



## **CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL TRAINING - PRIORITY OF TEACHING STAFF**

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### **Abstract**

The article covers the issue of continuous professional training of teachers, which is a complex, coherent process, aimed at ensuring the permanent adaptation of teachers to the dynamics of education processes and systems, promoting a proactive attitude, specific to a lifelong learning horizon.

The research paper specifies the defining characteristics of the continuous professional training process, describes the principles and objectives of continuous teacher training, determines the content, methodology, forms of continuous teacher training, and elucidates the trends in continuous professional training of teachers.

**Keywords:** continuous professional training, characteristics, principles, objectives, contents, forms, contexts, trends

## 1. Introduction

Continuous training, the driving force behind social dynamics, is currently of increasing importance in the educational field due to the impact of technological progress, the evolution of contemporary society, the growing demand for quality education, the need to successfully overcome crisis situations, etc.

S. Cristea (2000, p. 155) highlights the fact that the concept of *training* defines a vital, essential social action, which integrates, among others, education, instruction and training without being reduced to them. Its evolution registers three significant moments from the perspective of the theory and management of education:

- *training* understood in the sense of Aristotelian philosophy, which highlights the role of the external impulse form of activity;
- *training* understood in the sense of classical pedagogy, which highlights the importance of initial professional training, extended to the level of adult education;
- *training* understood in the sense of modern and postmodern pedagogy, which highlights the importance of integrating complex, initial and continuous socio-professional training, at the level of strategic models specific to *lifelong learning*.

T. Callo (2003, p. 35) argues that “education has its place throughout life (continuous education, lifelong learning), it is more necessary in certain *critical moments* that occur in the activity of teachers. In order for these moments to acquire *significance*, so that they are not *moments of regression*, but *factors of progress* on the path leading to a better knowledge, it is necessary to make a special development effort every time, as if be a new formation. Professional development is the conscious, voluntary, competent part of continuous training and takes place according to the psychology, philosophy, discipline of each

individual; involving choices, waivers, decisions, which require knowledge, information, elements that depend on a broad and in-depth conception of the given field”.

Teaching staff must always keep up to date, to be the first bearer of the new. According to researcher I. Jinga (2005, p. 62), this requirement is determined by a number of factors, including:

- the economic and social development of the country, as a whole and in territorial profile, according to which the school prepares the new contingents of qualified staff, specialists, human resources in general;
- the changes that take place in the world of work and in the world of professions, with significant implications in the content of school curricula and therefore in the teacher training;
  - new acquisitions in the field of science, human knowledge;
  - the advances registered in the sciences of education, in the learning theories;
  - increasing the duration of compulsory education;
  - heterogeneity of student groups and diminishing the share of family education;
  - increasing society's demands on school.

The issue of continuous professional training is a theme studied by various researchers in national and international contexts. In the Republic of Moldova, aspects of in-service teacher training have been covered in the studies of various researchers, specified by T. Nagnibeda-Tverdohle (2018, p. 37): Vl. Guțu - the training of teachers' competencies, the contexts that ensure the functionality and efficiency of the initial and continuous professional training of teachers; VI. Pâslaru - reconceptualising the training of general education staff; T. Callo - professional development of teachers in terms of conditions, accountability, conceptualization of attitudes; V. Andrițchi - human resources management in

education; N. Bucun - the issue of continuous training from the perspective of personality development; S. Baciuc - continuous teacher training in the context of adult education, ensuring quality management in the school; D. Patraşcu - the management of the training of the teachers' professional competencies; A. Cara - training / professional development of teachers in the context of quality, standardization; L. Cuzneţov - teacher training from an axiological perspective; Paniş A. - professionalization of teachers; V.Gh. Cojocaru - ensuring the management and quality of continuous training of teachers; O. Dandara, I. Gîncu - value orientations in professional training; M. Cojocaru-Borozan - the formation of the emotional culture of the teachers, etc.

I. Jinga (2005, p. 67) notices the recorded trends in the field of continuous professional training of teachers:

- integrating of training and improvement in a unitary system, finding factors to stimulate the interests of teachers towards their own improvement;
- transforming lifelong learning from desideratum into reality;
- involving teachers to a greater extent in the decision-making process regarding training programs and courses;
- moving the centre of gravity on the training actions carried out at school level;
- identifying innovative methods for teacher training;
- increasing the duration of improvement and especially of that intended for the practical application of theoretical knowledge.

## **2. Continuous professional training: terminological benchmarks**

By contrast with the initial professional training, which aims at introducing the future teaching staff, through specific theoretical and practical activities, in the professional universe for which it is formed, continuous training

/ preparation refers to updates, achievements and specializations of theoretical, methodical and practical order, through a series of training activities during the professional exercise (C. Cucuș, 2014, p. 495).

*The concept of continuous training* refers to a set of theoretical and practical activities, institutionalized at system level, which involves the participation of educators in order to amplify their psycho-pedagogical, methodical and specialized knowledge necessary for developing optimal socio-professional skills and attitudes in relation to the requirements of a quality education.

The activity of continuous training of teaching staff employs two corresponding actions: an action of renewal and improvement of professional practices by updating the knowledge acquired during the initial training and an action aimed at professional reorientation through new skills validated including through obtaining diplomas. Their interflow anticipates the permanent evolution of educators in the context of a complex activity of advanced training, which responds to both personal and organizational needs, thus favouring the development of educator autonomy (S. Cristea, 2000, p. 155).

Going beyond the traditional meaning of “remedy for the shortcomings of insufficient initial training for the entire professional (didactic) career”, continuous education, in its (post)modern sense, begins to be conceived as a process of long duration and lifelong learning, being defined as a set of activities and practices that require the involvement of educators to amplify their own knowledge, improve skills, analysis and development of professional attitudes.

The continuous training of teachers represents an activity with pedagogical and social content designed, realized and developed within the education system, with a managerial function of continuous regulation / self-

regulation of the educational process, at all its reference levels: functional, structural, operational.

At the functional level, the continuous training of the teaching staff aims at stimulating the pedagogical and social capacities of practical conversion of the system finalities (ideally, educational aims) into objectives engaged in the educational process, in the school and extracurricular environment.

At the structural level, the continuous training of the teaching staff aims at stimulating the pedagogical and social capacities of full capitalization of all the pedagogical resources (informational, human, didactic-material, financial) existing at system and process level.

At the operational level, the continuous training of the teaching staff aims at stimulating the pedagogical and social capacities of design, realization, development and completion of the specific activities of the educational process (lessons, courses, seminars, practical works, conducting classes; extracurricular activities performed with: students, teachers, parents, other representatives of the educational community, activities: managerial, methodical, psycho-pedagogical and social assistance, school and professional guidance, counselling, etc.), in optimal conditions, corresponding to the existing internal and external context, in the short, medium and long term (A. Panait, 2014, p. 3).

Continuous education can be complementary or an extension of the initial one. In connection with this problem, the following misunderstanding arises: it reinforces the idea that continuous education should focus on the academic area that the graduate followed in the initial training stage, and not on the profession acquired or chosen by him at some point. There is not always a complete overlap between the intentionality of initial training and the actual configuration of a profession. The correspondence *between the initial training and the continuous training* is not absolute, and the last one, i.e. the improvement aims at the current

professional state, and not an imponderable state, still undetermined, one that could have been, but was not (C. Cucuș, 2014 , p. 496).

### **3. Continuous professional training: defining notes**

Analyzing the system of continuous professional training in different European countries, the researchers L. Pogolșa, A. Afanas, N. Vicol, V. Andrițchi et al (2016, pp. 12-13) identified the following defining characteristics:

- Continuous professional training is declared a priority area in the educational policy of the countries, but the mechanisms for implementing these policies differ from one country to another.

- Continuous professional training is compulsory or optional, but is done on flexible content and based on decentralized designs.

- Continuous professional training is carried out both by higher education institutions and by specialized institutions, scientific societies or professional associations of teachers; the adopted forms, the duration of the traineeships and the periodicity differ from one country to another.

- In most European countries there are trends of re-conceptualization of the professional training system with emphasis on: establishing factors to stimulate the interest of learners in their own training; involvement of teaching staff to a greater extent in the decision-making process regarding training programs and courses; transfer of training actions in school units; elaboration / setting up of innovative methodologies for continuous professional training; increasing the duration of training activities, especially for practical applications.

According to European policies in the field of continuing professional training, it is appropriate that the relevant legislative and normative regulations of each member country aim at:

- guaranteeing and facilitating continuous access to lifelong learning for skills training and improvement;
- valuing non-formal and informal learning and recognizing the competencies formed in these contexts;
- encouraging innovation in teaching and learning;
- rethinking guidance and counselling, with a focus on access to quality information and counselling on lifelong learning opportunities;
- more flexible ways of providing and personalizing training offers;
- bringing home learning closer, providing lifelong learning opportunities as close as possible to the beneficiaries, in their own communities and supported by IT equipment;
- quality assurance in training.

In order to streamline the process of continuous training of teachers, in response to their professional and personal needs and interests, but also to the specific requirements of the labor market, it is necessary to respect certain principles referred to by Ş. Iosifescu (2001):

*Principles of educational policy:*

1. *The principle of decentralization and flexibility* - translates into the indicative nature of the course and the curricular approach, so that the training offered to meet the specific needs identified at the level of each regional / county centre, both in terms of themes and management of organizational forms and related durations.

2. *The principle of efficiency* - involves a more profitable use of human resources (national, regional and local certified trainers) and support materials through structural and procedural ways to ensure both quality training and co-training and development of trainers.



3. *The principle of compatibility* - the Romanian continuous training system with the European standards (training with the help of educational tutorials).

*Curricular principles:*

1. *The principle of cultural selection and ranking* - refers to the areas of the continuous training curriculum in relation to the fields of human knowledge and the teachers' interests and needs. The curricular offer for continuing education must be sufficiently broad and diverse and integrate multiple cultural approaches.

2. *The principle of functionality* - the connection of the proposed themes to the age of the participants, to the point in their career evolution, to the psychological particularities specific to the different generations of trainees.

3. *The principle of coherence* - the integration of the training themes offered on different components and training channels, the articulation of the learning experiences vertically and horizontally so as to favour the complete learning, the acquisition of functional and operational skills and knowledge.

4. *The principle of equal opportunities through education and of ensuring the individualized path* - the training theme to favour both the improvement on the own field of knowledge, and on the secondary fields, required on the labour market.

5. *The principle of connection to the social* - response to needs / creation of needs - the theme and learning experiences to support the great diversity and rapid dynamics of social life, to be focused on solving situations.

VI. Pâslaru (2003, p. 11) draws attention to the need of reconceptualising the training of the staff involved in pre-university education and argues that *the principles of staff training* envisage change as an immanent state of education / training; positive change of the human being through education / training; strengthening the identity of the human being, including as a national being, the freedom and the democratic character of education / training; permanence and

ubiquity of education / training; the axiological universality of the training of educational staff; employment in culture; scientific character, scientific plurality and interculturality; social connection; focusing on novelty, innovation and creation, on the continuous capitalization of tradition; continuous updating of staff training; systemicity and coherence, efficiency, continuous decentralization and flexibility of training of education staff: correlation of institutional and private approaches, individualization of training; integrating the processes of monitoring, evaluation and certification of the training of the educational staff.

S. Cristea (2000, p. 155) highlights the objectives of continuous training, structured around three poles:

a) personal and professional development of educators by: updating basic skills (psycho-pedagogical and specialized) and acquiring new skills (especially in the field of methodology / specialized teaching);

b) improving the quality of the educational process by: stimulating interdisciplinarity and pedagogical innovation and hiring management at the school and student level and in terms of psychosocial behaviors;

c) knowing the social and environmental environment by: fostering relations with the local educational community (family, economic agents, etc.), bringing the school closer to the social environment (economic, political, cultural), adapting to social change (cultural, political, economic).

I. Jinga (2005) specifies the *objectives of continuous teacher training*:

- improving teacher training, as a premise for optimizing the training quality;
- fostering the competent participation of teachers in the development, modernization and improvement of education;
- developing the capacity of teachers to adapt quickly and easily to the new demands of society.

The basic coordinates of the continuous teacher training according to the researcher I. Jinga (2005, p. 70):

- Continuous education or teacher training must meet the real requirements of education and teachers and be based not on administrative obligation, but on motivational factors.

- Reconsideration of the rigid system, based on a rigid planning and an inadequate evaluation, of school type, which appeals to a small extent to thinking.

- Diversification of training forms and programs, in order to be able to respond to a greater extent to the requirements and possibilities of different categories of teachers.

- Radical improvement of the content of the continuous training activity at all levels, simultaneously with the increase of its attractiveness.

- Giving priorities to those who participate in training activities and obtain very good results, by reducing the internship between grades, promoting in various positions, sending internships abroad, etc.

- The system must ensure the continuous teacher training, designed as complex, creative and responsible personalities, in accordance with the new acquisitions in the field of specialty and education sciences, with the requirements of a democratic society, based on pluralism, on personal initiative.

- The continuous training of teaching staff is a complex process, susceptible to improvements, in relation to the evolution of the objectives and the didactic optimal.

T. Callo (2003, p. 35) is of the opinion that in the process of continuous professional training it is necessary to pursue the following *tasks*:

- Elaboration of programs that would establish the connection between the requirements and the content of the profession, between the general training and the various situations *for which* and *through which* the teacher is fulfilled.

- Increasing the quality of learning by relating the specialized needs of each one and highlighting the professional potential.
- Identifying and applying the advantages of best teaching practices, offering opportunities for professional advancement.
- Transforming professional development into a right and an obligation of all teaching staff.
- Introducing professionalization days in school. Apply a course syllabus to the workplace to ensure vertical transfer.
- Professional development in the classroom context.
- Dynamization of mutual training, summarized in the following components: presentation of the theory; modelling or demonstration; structured or free, unconditional reverse connection; application training.
- The use of a considerable volume of practice in simulated conditions to ensure a dynamic control over the formation of new skills.

The essential difficulty of professional development consists in the relationship that the teacher establishes with his/her own activity, in terms of duration. The transition from one educational field to another does not occur without crises. Professional development must be made omnipotent: the person can be trained and accustomed to submit to the pace of his/her individual development. A first gain is *not to give negative valences to change*, but to consider it a positive factor. On this solid basis the person can explore new areas and acquire the benefits.

VI. Pâslaru (2003, p. 11) states that the *objectives of training teaching staff* involve the epistemological-conceptual and praxiological-methodological fields.

The objectives of epistemological and conceptual training provide:

- promoting identity awareness and property awareness;

- proper understanding of the currently promoted educational concept and of the educational reform, of the conception and strategy of staff training;
- awareness of continuous professional training as a manifestation of the professional personality of the human being;
- discrimination of specific periodic training (active life) from permanent training (whole life);
- the formation of a modern axiological vision, centered on the fundamental values of the contemporary human being (freedom and democracy), on the values of the local, national and universal community;
- encouraging pedagogical creativity and research in the school professional environment;
- the ability (the will) to assume responsibilities and educational initiatives, to think professionally, managerially, economically;
- openness to scientific, professional, cultural pluralism.

The objectives of methodological training establish:

- rigorous conceptualization of all technological training actions;
- integration of technologies with teleology and the contents of teaching staff training;
- universalization and operationalization of training of teaching staff in all its aspects;
- focusing on modular continuing education, on general and specific issues of education;
- selection / combination of traditional and modern methodologies in accordance with the technological vision of the educational actions to be carried out;
- focusing training activities on professional and cultural communication, on creative dialogue and personal insertion of the teacher / school manager in their

own training;

- integration of the values of sciences and technologies, literature and arts with the educational experiences of the teachers, with their own experiences of continuous professional training;

- monitoring the impact at the level of formative innovation;
- promoting the pluralistic model of training sciences;
- continuous adaptation of the technological repertoire to the objectives and the training program.

In the context of continuous professional training it is necessary to focus on the following issues:

- ensuring continuity so as to avoid the loss of accumulated knowledge;
- adapting programs and methods to original objectives, specific to each company;

- training the person for a reality in which evaluations, changes and transformations could occur;

- mobilization and massive use of all means for training and information;
- establishing a close link between the various forms of action and the objectives of education.

On these bases, several models and formulas can be designed, presenting various aspects that would meet the same imperative: transforming professional development into a tool to prepare the person for the tasks and responsibilities imposed by the profession, which also involves a re-evaluation of the educational system according to certain coordinates of thought and action, the emphasis shifting from the forced presentation of novelties in the field to the systematic implementation of effective ideas (T. Callo, 2003, p. 36).

*The content of the continuous training activity* reflects the objectives evoked by the offers designed longitudinally and transversally in different

institutionalized variants (improvement, professional promotion exams, intensive and extensive research, implementation of didactic innovations, school management courses, experience exchanges, scholarships / documentaries etc.) that respects the particularities of each education system. These offers cover, in principle, the following areas of activity:

- a) the curricular design of the subject of the specialized discipline / disciplines;
- b) the managerial organization of the school and the class;
- c) (re)orientation of the psycho-pedagogical training in order to individualize the training, to optimize *the functional-structural correlation* between teacher and student;
- d) the deepening of the essential sociological aspects that aim especially at the relations between school-society, school-local community, school-family (S. Cristea, 2000, p. 156).

As for the structure of curricula in the process of continuous training (i.e. further training), C. Cucuș (2014, p. 504) considers that it should be decentralized and organized modularly, offering the possibility for the teacher to choose the modular segments that actually are useful for them in his/her professional situation: “It is not right for all teachers to be aligned with the same curricular training coordinates, to be put in a particular “form”, knowing that they themselves have different competencies and that they manage different teaching situations, with concrete problems to be solved”.

*The methodology of the continuous training activities* for teaching staff capitalizes on the pedagogical strategies affirmed at the level of permanent education, in general, and in the field of adult didactics, in particular.

S. Cristea (2000, p. 156) is of the opinion that the continuous teacher training is achieved through: methodical and psycho-pedagogical improvement activities carried out at the level of departments or specialized teams in

educational units; conferences, seminars, debates or other special forms of training, organized at interschool, territorial and national level; training courses for specialized, methodical and psycho-pedagogical training, etc.

The main *forms of teacher training* aim at: methodological-scientific and psycho-pedagogical activities carried out at school and after school; methodological-scientific communication sessions, symposia and exchanges of experience; periodic internships for specialized scientific information and in the field of education sciences; distance learning; non-attendance courses; professional training courses organized at different levels, etc. (S. Cristea, 2000, p. 157).

I. Jinga (2005) specifies the value of the following *forms of organizing the continuous teacher training*: individual study (led by a mentor); current scientific information (performed territorially); inter-assistance and exchanges of experience on given topics; pedagogical circles and seminars; summer courses; scientific research; specialized training courses; obtaining teaching degrees; courses organized on TV; internships abroad; master's and doctoral studies, etc.

VI. Pâslaru (2003, pp. 13-14) specifies the following types and forms of training of teaching staff:

a) by duration: long-term training; medium-term training; short-term training;

b) by type of activity: trainings; workshops; practical and laboratory work; assistance with experimental activities in pilot schools; lectures; thesis development; counselling in all types and forms of professional training; internships offered by various specialized training institutions (on thematic modules, on common interests, based on individual need, visits to other schools, teacher exchange between schools, in personalized training workshops); training within the school unit (on-the-job training through the alternation of theoretical



study and practical activity, through counselling, monitoring, assisted design, professional partnership, action learning, tutoring); conferences and debates; self-training (observing another teacher in the class, working in a working group, carrying out research projects); distance learning; permanent and special thematic seminars; methodological meetings; assistance to the educational activities within the school, the department; professional partnership, including expertise of works; monitoring various types and forms of training activities, etc.

In accordance with the principles and laws of the modern labor market, it is necessary to achieve a permanent marketing of the teacher training, which involves:

- investigating the training needs and motivations in relation to various training offers, stimulated by the competition emergence of several educational factors that provide training activities, innovations in the field, various training qualities, and aimed at establishing gaps in professional performance of education staff;
- reporting the real level to the estimated performance level;
- elaboration of training programs focused on the real needs of the beneficiary;
- adequate choice of advertising channels, which is based on the analysis of the quality-price ratio (Vi. Pâslaru, 2003, p. 14).

T. Nagnibeda-Tverdohleb (2018, p. 27) states that the variety of types of proposed trainings demonstrates the complementarity and complexity of the launched process. In the face of the offer of continuous training, teachers can find an answer to their needs. They must also apply for participation, obtain approval, be accepted and be able to bear the consequences of the commitment (school absence, replacement, travel, material and family problems), as well as the question of whether the actual contents and methods of continuous education meet expectations.

Researchers L. Pogolşa, A. Afanas, N. Vicol, V. Andriţchi et al (2016, p. 12) argue that continuous professional training of teachers is a significant area in the implementation of changes in education and therefore concerns many factors interested in this system of adult education. Streamlining the process of continuous professional training is possible with qualified trainers, innovative learning methods, high quality infrastructure and facilities, high relevance to the labour market and motivating directions to further education and training. At the same time, the system of continuous professional training must be accessible to teachers, be career-oriented, and facilitate all over the life both the skills development and career changes of those employed in education.

In order to correctly orient the activity of continuous training of teachers in general education, it is necessary to highlight their motivation, this being an energetic-directional component of their learning potential. It is also necessary to specify the role of each teacher in their own continuous training, in order to modernize this process (T. Nagnibeda-Tverdohleb, 2018, pp. 125-126).

E. Muraru & O. Dandara's research (2003, p. 42) is about ensuring the continuity of the educational process, establishing the connection between general culture training in pre-university education, initial vocational training in university education and continuous professional training as an integral part of professional activity. Trying to correlate the three stages of human formation / realization as a personality, through the prism of the three levels, the authors conclude that in the context of general education the theoretical aspect of training prevails which will diminish in favour of practicality while passing through initial and continuous professional training. At the same time, the authors claim that the basic element of the (initial and continuous) professional training standard is competence. In the same train of ideas, among the multitude of competencies that

must be held by teachers, *the continuous training competence* is highlighted, which aims at:

- identifying professional training needs;
- knowing and using continuous training methods;
- determining priorities in continuous professional training;
- manifesting an openness to changes in the field of activity.

C. Cucoş (2014, p. 509) highlights the need for the teacher to have the *self-reflexive competence*, critical in relation to their own educational activity. The authentic teacher must supervise his/her educational activity; to develop metacognitive resources in the perspective of improving his/her own didactic approach. At the same time, he/she becomes responsible for his/her own professional evolution which must be part of the logic of a permanent development or reevaluation.

E. Păun (2017, p. 185) mentions the value of *career management competence*, in the context of which the teacher is a critical, reflective practitioner who constantly evaluates his/her activity and its pedagogical effects and actively seeks opportunities for professional development and improvement. Among the defining aspects of that type of competence are:

- manifestation of a self-evaluative, self-reflective and self-critical behaviour towards one's own activity;
- openness to innovative trends in the field of his/her professional activity;
- ability to use different sources for his/her professional progress;
- consulting and cooperating with colleagues and school management to improve the activity;
- participation in various forms of improvement and implementation of the assimilated ones;
- the ability to get involved and to carry out research activities.

The characteristics of an efficient continuous professional training system (L. Pogolşa, A. Afanas, N. Vicol, V. Andriţchi et al, 2016, p.13) are the following:

- teachers who demonstrate skills necessary for personal, social and professional growth and development throughout life;
- the relevant continuous training curriculum, connected to the professional needs of the teachers, the school, the community;
- training process focused on the professional needs of teachers and the educational needs of learners;
- fair evaluation system, focused on measuring the skills relevant for the life of the individual and for the labour market;
- teachers able to design learning activities focused on the individual educational needs of the beneficiaries;
- infrastructure and a learning environment friendly to the learner
- a modern, flexible and functional institutional framework that contributes to ensuring the quality of education;
- sustainable academic and social partnerships, focused on common long-term benefits.

#### **4. Conclusions**

1. So as any teacher to respond to the constant demands of the educational environment and the ever-changing society, to become a promoter of change himself, it is necessary to create easy contexts for quality professional training (designed in relation to the requirements of continuous labour market development, but also in accordance with the interest and needs of the pedagogue), whose improvement lasts throughout the entire professional process.

2. The continuous training of teachers is a complex, coherent process, aimed at ensuring the permanent adaptation of teachers to the dynamics of education processes and systems, facilitating the coherence of the professional development of teachers at the same time promoting a proactive attitude, specific to a lifelong learning.
3. In ensuring the professional progress of pedagogues, it is necessary to respect the principles, to achieve the objectives, to capitalize the contents and technologies relevant to the process of continuous professional training of teaching staff.
4. The teacher's self-reflexive competence, critical in relation to their own activity, of continuous training competence, of career management competence enhances their own process of continuous professional development.

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