Teaching between intellectual and moral. Perceptions of Romanian teachers

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Abstract

Teaching is a complex process integrating both intellectual and moral-civic goals. Even if theoretically these goals are of the same importance, practically intellectual aims seem to be a priority. The present study has two parts: a theoretical part and an empirical part. In the first part, we shall analyse the relationship between intellectual and moral in two areas of debate: at the level of the finalities of education and at the level of the teaching profession. In the second part of the study we shall present an empirical approach in which we shall investigate the perceptions of Romanian teachers on professional roles, focusing on the relationship between intellectual and moral-civic roles. The empirical purposes of our research are: 1. To investigate the perceptions of Romanian teachers on moral roles and intellectual/technical roles in the teaching profession; 2. To analyse the teachers' perception upon the components of professionalism; 3. To draw comparisons between the perceptions according to 3 variables (position, didactic degree, teaching experience). The data was collected from a sample of 440 teachers. The research instrument was a questionnaire, designed specifically for this purpose. The results reveal several findings: 1. Romanian teachers attach the greatest importance to the perception on quality teaching; 2. teachers who teach in kindergarten and primary school perceive moral-civic values as more important than teachers who teach at middle school and high school; 3. senior teachers consider that loyalty to the institution is important to a higher degree than junior teachers.

Keywords: moral aims, intellectual aims, teaching profession.

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Introduction

Over time, two categories of values have fought a fierce battle to "fill the arena" of formal education: intellectual values and moral values. These remain "the red thread" around which the overall ends of educational systems are established all over the world. What should schools form? Specialists or citizens? A man with a strong character or an intellectual? There is, indeed, strong reductionism in looking only from this perspective at today's global educational goals, but experience has shown that both goals cannot be equally achieved. "Slipping" towards one pole or another is inevitable. Today, educational systems are designed to maximize intellectual performance, with all the threats involved (Kelchtermans, 2004; Bullough Jr. & Pinnegar, 2009; Day & Gu, 2014). The international tests made up of cognitive tests (PISA, TIMSS, PIRLS) are the basis of the educational systems hierarchy, according to which educational policies are established (Williams & Engel, 2013). The development of students' intellectual capabilities is a potential guarantee for the success of students in the future. The other categories of educational values (moral, aesthetic) are generally sacrificed in favour of intellectual performance (Leming, 1999).

From the educational endings designed for students we may reach the type of educator who would implement these goals: the technician, focused on expertise or the moral model? The same antithesis also applies to the teacher's training profile. Teachers' responsibilities towards students are numerous. Several categories of educational policy documents are required to circumscribe them (laws, statutes, school curricula, regulations, codes of ethics) and others to implement them (lesson projects, evaluation tests). All these generate excessive bureaucratization that teachers feel as extremely painful (Skubic Ermenc & Mažgon, 2015). A practical problem that transpires is the following: what is left of all these intentions at the level of the didactic process, and further, at the level of teachers' perceptions? To which finality categories do they give priority? Moral or intellectual finalities? We are aware that "perception is not reality", "the map is not the territory", but it provides a context for reporting messages from practitioners to educational decision-makers.

This is not just a theoretical debate. The consequences of the accentuation of the intellectualist approach to education are already known. Teachers are far too busy teaching and testing cognitive content in order to have time for moral education. Some teachers have even stopped teaching anything else that is not tested (Berkowitz & Bier, 2004). It is not impossible for the teacher to achieve in his teaching a wise balance of the moral and intellectual ends of education. However, teaching in which the teacher is constantly mindful of both intellectual content and moral implications is very rare, being an exception rather than a rule. The level of mastery, which involves the connection between the moral and intellectual plan is not accessible to most teachers (Osguthorpe, 2008).

The present study has two parts: a theoretical part and an empirical part. In the first part, we shall analyse the relationship between intellectual and moral in two areas of debate: at the level of the finalities of education and at the level of the teaching profession. In the second part we shall present an empirical approach in which we shall investigate the perceptions of Romanian teachers on professional roles, with a focus on technical and moral-civic roles in the teaching profession.

The study's motivations are numerous. For both researchers and teachers, information about teachers' perceptions contributes to the understanding of teacher's practices. Sanger (2001) demonstrated that, despite much discussion, researchers still know little about how teachers view morality or themselves as moral agents. Strike and Ternansky (1993) pointed out that there are three areas where ethics is applied in education: reflection on educational policies, moral education and professional ethics. All these three areas can be covered by the implications of this study. For Goodlad (1990) many schools of education overlook the moral aspects of teaching. The mission is not just to prepare teachers for the mechanics of their occupation. Ideally, teachers should be eager to face the ethical issues of their profession. Taking into account the social and moral aspects of teaching should become a priority in teacher education, as today it is seriously

limited in favour of teaching about content and teaching methods (Noddings, 1992; Noblit, Rogers & McCadden, 1995; Smith & Emigh, 2005;).

Very few educational policy initiatives in Romania take into account the signals from teachers. Top down decisions are given priority, and teachers are mere executives who are rarely consulted. The study of teachers' perceptions is relevant, as what teachers believe influences their actions (Fulan, 1993). Depending on the results, we may highlight the areas where teachers need support.

The relation between intellectual and moral as reflected in the finalities of educational systems

From the earliest times to the present, there has been this predilection of authors to group the aims of education into two broad categories: intellectual and moral purposes. All the great philosophers of education (Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Dewey) have argued that education has these two major goals. Therefore, we speak of a dichotomy with strong traditions. For the renowned French pedagogue Olivier Reboul (1992), "to know" is an unconditional, desirable human goal, a fundamental value of education. But moral values are of another nature, warns the philosopher, irreducible to intellectual grandeurs. Contemporary school relies heavily on the postulate that by making people better trained, they will become morally better. Experience shows, however, that these are two different aspects and that they may work independently. It is just an excess of intellectualist optimism, as moral values and intellectual values are immeasurable (Reboul, 1992). Fourquin (1993) points out that the issue of moral education in school is often replaced nowadays by sceptical and ironic attitudes. There is a practical incompatibility, according to the French pedagogue, between a moral education project and the objective cultural situation of contemporary societies, characterized by the disappearance of religious beliefs and the disintegration of normative models. Why has the school focused mainly on intellectual education and not on moral education? Morality does not have a universal and rational definition, it varies depending on epochs, social groups, cultural attitudes, ideological or philosophical choices, while intellectual values have the vocation of universality (Fourquin, 1993).

In the past, moral education was given priority compared to other types of education. For Buisson (1882), moral education was the ultimate object of pedagogy, overcoming all other ends. Since the 1930's, American education has increasingly turned away from moral education as a primary focus (Power, Higgens & Kohlberg, 1989). In Europe the situation was similar as well. The prioritization of intellectual ends in education has led to worrying consequences. Research by Nucci (2001) found that between the third and fifth grade, the amount of discourse between students and teachers about ethical issues gradually declines and eventually disappears. Most of the time, the educational objectives included in the curriculum are elaborated in the form of standards to be achieved. But research has highlighted that standards are only stringent criteria for academic curriculum and student performance on tests (Howard, 2005). Also Taylor (2009) stressed the fact that the rhetoric around moral education and values education is still very rich, especially in educational policies, but practically moral goals are rarely translated into the curriculum.

The relationship between intellectual and moral in the teaching profession

From the etymological point of view, "profession" comes from the Latin professio, -onis, meaning "confession", "public statement that we would not be ashamed to realize in a community because it is socially honourable" (Barlow, 1999, p.2). Therefore, the original meaning is related to the profoundly moral nature of any profession. Based on synthesizing the criteria offered by many authors (Houle, 1980; Hoyle, 2001; Prate and Rury, 1991; Sykes, 1999), we have systematised the classical criteria of a profession: 1. Covering educational stages in the field; 2. Expertise; 3. Social utility; 4. Accomplishing certain ethical and legal parameters (obtaining legal

accreditations, establishing the ethical code), 5. Obtaining constant income. These criteria encourage and enable the acquisition of the professional status only for occupations where technical, methodological and intellectual aspects predominate and less for those in which relational aspects predominate (McClure, 1999). What were the consequences of these criteria for professionalism in education? These were not few. Etzioni (1969) unreservedly encompassed teaching in the semi-professions category, because none of the classical criteria was satisfactorily fulfilled by the field of education, particularly the expertise criterion. Since then, education policy provisions have fully encouraged research orientations that have helped to build methodological knowledge in education. The assigned intuitive nature of teaching was answered, in time, by constructing highly technical models that claimed to capture the multiple dimensions of classroom activities. Focusing on the technical and instrumental pole was a result of studies and research that attempted to reduce teaching to a chain of well-controlled, perfectly determined interactions, with precise regularities. Behaviourism also had decisive contributions, by introducing mechanism into teaching and learning.

The technical expertise model for the pedagogical profession remains high, as it is easier to access an exclusive group of professions. Forms of organizing today's schools are the result of a belief system that values the technical dimensions of teaching, despite the relational ones (Noblit, Rogers & McCadden, 1995).

In response to the very technical accents in teacher training and evaluation of teacher efficiency, the last four decades have seen increased interest in investigating the moral nature of teaching. Fenstermacher (1986) reported that research ignores the moral dimension of the teaching profession. Since then, many authors have contributed to the extension of research on teaching as an ethical practice (Lickona,1991; Carr, 1992; Jackson, Boostrom & Hansen 1993; Hansen, 2001; Campbell, 2003; Husu, 2003; Colnerud, 2006; Strike & Soltis 2009).

Although in many professions the technical and methodological aspects are defining, this does not apply also to the teaching profession. The arguments that provide a basis for highlighting the profound socio-relational and moral nature of the teaching profession are offered by many authors (Hegarty, 2000; Hansen 2001; Hoyle, 2001; Rasänen, 2000; Golan & Fransson, 2009; Labaree, 2000). Teaching is multi-dimensional, it draws on a multiplicity of cognitive, affective and interpersonal elements. Recognition of the fusion between moral and intellectual teaching is the ultimate proof of professional integrity (Lowenberg, Ball & Wilson, 1996). Seghedin (2011) uses the notion of reflective capability to highlight the link between the technical and ethical components of teaching.

This theoretical incursion supports in delineating the empirical aim of our investigation. It provides the premises to signal the fact that the surpassing of moral finalities by intellectual ones at the level of the educational system's finalities and the model of the teaching profession may lead to reverberations on the understanding of professional roles by teachers.

Previous research

It is not a simple task to identify previous research that pertains to the perception of the relationship between intellectual and moral in terms of the purposes of education and teaching. This debate is often conducted in the philosophy of education rather than in empirical research. Several authors (Jackson, Boostrom & Hansen 1993; Campbell 2003) have shown that most teachers are not always aware of the moral impact of their actions. Joseph and Efron (1993) examined the perceptions of teachers about their role as moral agents in school. They have demonstrated that the teachers' individual moralities shape the choices they make and the conflicts that concern them as they function as moral educators. Taylor (2009) demonstrated the discrepancy between the ease and goodwill of teachers to talk about the achievement of cognitive goals and the linguistic inability to specify the moral objectives of their activities, other than

through very general attitudinal terms. By using open-ended interviews and classroom observations Sanger (2001) found that teachers' beliefs about their role as moral agents are complex and diverse. More research (Narvaez and Lapsley,2008; Gaziantep & Buzzelli, 2014;) showed that teacher education programs usually focus on the technical and instrumental aspects of teaching, namely the knowledge and skills required.

The Romanian context

Romania is a post-communist transitional country (Decker, 2007) with a special education landscape. In terms of curriculum policy, Romania is rallied to the European Framework of Competencies (Recommendation of the European Parliament, 2006), in which the desideratum would be a harmonious blending of students' knowledge, values and attitudes. But, the reality is different as specialists and practitioners point to a wide gap between policies and implementation (Harrison & Baumgartl 2002; Bîrzea 2002). For example, legislative provisions support a large number of exams for students, with high stakes. The number of examinations is a striking feature of the Romanian educational system (OECD, 2000). The most important goal that the public expects the schools to accomplish is to teach the basic academic subjects so that students can get high marks on the tests and thus gain access to the upper levels. Therefore, teachers have strong curricular priorities, and students are under a fantastic pressure to get high grades from very young ages. The emphasis on content, marks and tests is quite pronounced, but despite this reality, the results obtained in international tests are not encouraging. Moreover, some investigations have revealed a worrying reality. In the TIMSS 1998 test investigation, the students in Romania stated that they spend the most time in the world learning Mathematics. In the PISA 2012 survey revealed that Romania has the most demotivated students in the world. Intellectualism has therefore turned into anti-intellectualism, with students becoming saturated. Teacher policies are also not encouraging. In spite of the precarious material status and the fact that many leave this profession, teachers also have many exams to pass, with no proven formative value in terms of improving their teaching.

In the last 27 years of so-called democratic regime, teachers have rarely been consulted on the adoption of educational curriculum and assessment measures, these being imposed from the centre. The centrality of decisions is still very pronounced today. Harrison & Baumgartl (2002) advocate for understanding the perceptions of teachers during Romania's transition. Decker (2007), using a nonlinear model for assessing teacher perceptions of democratic principles in Romanian schools, shows that perceptions are a component of a continuous cycle alongside policies, practice, and societal influences, all interacting with each other within the same orbit. In this context, studying the perceptions of Romanian teachers regarding the relationship between moral tasks and intellectual tasks in teaching gains special significance.

Aims

The global aim of the present research is to investigate the perceptions of teachers upon the professional roles in accordance with the standards for the teaching profession in Romania. We have explored the following research questions: 1. What is the perception of Romanian teachers upon professional roles? What are the professional roles that are prioritized: moral-civic roles or technical roles? 2. What is the perception of Romanian teachers on the relation between the components of teaching professionalism? 3. What are the differences between perceptions according to a series of variables (position, teaching degree, teaching experience). The specific purposes of our research are: 1. To investigate the perceptions of Romanian teachers on moral roles and intellectual/technical roles in the teaching profession; 2. To analyse the teachers' perception on the components of professionalism; 3.To draw comparisons between the perceptions according to three variables (position, teaching degree, teaching experience).

The central concept of our empirical study is the professional role, understood as the formal responsibility of teachers, derived from the teaching profession standards. We have opted for our own classification of professional roles, because we have not found another one that satisfies the requirements of connecting the technical/intellectual level with the moral/civic level. Other classifications in the field are not comprehensive enough, they mainly serve educational policies (Perrenoud, 1999). We wanted to generate a model of the professional roles of teachers, starting from the language of Romanian reform and the realities with which Romanian teachers are familiar. In building our instrument we have used and refined the standards for the teaching profession in Romania (Gliga, 2002). These standards are: 1. the teacher is conversant with the domain and the didactics of the discipline he/she teaches; 2. the teacher knows the student and assists him/her in his/her own development; 3. the teacher is an active member of the community; 4. the teacher has a reflexive attitude; 5. the teacher is a promoter of a value system in line with the educational ideal.

Methodology

Participants

The group of subjects consists of 440 educators distributed as follows: 1. for the variable function there are 80 educators, 160 teachers and 200 secondary and high school teachers; 2. for the variable teaching experience there are 167 subjects (1-14 years of experience), 176 subjects (15-29 years), 97 subjects (over 30 years); 3. for the teaching grade variable there are 243 subjects with the 1st didactic degree, 102 with the 2nd didactic degree and 95 with the 3rd didactic degree (tenure). In Romania, performance in the teaching profession is evaluated on the basis of didactic degrees. Grade 3 or tenure is for beginners, representing the minimum level required. Grades 2 and 1 are optional, representing career steps. Grade 1 is the highest and Grade 2 is the intermediate step.

Instruments and measures

The research instrument was a questionnaire built to investigate the research variables and to answer the research questions. Questionnaires were administered in paper-and-pencil format, with instructions given in writing. Approximately 470 instruments were applied during the investigation, but those missing relevant biographic information or containing incomplete data were excluded from further analysis. The questionnaire comprises two sections. The first section contains demographic questions (3 items). Section two includes 18 items for evaluating perceptions upon the professional roles. In order to evaluate several dimensions of the professional roles, the subjects were supposed to rank 18 behaviours on a Likert Scale 1-7, according to frequency (1 very rarely – 7 very frequently). The concept of professional roles was operationalized into several categories of indicators: indicators of technical and intellectual roles, indicators of moral roles and indicators of civic -relational roles. We shall further present the list of behaviours that teachers were asked to evaluate. For indicators of technical roles, there were seven situations: achieving quality teaching, fairness in student assessment, passing basic knowledge, using methods to know one's students, expressing a reflexive attitude in teaching, passing scientific truth, pursuing the achievement of intellectual excellence. For indicators of moral roles, there were four situations: the formation of students' character, the building and maintenance of a high moral standard, the transmission of civic and moral values to students and the establishment of a positive climate in activities. Indicators of civic-relational roles are: launching school and community initiatives, creating conditions for equal opportunities, respecting the rights and interests of students, establishing positive relationships with other colleagues, initiating a working relationship with parents, adopting a loyalty attitude towards school, involvement in solving conflicts between students.

Didactic professionalism is understood, in our research, as a combination of four components: psycho-pedagogical competence, moral competence, intellectual competence and talent. The presence of talent in our model can be explained by the fact that many authors consider it as an intimate, spiritual dimension of teaching, associated with vocation or talent (Hansen, 1994; Estola, Erkkila & Syrja, 2003; Bullough & Hall-Kenyon, 2012) .

The operationalization of the two concepts of our research (professional roles and didactic professionalism) responds to several exigencies of our research: 1. The indicators correspond to the teaching profession standards in Romania 2. The indicators reflect the Romanian context of analysing the work of teachers. 3. The indicators may be easily understood by the respondents of our research.

Statistical analyses

 The statistical analyses were carried out using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22 for Windows. We calculated descriptive statistics for all the close-ended questions. The Friedman non-parametric test was used to compare ranks within dependent variables. ANOVA One-Way and Bonferroni was used to compare mean differences among the 18 professional roles.

Results

Analysis of the perception of teachers on professional responsibilities

We have applied the non-parametric Friedman test, first globally (for teachers at all levels, kindergarten to high school) and then for each separate group. The results for the whole group have shown significant differences between the situations enumerated in terms of the frequency of their occurrence [$\chi2$ (17) = 1231,779, p < 0.05], that is, achieving quality teaching was ranked first, and the others on the following positions (see Table 1).

Professional responsibilities	Mean of ranks	Friedman test results
Achieving quality teaching	11,82	
Formation of students' moral character	11,59	
Fairness in student assessment	11,42	
Building and maintaining a high moral standard	11,01	
Passing civic and moral values to students	10,95	
Establishing a positive climate in activities	10,90	
Transmission of basic knowledge	10,22	
Creating the conditions for equal opportunities	9,96	χ^2 (17) = 1231, 779, p = 0.000
Respecting the rights and interests of students	9,69	
Using methods to know one's students	9,23	
The manifestation of a reflexive attitude	8,89	
Propagating scientific truth.	8,85	
Establishing positive relationships with peers	8,82	
Initiating collaboration with parents	8,81	
Involvement in solving student conflicts	8,54	
Adopting a loyal attitude towards schools	7,89	
Aiming to achieve intellectual excellence	6,58	
Launching initiatives in school and community	5,83	

Table 1. Friedman test results for comparing the frequency of the roles highlighted by all teachers.

By applying the same Friedman test to separate groups (preschool, primary, middle and high-school teachers), there were identified relevant differences among the enumerated situations in terms of their frequency of occurrence, as follows: for preschool teachers, $[\chi^2 (17) = 243, 358, p < 0.05]$, meaning that *achieving quality teaching* is appreciated most frequently compared to the others; for primary school teachers, $[\chi^2 (17) = 478, 772, p < 0.05]$, meaning that *achieving quality teaching* is appreciated most frequently compared to the others; for middle-school and high-school teachers, $[\chi^2 (17) = 668, 468, p < 0.05]$, meaning that *achieving quality teaching* is appreciated most frequently compared to the others.

In order to compare the perceptions of teachers on professional roles we applied the ANOVA One-Way with the dependent variables of professional roles and the independent variables of position and didactic degree.

Comparison between the perceptions of teachers regarding professional roles, in relation to the variable position

A statistically significant difference was found among the groups of preschool, primary, middle and high-school teachers, with respect to the following responsibilities: *pursuing the achievement of intellectual excellence* $[F (2, 520) = 3.852, p < 0.05]$, *fairness in evaluating students* $[F (2, 521) = 3,045, p < 0.05]$, *establishment of positive relations among teachers* $[F (2, 519) = 10,595, p < 0.05]$, *passing of civic and moral values* $[F (2,519) = 4,752, p < 0.05]$, *involvement in conflict resolution* $[F (2,520) = 8,947 p < 0.05]$ (see Table 2).

Variable	F	p
Pursuing the achievement of intellectual excellence	F (2, 520) = 3.852	p = 0.022
Fairness in evaluating students	F (2, 521) = 3,045	p = 0.048
Establishment of positive relations among teachers	F (2, 519) = 10,595	p =0,000
Passing of civic and moral values	F (2,519) = 4,752	p =0,009
Involvement in conflict resolution	F (2,520) = 8,947	p =0,000

Table 2. ANOVA One-Way results on the effect of the variable position upon the perception regarding professional duties (Annexes 11, 12).

In order to check between which groups there are significant differences we applied the Bonferroni t test with the following results: 1. There are significant differences between preschool and primary school teachers $[t (284) = 2.75, p \le 0.05]$, in the sense that preschool teachers perceive the achievement of intellectual excellence as more important compared to primary school

teachers; 2. There are significant differences between primary school teachers and middle and high-school teachers [t (398) = 2.47, p≤0.05], in the sense that teachers perceive that fairness in evaluation is more important, compared to middle and high-school teachers; 3. There are significant differences between preschool teachers and other teachers [t (354) = 4,258, p≤ 0,05] in the sense that preschool teachers perceive establishing a good relationship with teachers as more important, compared to other teachers, but also between primary school teachers and other teachers [t (397) = 3,064, p < 0.05], in the sense that primary school teachers perceive the establishment of good peer relationships as more important compared to middle and high-school teachers; 4. There are significant differences between preschool teachers and middle and high-school teachers [t (184) = 2.75, p < 0.05], in the sense that preschool teachers perceive the passing of civic and moral values as more important compared to middle and high-school teachers. 5. There are significant differences between preschool teachers and middle and high-school teachers [t (355) = 3,97, p < 0.05], in the sense that preschool teachers perceive the involvement in solving conflicts between students as more important compared to middle and high-school teachers, but also between primary teachers and middle and high-school teachers [t (398) = 2.82, p < 0.05], in the sense that primary school teachers perceive the involvement in solving conflicts as more important compared to middle and high-school teachers.

Comparison between the perceptions of teachers regarding professional roles in relation to the variable didactic degree

A statistically significant difference was found between the groups of teachers with the 1st didactic degree and others with regard to the following duties: *adopting an attitude of loyalty* [F (4, 519) = 10,814, p < 0.05] and *initiating collaboration with parents* [F (4, 517) = 2,384, p ≤ 0.05] (see Table 3).

Variable	F	p
adopting an attitude of loyalty towards the school	F (4, 519) = 10,814	p = 0.000
initiating collaboration with parents	F (4, 517) = 2,384	p = 0.050

Table 3. The ANOVA One-Way results on the effect of the variable didactic degree on the perception regarding professional duties.

In order to check among which groups there are significant differences, we applied the Bonferroni t test, with the following results: 1. there are significant differences between teachers with the 1st didactic degree and those with the 2nd degree [t (413) = 3,81, p < 0.05], in the sense that those with the 1st degree perceive the *adoption of a loyal attitude* as more important compared to those with 2nd degree; 2. there are significant differences between 1st-degree teachers and beginners [t (325) = 5,54, p < 0.05], in the sense that 1st-degree teachers perceive the *adoption of a loyal attitude* as more important compared to beginners; 3. there are significant differences between 2nd-degree teachers and beginners [t (114) = 3,80, p < 0.05], meaning that 2nd-degree teachers perceive the *adoption of a loyal attitude* as more important compared to beginners; 4. there are significant differences between teachers with tenure and beginners [t (93) = 5,11, p < 0.05], in the sense that teachers with tenure perceive the *adoption of a loyal attitude* as more important compared to beginners.

Analysis of the perception of teachers regarding the components of professionalism

We applied the Friedman nonparametric test for all teachers, globally. According to the obtained results, there are significant differences between the four components in terms of perceiving their importance [χ^2 (3) = 176, 261, p <0.05], meaning that *moral competence* is regarded as the most important component, followed by *psycho-pedagogical competence*, *intellectual competence* and *talent* (See Table 4).

Didactic professionalism	Mean of ranks	Friedman test results
Moral competence Psycho-pedagogical competence Intellectual competence Talent	2,75 2,67 2,46 2,13	χ^2 (3) = 176,261 p = 0,000

Table 4. Friedman test results for comparing the frequency of the components of didactic professionalism, for all teachers.

Conclusions and discussions

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of Romanian teachers on professional roles in line with the standards of the teaching profession in Romania. The first conclusion of the research is that the hierarchies of the perceptions on professional roles are fairly stable, regardless of the variables taken into account (position, teaching experience). The first place is occupied by the perception on 'achieving quality teaching', the perceptions about moral and intellectual roles in relation to students are placed in the following places, and then the broader responsibilities (civic and relational). We may imagine several concentric circles, placed on the following layers: in the centre, there is placed the perception on the role of quality teaching, then there are the moral responsibilities towards the direct clients (students), and at the outer edge the role of civic, community involvement. This perceptual framework that emerged from our research is similar to that of Stooksberry, Schussler, & Bercaw (2009), who proposed three domains of dispositions for teachers: intellectual, cultural and moral.
We cannot clearly state that the perception of technical and intellectual roles prevails over the perception of moral roles. The research has not demonstrated this, as moral roles are regarded as important, occupying the 2nd, 3rd and 4th places in the hierarchy. But the presence of *quality teaching* on the first place in the hierarchy deserves special attention. This phrase is very common in the vocabulary of the Romanian teachers, but it is strictly related to the efficiency in teaching and the achievement of high intellectual performances. Therefore, the top of the hierarchy is occupied by a technical and intellectual role, without doubt. And other research has shown that teachers prioritize technical dimensions rather than moral teachings (Beijaard, Verloop & Vermunt 2000).

Civic and relational roles are placed on middle positions or in the last third of the hierarchy, regardless of variables. This positioning is not accidental. Concepts such as *respect for children's rights*, *equal opportunities* are part of the new language of post-communist education policies, centred on the *democratic school* paradigm. Teachers know there is much rhetoric and less substance in this discourse. In Romania, a country with a democratic regime established in the 1990s, many civil rights are not fully respected, partly because of insufficient funds (about 3% of the GDP for education). We are wondering how basic concepts of democracy can be learned when they are ill-defined and misunderstood in popular culture (Tibbitts, 1994). The last place is, with

a high level of stability, the perception on the role of launching initiatives in school and community. This is not accidental, because in Romania, mentalities tend to rally to the belief that it is better to "receive from the state" rather than "have initiative". The shift from the communist egalitarian and passive working mentalities to active, competition-based and responsibilities-taking mentalities (Nicolescu, 2002) is very difficult, including for teachers. Other research (Butnaru, 2016) on parents' perceptions regarding the professional roles of Romanian teachers reached the same conclusion: the role of involvement in the community is perceived as the least important.

The fact that the perception regarding the relationship with the other teachers occupies lower positions in the rankings is another alarm signal. Numerous studies have shown that teaching teachers to work in a team is a way to lead them to better professional performance (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008; Hattie, 2012). In general, teachers' activity predisposes to isolation and individualism (Lortie, 1975; Labareee 2000;). However, there are some circumstances that make Romanian teachers even more individualistic: the strictly individual reward system (performance-related pay) and successive reforms have focused on individuals, at the expense of building professional communities in schools. The fact that the Romanian school stimulates the competition and individualism of teachers and students is certified by research (Badea, Farca & Velea, 2011).

A second conclusion of the research highlights the fact that teachers who teach in lower cycles (kindergarten, primary cycle) perceive the values of collegiality and moral-civic values as more important than teachers who teach at middle school and high school. The focus of middle and high school teachers on preparing students for national exams may provide an explanation for this result. The socio-moral finalities are thus subordinated to the intellectual objectives of the examinations. Each teacher works to get the best results with students, as the grades are important. The pressure of parents on school is not negligible.

This study also found that the higher the professional status of teachers, the more important their perception regarding loyalty to their institution. Thus, teachers with the 1st didactic degree (the highest professional degree for teachers in Romania) and with longer experience perceive loyalty as more important compared to teachers with lower didactic grades and less experience. These proofs reflect a series of social realities for the occupational category of teachers in Romania. There are several reasons why young Romanian teachers do not attach importance to *loyalty*. A first reason is that the motivation to choose the didactic profession has decreased, both because of very low wages and the deteriorated occupational prestige (Tomuletiu et al., 2011). A second reason is the increased mobility of young people from one teaching location to another. In the early years of their career, they teach at different school units, which leads to a decrease in loyalty. This result deserves to be taken seriously by decision makers and politicians of education in Romania, as organizational loyalty and the concrete strategies that should be produced at the organizational level represent a decisive element in keeping the best human resources in the teaching career **(**Pânişoară & Pânişoară 2010). Other research has shown that Romanian teachers have a deep sense of insecurity (Vasile, Margaritoiu & Iftimie, 2011), or it is precisely loyalty that may work as a lever for emotional balancing. Other researchers have also found differences between experienced teachers and beginners in relation to perceiving professional roles (Beijaard, Verloop & Vermunt, 2000).

By analysing the perception of the components of professionalism, as it has been operationalized in our research, with the perception of talent on the last position, we may say that Romanian teachers have overcome the stage at which they relied only on "the ideology of gift" when exercising their profession. The many initial and continuous training activities of Romanian teachers have succeeded in dismantling this myth circulating in society. These findings are consistent with the findings of Osborn (2006) who argued that these variables related to the

ideology of gift (talent, vocation) were being undermined by the pressure for performance, becoming "expert technicians" in transmitting externally pre-defined knowledge and skills to students.

The results of our investigation are valid in the Romanian context, amid a certain social and cultural dynamics, of transition from communism to democracy. This context determines a coexistence, in the Romanian educational landscape, of a mixture of the traces of the former totalitarian regime and the measures of the current regime, quite unconvincing for many teachers. The unique curriculum, respect for the teacher due to the social discipline imposed by communism have been replaced by flexible curriculum designs, alternative manuals, and endless adjustments in student assessment.

Adherence to European reforms risks to become an empty shell if it is not accompanied by the analysis of the contextual needs of a particular country. European education systems are quite heterogeneous. We cannot compare the East and West of Europe in terms of the educational policies implemented over time. In western Europe, a neo-liberal economic model functioned, whereas in the East, a communist economic model (Arriazu Muñoz, 2015). The moral-civic roles of teachers have been profoundly influenced by the dominant political model, which explains eastern scepticism (MONEE Project, 1999). The contemporary "harmonization" between East and West is not without difficulty. For example, the European Framework for Competences (Recommendation of the European Parliament, 2006) has been implemented in Romania, with substantial changes in school curricula, including in the direction of balancing intellectual and moral civic goals. Thus, any curriculum includes, besides the knowledge and abilities characteristic of a discipline, a series of attitudes and values. Within these values and attitudes, the moral-civic component is well represented. But all these aspects refer to the formal plan, that of curricular documents. These changes must also touch the "essence" of the actual development of the educational process. This is quite challenging, given the traditional Romanian background focused on disciplinary knowledge in teaching.

We can learn some lessons about teacher education by reflecting on the results of the survey. Even if we cannot overlap perceptions onto reality, a series of signals from our research may be taken into consideration. A first lesson refers to the strengthening of the moral-civic dimension of the status of teacher in Romania. A series of formal steps have been taken: there occurred the ethical code of the teaching profession (2011), the curriculum for the initial training of preschool and primary school teachers are courses of professional ethics, sometimes teachers study ethics also during continuous training programs. A second lesson concerns the opening of the school to society. It is symptomatic the fact that the perception of the role of launching initiatives in school and community occupies the last position in the hierarchy of the answers given by our research subjects. How can the agent-of-change mentality be formed for teachers with such a pattern of thinking? Preparing future teachers for community involvement implies implicitly valuing the teacher's role of moral agent. It is not a simple task, it will not be done in a short time, as it requires teachers to undertake new roles with which they are not used. Many authors have criticized the school as a closed, self-sufficient and conservative institution (Reboul 1992; Gardner 1999). Opening it to the community and working in a team of teachers is a necessity. Research reveals that collaborative learning among small groups of teachers is a powerful predictor of improved student achievement over time (Jackson & Bruegmann, 2009). Although community involvement is a standard of the teaching profession in Romania, Romanian teachers have not internalized it. The presence of this standard in educational policy documents is rather decorative. The purpose of forming individual moral traits of students is perceived as totally separate from that of civic involvement, even if civic roles have an intrinsic moral dimension. Finally, we believe that our research highlights the fact that teachers' perceptions are influenced by both practices established through teacher education programs (that focus on technical expertise) and a series of contextual variables (particular national traditions, the type of political regime existing in a country, ways of understanding moral-civic values in society etc.).

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