they devise appropriate strategies for timely attention to the problems that may arise during the teaching-educational process. The remaining teachers are located in the following categories: **Partially Achieved** 4 teachers for 16.6% and **Not Achieved** in 14 teachers representing 58.3%.

As a tendency, the indicator "Adequate use of computer and communications media" is considered as **Not Achieved**, reaching 54.1%.

66.6% (16 elementary teachers) determine the tendency to **Not Achieved** in the indicator "Use of scientific research methods to study the causes of the problems present in their students".

Participation in scientific events for the socialization of the results of their research. The category of **Fully Achieved** in this indicator reaches 20.8% (5). **Not Achieved** reaches 70.8% (17), and **Partially Achieved** 8.3% (2).

As can be seen, only the indicator "Control of professional training needs" tends to be in the **Fully Achieved** category with 37.5%. The indicators evaluated with the categories of **Not Achieved** and **Partially Achieved** constitute significant points of attention in this research for the search of an effective and efficient way for their solution.

In relation to what has been described above, it is necessary to train a elementary school teacher who shows a professional pedagogical performance in correspondence with the context in which he/she works, which will allow him/her to solve the professional problems that arise, as a sign of his/her high level of professionalization.

Conclusions

The preparation of the elementary school teacher for professional purposes is assumed as a source that promotes their pedagogical and human professional improvement in the process of professionalization for the care of students with special educational needs. The analysis of the processing of the data obtained in the processing of the evaluation of the indicators of professionalization of the elementary school teacher allows to outline strategies that favor the solution to the present research problem: the professionalization of the elementary school teacher for the attention to the special educational needs of the students he/she attends.