

THE POSSIBILITIES OF THE INTEGRATION OF THE THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL TRAINING IN THE HUNGARIAN TEACHERS' TRAINING FROM TRANSYLVANIA

© Barabási Tünde
tunde.barabasi@gmail.com

Since the end of 90's in the primary school teachers preparation in Romania has been introduced the college level parallel with the high school level training. In this study I would like to show which the real possibilities are, which the former teachers' training high schools, now colleges, give and realize for the integration of the theoretical training and practical preparation, and the extent at which this is realized during the training. In this research work my attention is focused on the Hungarian teachers' training colleges from Transylvania. I examined how students, psychology and pedagogy teachers and practice coordinators see the integration of theory and practice within the framework and possibilities given by the curriculum. My goal was to show which theory-practice integration possibilities are used during the professional training, in order to complete and modernize them through further research work.

Introduction

The proper training for the pedagogical profession is a serious job for the institutions and teachers doing this, due to the continuously appearing and enlarging system of tasks. Naturally, one cannot learn for lifelong what to teach and how to do it. Though it is very important in teachers' training to acquire such theoretical knowledge, practical skills and abilities, which are functional and flexible and at the same time such basic notions on which one can build the knowledge gained in refresher courses.

Thus, in teachers' training, especially in the theoretical training, the educational sciences as well as psychology have a key role. This does not mean that the other subjects are less important. Besides the fact that the above mentioned theoretical subjects help the formation of the pedagogical approach they are basic elements of pedagogical culture and strengthen the sense of vocation. It has such functions as: it contributes to the revealing of the pedagogical reality, to the interpretation of the pedagogical phenomena constituting the important element of the profession socialization. (*Fehér-Lappints, 2000*). The authors consider it as the main function since the knowledge of educational science lays the foundation of the educational activity, of the pedagogical training, having a developing influence on them and making them more conscious. The teaching of psychology is of the same importance, since it takes to the understanding of the manifestations of certain children and of the psychological mechanisms, and teaches the

trainees to self-knowledge and personality development. (*Balogh-Tóth, 1997*)

The pedagogical training or the practical training is as important a side of the teachers' training as the theoretical training. Practically speaking neither can be put in front of the other from the point of importance, as we cannot speak of the efficiency of the primary teacher's work if the mere theoretical knowledge and the skills and abilities which put it in practice are missing. On the other hand, if the stress is put only on practice, on the skills and abilities, this is unfounded, empirical and less conscious. The practical training gives the possibility to gain educational-pedagogical experience, conscious pedagogical practice. It develops the pedagogical abilities.

It is perceptible that both the theoretical and the practical training have such functions, which are indispensable for the whole training and serve to the formation of such a professional competency, which gives the possibility for the formation of a qualitative pedagogical-educational work. But in order to fulfil such functions these subjects must have a proper place and importance in the educational system. They must be embedded in a proper system and last but not least, they must be correlated to the practice in such a way that they should help its realization in a more efficient way, i.e. to make for it.

In this research I would like to show which the real possibilities are, which the former teachers' training high schools, now colleges from Romania give and realize for the unionization of the theoretical training and practical preparation, and the extent at which this is realized during the training. In this research work the Hungarian teachers' training colleges from Transylvania captured my attention, and I examined how they see the integration of theory and practice within the framework and possibilities given by the curriculum. My goal was to show which theory-practice integration possibilities are used during the professional training, in order to complete and modernize them through further research work. Consequently the present research work has a disclosing character.

The area and the methods of the research:

The teachers' training colleges, the Hungarian line, which belong to the Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj: from Targu Secuiesc, from Cluj, from Aiud, from Satu Mare and from Odorheiu Secuiesc, form the area of research. The survey was done on the students in the last year, on the teachers teaching psychology and pedagogy and the practice coordinator teachers of the mentioned institutions. Taking into account the number of the questioned people, sampling was not necessary, the survey was a complete range.

Table 1: The distribution of the persons concerning the locality

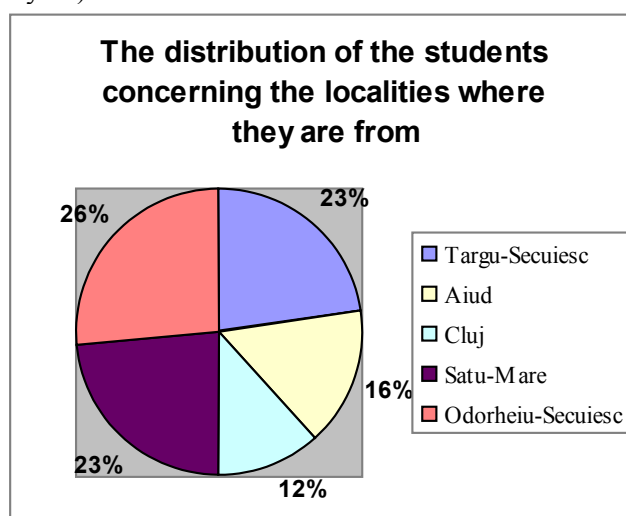
| Locality | Questioned persons | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| | Students | Pedagogy and Psychology teachers | Practice coordinators |
| <i>Odorheiu-Secuiesc</i> | 34 | 5 | 4 |
| Satu-Mare | 30 | 4 | 4 |
| Cluj | 15 | 2 | 1 |
| Aiud | 20 | 1 | 1 |
| Targu-Secuiesc | 29 | 3 | 1 |
| Total | 128 | 15 | 11 |

The collection of data was done on the basis of a questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of closed and open questions (12/13 sheets). I used qualitative research methodology in the interpretation of the answers received to the open and some of the closed questions (the coding and interpretation of the answers).

The results of the research

In the course of the processing of the data we synthesized our surveyed groups independently from the localities where they learn/teach. In the cases when we observed great differences, between certain localities, we stressed on them as local particularities.

On the whole 128 students were questioned, all of them being in their last year (3rd year). Their distribution can be seen in the following chart:



The majority of the students (99.2%) answered positively and found the mixing up of theory and practice necessary. Their justification is a little bit nondescript since 31.25% could not explain why they found this integration important. We classified the given justification in the following categories:

- Theory and practice have an auxiliary character, they make a whole (A)
- Theory has no sense without practice (B)
- Practice is inefficient without theory (C)
- Due to the integration theory is more intelligible, longer standing, practice is more conscious (D)
- Other (E)

It is interesting to state that the "B" and "C" type answers of the justification appear in the same proportion. The "B" type answers show us that the questioned subjects are pragmatical minded and they consider that the application in practice gives the final meaning to theory. However, those who gave the "C" type answer, the academic minded, emphasized that practice cannot be of a proper quality without theory. Perhaps, all these are not due to the mental constitution but rather to the commitment to protect theory and practice.

The Pedagogy and Psychology teachers, as well as, the practice coordinators equally show that it is important to connect the theoretical

knowledge to the possibilities of the practical application, that is, the possibilities of the practical applications of the theoretical knowledge should be taken into account at the organization and coordination of the pedagogical practice.

We support this idea with the following arguments:

Practice coordinators:

- The theory-free techniques are slow and unsteady
- The teaching activity becomes conscious in such a way, otherwise practice is more empirical
- Otherwise the theory may seem unnecessary
- One becomes a good teacher if he/she puts into practice his/her pedagogical or pedagogical knowledge

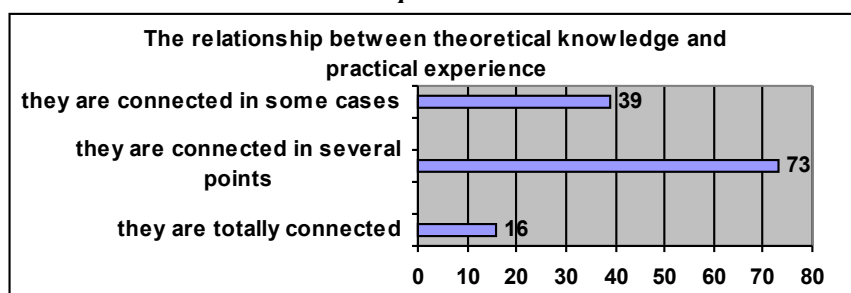
Teachers of pedagogy and psychology:

- The practical value of these subjects is important, otherwise they are knowledge for themselves
- The practical oriented training is more efficient, this knowledge becomes useful for the students only in such a way
- There can be formed a dangerous double aspect: the theory is needed only for exams, while the practice is formed only on the basis of experience
- Without enforcement the theoretical knowledge is quickly forgotten

While analyzing these answers we can state that we have to do with the same phenomenon but under other aspect. The basic requirement of a qualitative training is that it needs a theoretical consolidation on which a professionally organized practical activity is built in a proper proportion and relation. We are in front of such a question, which interpreted and coded, is shown at the same extent by the students, the teachers and the practice coordinator.

As we have seen so far, theoretically every student agrees that theory and practice should appear as a whole, but analyzing the relationship between theory and practice it turned out that all these are realized only partially in their training. Per se it is reassuring the fact that none of the students considers that his/her theoretical knowledge and practical training is totally independent from each other, their proportion of dependence is quite different.

Diagram 1: *The relationship between theoretical knowledge and practical experience*



It can be seen that more than half of the students (57.03%) consider that theory and practice are connected in several points of view, while 30.47% considers that these connections are only accidental. All these show us that the teachers' training cannot fulfill the role which is expected from it, that of a "bridge". We can also mention that the 12.5% of the students feel that their knowledge and experience are totally connected. This means that the system of teachers' training has the role of helping the realization of this integration but it depends on the students, too, at a great extent.

This idea seems to be strengthened by the answers of those students who do not wait for the help of the teacher or coordinator in the realization of integration but considers that this must be done by him/herself alone.

Very different answers were given to the question who helps mostly in the integration of the theoretical knowledge and the practical experience. The methodologists' teachers (49.22%) and the coordinators (44.53%) gave the highest rate, while the pedagogy (12.5%) and psychology (5.46%) teachers gave the lowest rate. However, in a great proportion was given the answer "neither of them" (23.43%), from which some say that he/she him/herself tries to realize the integration. But most of them show that nobody tries really to define the connection points. This phenomenon is seen at the greatest extent in the case of the students from Targu Secuiesc, where from the 29 questioned students 15 answered that nobody helped this connection. Some students (7.8%) answered that the teacher from the primary school helped them at the greatest extent in this integration.

It is interesting to put the answers of the students and of the teachers to this question side by side. The practice coordinators unequivocally say that the coordinator helps mostly the integration of the theoretical and practical subjects. On the second place we can find the primary school teacher's and the pedagogy teacher's answers with the same percentage, while on the third place the methodologist's, who in the students' opinion was on the first place. Finally, relatively with a small percentage the psychology teacher is mentioned, who in the opinion of some of the questioned people is not responsible for the realization of the integration. It is also important to state the fact that some of the coordinators answered that it is hard to put into order of importance since each part has its own particular role in the integration. But the following question arises then: whether the

manifestation at a small extent of the integration is caused by the fact that its realization is done by several people, and thus the responsibility is shared, too. Whether do we face the phenomenon "Too many cooks spoil the broth"?

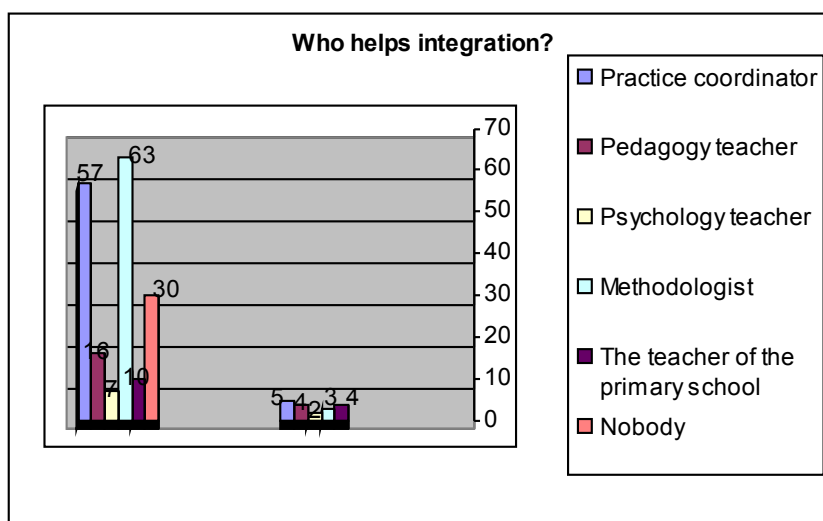


Diagram 2: Who helps in the integration?

These data are also strengthened by the students' answers given to a next question, which show the subjects that are more used during their teaching, that is: which is the theoretical knowledge they can use more profitably during their teaching classes. Several students answer that pedagogy, psychology and methodology are equally important. (62.72%). If we rank the subjects then on the first place the different methodologies come, on the second and the third places the pedagogy and psychology at an equal percentage. In ranking these subjects we have also found differences concerning the five localities of the questioned colleges.

| | I. | II. | III. |
|--------------------------|-------------|-------------|------------|
| Targu Secuiesc | Methodology | Psychology | Pedagogy |
| Aiud | Psychology | Methodology | Pedagogy |
| Cluj | Methodology | Psychology | Pedagogy |
| Satu Mare | Pedagogy | Methodology | Psychology |
| Odorheiu Secuiesc | Methodology | Pedagogy | Psychology |

Analyzing the same question from the point of view of the teachers we got similar answers. Though, $\frac{3}{4}$ of the questioned persons consider that from the point of view of theory and practice integration, pedagogy, psychology and methodology are equally important, when they are ranked the methodologies are put on the first place being followed by pedagogy and finally by psychology. All these also show that pedagogy and psychology teachers feel just partially that they are responsible for the realization of the integration, and they consider it as a prime task of the methodologists. On the basis of the collation of the students' and teachers' answers to the questioner we can say that the teaching of pedagogy and psychology requires a greater practice orientation in the teachers' training colleges from our country.

However, if we do not take into consideration the methodologies and pay attention only to pedagogy and psychology as theoretical subjects, it can be interesting to state which subjects the students consider more useful practically, since these subjects play mostly the integrator role.

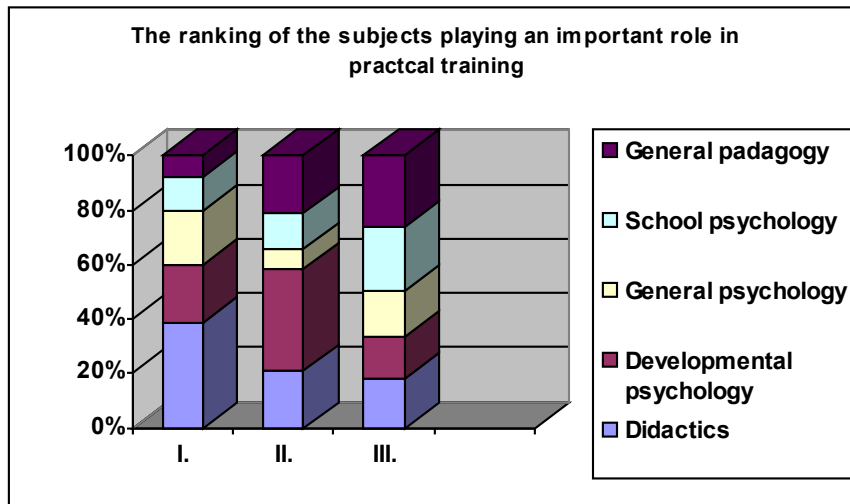
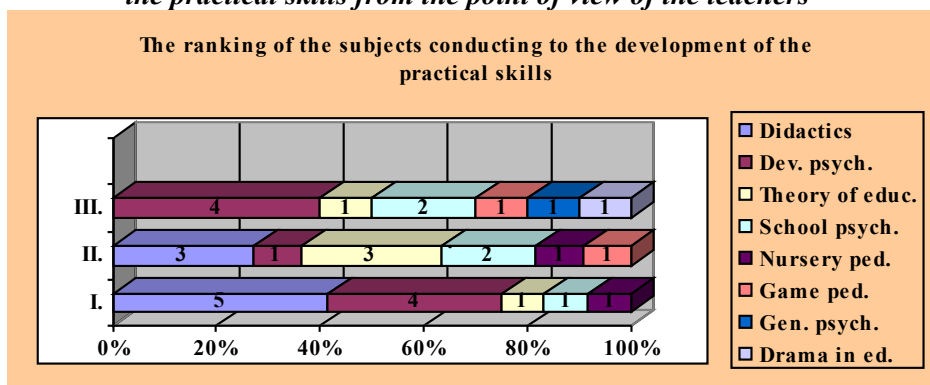


Diagram 3: The ranking of the subjects playing an important role in the practical training

Naturally this ranking is determined at great extent by the list of those pedagogical and psychological subjects, which the students study during their formation. Assuming that the more practice-oriented subjects there are the more they would come to the fore, and the basic subjects such as general pedagogy or psychology would stay at the back.

The same question was analyzed in the mirror of the pedagogy and psychology teachers' opinion, too. Though smaller differences were found, it can be observed that the ranking is almost the same.

Diagram 4: The ranking of the subjects conducting to the development of the practical skills from the point of view of the teachers



So, the teachers of the theoretical subjects state, too, that primarily the didactical and the Developing Psychology knowledge can be mainly used in the practical activities. It is interesting to mention that teachers did not tick at all or just sparsely such basic theoretical subjects as General Pedagogy or Psychology, since these are placed on the third and fourth places in the ranking done by the students. It is also an important fact that the teachers mentioned a wider scale of subjects on the whole than the students. What

may be the cause of this fact? Why do not the students see the importance of these subjects, e.g.: Nursery Pedagogy or Drama Pedagogy? These questions are to be thought of.

Seeing how important the students consider to be the ‘theoretical’ integration of theory and practice, it would have been expected that to the questions of the type: "Does the theoretical knowledge play a role in the self-evaluation of the probation teaching?" (Question 10) to answer with ‘yes’ in the same proportion. Despite the fact that the ‘yes’ answers number is greater, there are a lot of ‘no’ answers, too. This may mean that though, the student may understand the importance of the combination, he/she does not practise it. The causes of this must be shown. It is interesting that the students motivated their positive answers in most cases, but the negative cases rarely were motivated. Among these we found such answers as: e.g. ‘I cannot put it into practice’, when I am to do this I have already forgotten the theory’. We quoted the most illustrative ones.

The educational system can be made responsible for all these phenomena, even then when the number of such answers is small. Mostly, theory is considered to be the pivot, a correlation basis, i.e. the basis of the teaching activity.

Besides the evaluation of the probation teaching the students can realize their theoretical knowledge in the following areas, according to the percentage seen in the diagram:

- A – in the preparation of the lesson (exercises related to the content, choosing the method, means, etc.)
- B – in the self-evaluation
- C – during communication with children
- D – in the realization of different pedagogical situations

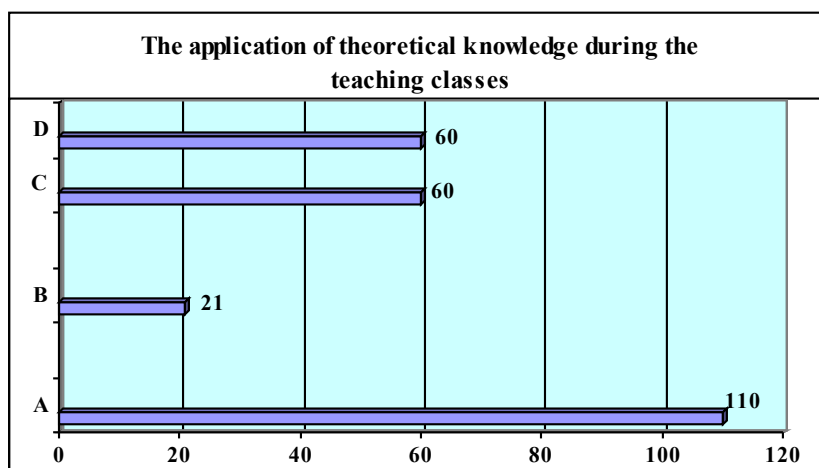


Diagram 5: The application of theoretical knowledge during the teaching classes

As it was expected, the students use the theoretical knowledge mainly in the planning phase of the teaching class, that is, it is used when the reflective decisions are taken. When the immediate decisions are taken (answers C and D), it is present, though in a smaller percentage than in the case of the reflective decisions.

As a result of the applied questionnaire those possibilities drew up which the target persons consider efficient in the application into practice of the

theoretical knowledge, namely the awakening of the theoretical practical experience to the consciousness of the theoretical level.

27.34% of the questioned persons do not suggest any integration possibility. This high percentage of the missing answers shows that a part of the students are not interested in the fact how the integration and through it the training can be done more efficiently.

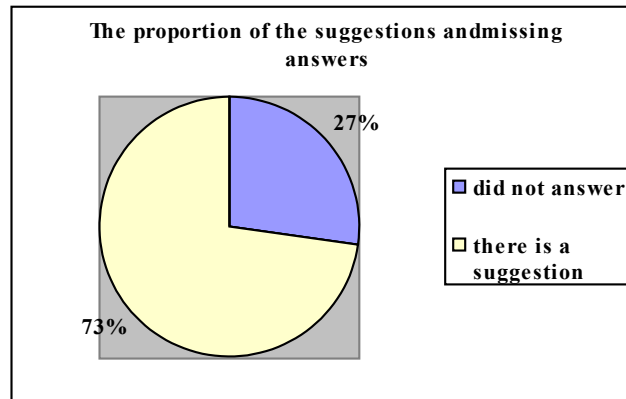
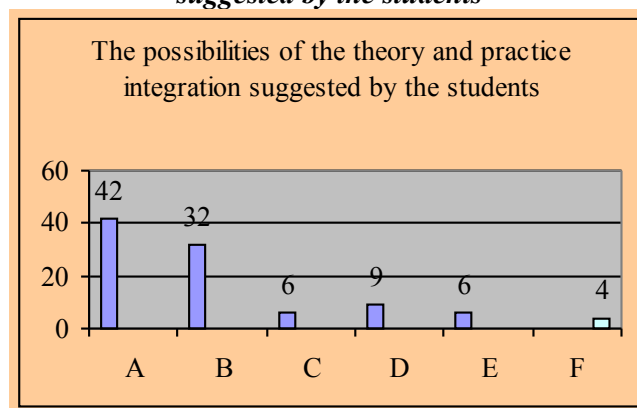


Diagram 6: The percentage of the suggestions and of the missing answer.

Among the suggested possibilities we have found the following ones with the percentages of:

- More practice (A)
- More practice-oriented subjects (B)
- Practice-oriented approach/teaching (C)
- The demand for more collective class evaluation, for more reasonable self-evaluation (D)
- A time parallelism and correspondence between the theoretical and practical training (E)
- Others (F)

Diagram 7: The possibilities of the theory and practice integration suggested by the students

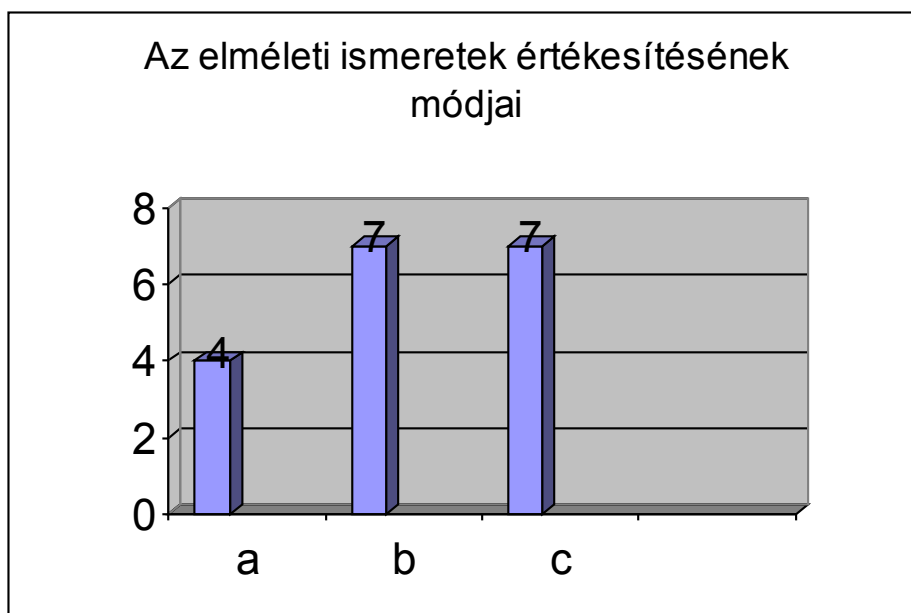


We also analyzed this question from the point of view of the practice coordinators and of the pedagogy and psychology teachers to see how they realize the integration of theory and practice in the area of their activities. We formulated the questions in two directions, having the aim to get an answer concerning the way the theoretical knowledge is realized during the

practical training on one hand, and how they build in the students' practical experience into the system of the theoretical knowledge on the other hand. The coordinators unequivocally consider that they have been thinking of the realization of the students' theoretical knowledge during the practical training. They showed the following ways of realization:

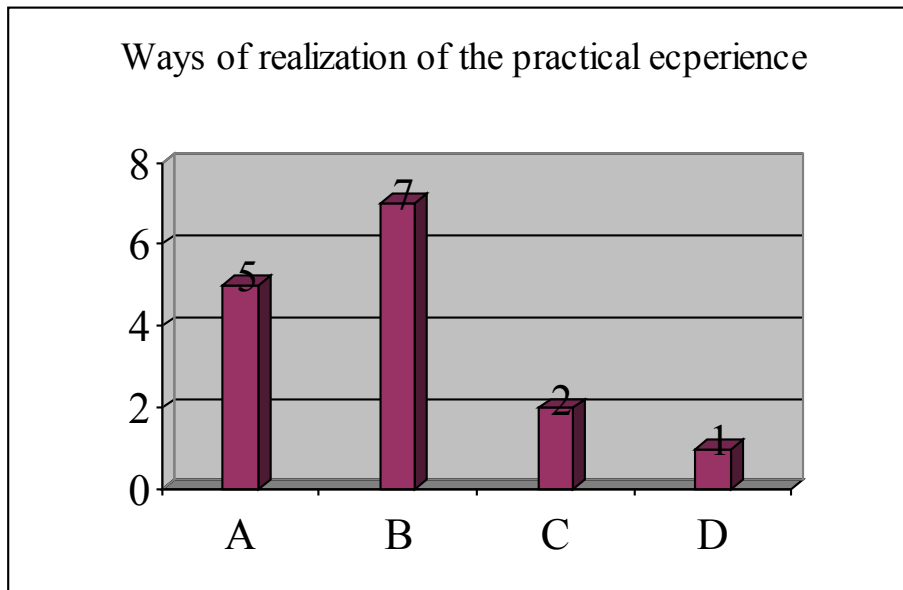
- At the analyzation of certain educational situations (a)
- At the preparation and evaluation of the teaching class (b)
- By the assignment of the observational point of view (c)

Diagram 8.1: Ways of integration – coordinators (I)



The integration in an inverse direction is not so unequivocal. The answers of the practice coordinators split concerning the question whether they follow the way the students realize their experience during the processing of the theoretical knowledge. Obviously, this is more difficult to do especially then when the practice coordinator does not teach theoretical subjects in the given group. Most answers were "the most time" (5), 2 persons answered "yes, always", while 1 person answered "sometimes".

Diagram 8.2: Ways of integration – coordinators (II)

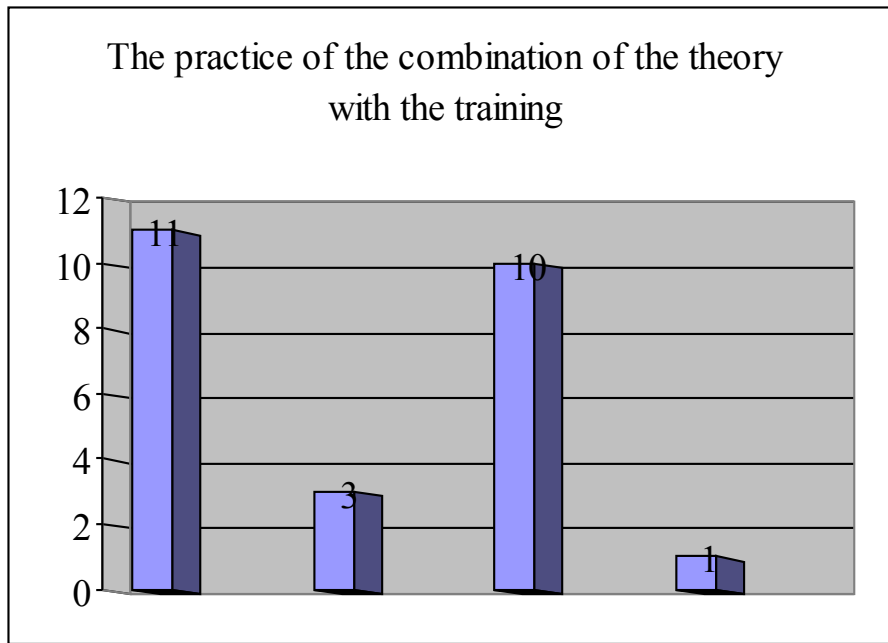


The questioned persons showed the following methods of following the students' realization:

- A/ The evaluation of certain pedagogical decisions
- B/ The analyzation and verification of the teaching plan
- C/ The evaluation of the teaching classes
- D/ The writing of such papers which are based on their own experience

The Pedagogy and Psychology teachers have mentioned several methods of combining the taught theory with practice. It is interesting to observe that some methods cover such integration possibilities that the students consider necessary. This means that there are efforts made for integration, but these are not in a proper number. Among the suggested combining methods we have found the following ones:

Diagram 9.1: Ways of integration – teachers (I)



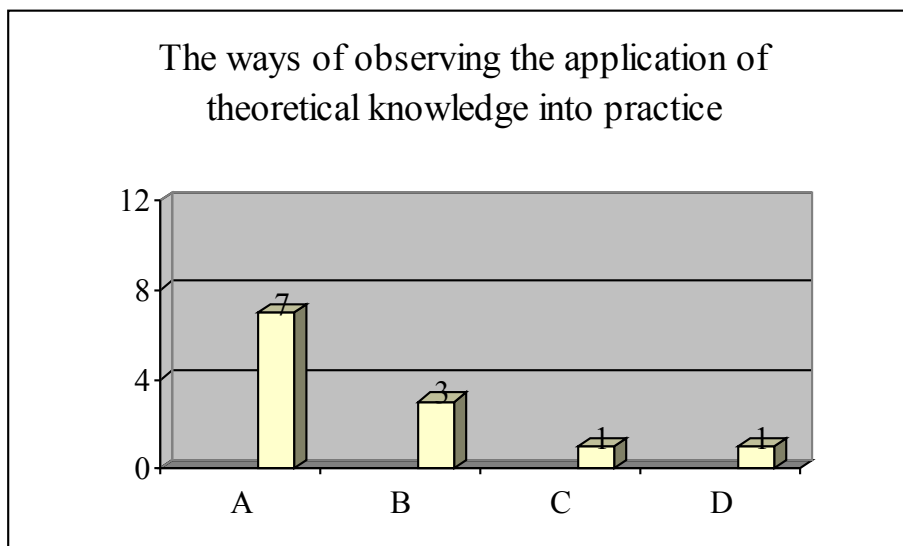
- a) Through examples
- b) Through dramatization
- c) Through reference to observation
- d) Through the evaluation of the teaching classes

As the diagram from above shows, the most popular is the use of examples and the reference to observation.

If we inverse the question and take into account the building in of the practical experience into the theoretical knowledge, though $\frac{3}{4}$ of the teachers mentioned that they often were attentive to this, we got such answers that show a kind of seclusion on the part of them. This fact is being motivated by saying that they are not practice coordinators.

This means that there are teachers according to whom it is not necessary to build in the practical experience into the system of theoretical knowledge. This combination must be done only from the theoretical direction.

Diagram 9.2: Ways of integration – teachers (II)



The questioned persons mentioned the following methods for the observing the students' theoretical knowledge application into practice:

- Through the evaluation of the practice (A)
- During the making of the lesson plan (B)
- Through observational point of view (C)
- The demand of motivations concerning the observed facts (D)

The relatively narrowness of the answers show us that these methods of observing are not too diverse.

Conclusions

Taking into account these empirical data we can shape a slice of the functioning of the Transylvanian Hungarian teachers' training colleges. On the basis of the survey and of the data we can draw reliable and valid conclusions concerning this segment of the training, especially because there is no need for generalization since the survey was complete.

The colleges concerned in the survey mostly show the same picture, and this is why not the differences are stressed but on the common characteristics, which define the particularities of the training. The common features are not given only by the same training profile, but also by the fact that inside the same institution (Babes-Bolyai University – Cluj) they function as affiliated institutions. This means that each college functions with the same curriculum, with the same subject programs and training structure that is decided by the patronizing institution.

The specific characteristic of the colleges is different only from point of view of the human resources.

General Survey

Analyzing the data gathered by means of the questionnaire we tried to show the extent at which the correspondence between the theoretical training (Pedagogy and Psychology teaching) and the practical training is realized, the extent at which the students, the Pedagogy and the Psychology teachers and the practice coordinators see its necessity. We have got some information about those integration possibilities they use continuously during the theoretical and practical training, as well as what other solutions they suggest for the combination of these two projections of the training. We have drawn the conclusions under the following points:

- *The necessity of integration* – the results of the research make us conclude that all the three target groups consider the necessity of the combination of theory and practice to be very important. This means that the value of the both projections of the training is shaped properly, the questioned persons see clearly the role of practice and of theoretical establishment. At the motivation of the necessity we have found in several opinions the fact theory has an establishing function. Bearing in mind this thing the organized practice is effective and serves the formation of professional competency. It is thought-provoking the fact that 31.25% of the students do not motivate their positive answer.
- *The situation of the integration and its characters* – it may be qualified as a strong discordance the fact that even though the students see, as we have

shown before, the necessity of integration, only 12.5% answered that these may be qualified as auxiliary in reality, too. More often they answered that in some cases they combine themselves, and they have several combining points. This result shows that there are efforts towards integration but any way these are not sufficient. It is interesting to point out that the students consider the methodologist the main character, and the teachers have the same opinion. However, the coordinators consider their own activity as an integrator role, while they put the methodologist on the third place. It is a fact that the students put the coordinator on the second place only with a few proportions below the methodologist. As a result we can conclude that at this moment the coordinator and the methodologist realize the strongest integration. In the case of the teaching of theoretical subjects this remains under the expectations. It is shocking the data according to which 25% of the students answered that nobody plays a part in the integration, in this case the students are alone. These empirical data require a faster establishment of a practice-oriented approach during the entire period of the training. The more so as the training structure, the percentage of the theoretical and practical classes and their distribution in time do not always serve at a proper extent the building of the theory on the practice.

- *The practice of the integration.* – We experienced that the integration efforts are realized in the first place at theoretical classes. The teachers mention the reference to practical examples, situations as fundamental form of the integration. The use of the students' practical experience and its utilization during the theoretical classes is present at a smaller percentage. The realization of the integration at the level of the practical training appears in our survey as a task for the coordinators and it comes to the fore primarily at planning and at the evaluation of the teaching classes.
- *The optimization of the practice of the integration.* – All the three questioned groups said that the extent of the integration and its practice must be optimized. Considering the possibility suggestions we could notice that the questioned persons look for them inside the borders of the material conditions. The students consider important the realization of a more practice-oriented approach, in order to take into consideration their practical experience at the teaching of the theoretical knowledge, and according to the possibilities the teachers should build their work on this.

Concluding, we have shaped a slice of the functioning of the Transylvanian Hungarian teachers' training colleges in this survey. We have met here the germs of the integration efforts, but on the whole we can declare on the basis of the questioned persons' opinion the training can be qualified as theory-oriented. In order to optimize it is necessary and it is also worth getting acquainted with adaptable techniques from abroad and to build them into the training system. But at the same time we must pay attention to the possibilities of collaboration of those who are responsible for the training thus facilitating the integration.