Distorted perceptions of teachers in organizing the differentiated learning situations

Aida Cornelia Stoian

University of Craiova, Romania

Abstract

Adapting the learning situation to pupil has determined the teachers, especially primary school teachers, to diversify the organizing forms of learning situations. A poor scientific information or the lack of an university education in this field influences the modality of organizing of the level groups by pupils reporting on subjective determinations.

The present study points out theoretical and practical argues, by presenting a research project in order to remove teachers' distorted perceptions who report the organizing of the differentiated learning situations to certain subjective standards.

We proposed as objectives: to study the effectiveness of different ways to select and integrate into lesson the differentiated learning situations; presenting two case studies (a distorted model and an optimum one); comparative analysis of case studies to identify demotivating/ motivating effects of pupils' learning, removal of inappropriate practices and to promote the efficient competences of teachers in projecting and organizing of differentiated learning situations.

Through the research project we wanted to verify the hypothesis: If there are studied comparative two case studies regarding different ways of projection of the differentiated learning situations, then there can be dismantled the distorted perceptions of primary school teachers about them.

Keywords: distorted perceptions, learning situations, differentiated learning, organizing the level groups.

JEL classification: A2

1 INTRODUCTION

Teacher's managerial role in carrying out the differentiated learning situations

If teacher's managerial success is conditioned by the organizing way of the instructing-educational process, then there must be introduced dimensions that shape the place and role of his capacities and powers as a teacher-manager along with other qualities that ensure him possibilities of successful action in pupils' formation-development.

Elena Joița sees the competence as "the efficient action module to achieve the objectives, the various situations, maintaining the educational environment centered on pupil participation, utilization of the management functions." (Joița, 2000)

To highlight teacher's managerial role within the learning situations we will treat the action-methodological skills involved in organizing of the educational situations and in and situations, actions and pupils coordinating.

Thus, in organizing of the educational statements the teacher-manager should show the following competences: to logically order the situations; to analyze and dose the resources; to build various training situations; to process and structure the logical given contents in relations with the objectives; to provide measures and differentiated approach forms of the actions; to alternate and diversify the means to motivate the active participation.

Proving managerial competence in organizing activities, learning situations, the teacher must demonstrate the managerial role in the coordination, management and guidance of pupils, forming in this respect the following skills: using various proceedings in motivating and enabling pupils; to provide footholds in making differentiated tasks; to provide alternatives for solving relevant to particular age groups of pupils; capitalize simultaneously with learning the contents and formative valences; to balance situational practice various skills, abilities, attitudes of pupils; to advise pupils on concrete problems of the activity or of the individual development.

These managerial skills of the teacher can not be individually approached, they correlate with each other, depend on each other. In this regard, D. Salade (1982) believes that teacher's *organizer and leader* role is next to the planner one: he organizes class activity at his discipline, distributes the tasks, creates the motivation of pupils' participation, diversifies their training way, diversifies the situations and their ways of solving, proposes and coordinates programs on objectives or tasks, includes formative activities, of differentiated treatment. Thus, "there are studies that point out that the greatest challenge to differentiate instruction is time, followed by

classroom management skills, changing teacher expectations, and professional development and lifelong learning personal targets." (Corley, 2005).

By organizing of differentiated learning situations the teacher-manager positively influences individuality respect, encouraging successes, the respect for values. Thus, he also has the tasks of diversified organizing of learning situations, which are reflected in the following objectives: to know the school's rules of organization; to know and to use the information system; to use cooperative relations with the pupils of the class; to promote pupils' initiation in tasks' distributing and fulfillment; to facilitate awareness for each pupil of the specific tasks in instructive-educational activities, to positively motivate him, to determine him to organize himself conditions for tasks solving, to understand the objectives and to pursue them independently or in groups, to conceive a solving task program; to train the pupil to practice proper rules of conduct in the development, management and solving of the tasks. In this regard, Bunăiaşu C. says in a study "The teacher`s managerial style is determined by more categories: cognitive level (psyho-pedagogical and managerual representations, competences, convinctions and beliefs); strategic decisions level." (Bunăiaşu, 2014)

Within a learning situation in a lesson, the management role of the teacher is determined by the following actions: determining of the tasks and requirements for differential solving, defining more accurate level's expectations, of the settlement-actions manners that have to be communicated to pupils initially for their awareness and motivation.

Ways for integration into lesson of the differentiated learning situations

The integration into lesson of the differentiated learning situations concerns teacher's managerial competence to organize, to carry out instructive-educational activities: "A modern teaching must place itself in a lifelong learning perspective, opened, pupil-centered and individualized as possible." (D' Haynaut, 1981).

Lesson's situational approach is one of the most required solutions (Joiţa, 1998) because: it can provide to the teacher an operational tool for the assertion of rationality and creativity in the organization; it concretizes the idea that the expected objectives are realized by solving some progressively linked actions, concrete situations; organizing and solving of concrete situations require compliance of some principles of the efficient action: timely intervention, rationality, balance, metering effort, foreshadowing the following action, comparison with previous ones, influencing pupil's educational complex by locating him in the middle of the situation, realizing various communication relations for coordination and guidance;

thus, the teacher applies more accurately the theory of the formative objectives, formulates more appropriate the learning tasks, influences more concretely the pupil, adjusts his actions, uses the continuous assessment in a stimulative manner.

The learning situations should be reported to each pupil as the proper treatment of the pupils during lessons regards both those facing difficulties and those who work in a faster pace. The differentiated education has positive effects for training and development of pupils' personality traits.

I. Negreț and I. Jinga (1999) sustain that the organizing of the learning situations into lesson involves identifying the initial objectives, results obtained from the initial assessment. Thus, identifying every child's gaps, the teacher selects the objectives and projects learning situations resorting to differentiated learning situation.

It is necessary, says M. Stoica (1996), to organize the learning activity along with each lesson by creating the learning situations. Pupil's learning must be organized by creating the learning situations adapted to each pupil specific by structuring the learning material, by formulating the working tasks relative to its pace of work.

The organizing forms of the learning situations, says Elena Joița (1994), should not be overrated by the dominance of one, but throughout the lesson they have to be joined.

For a lesson, the ensemble of the concrete learning situations appears on sequences constructed for each target.

Table 1. *The structure of the learning situation realized on sequences constructed on each target*

Cognitive Object	Essentialised content	Initial level	Learning tasks (group level)	Strategy (methods, means, organization, type of learning)	Continuous assessment
1........	1..........	1.1..... 1.2..... 1.3.....	1.1... 1.2.... 1.3....	1.1... 1.2... 1.3...	1.....

Source: Elena Joița, (1994). *Didactica aplicată* -partea I. Craiova: Editura Gh. Alexandru

In the research project, we proposed the as objectives:

1. Studying the efficiency of different ways to select and integrate into lesson the differentiated learning situations.

2. Presentation of two case studies to highlight the distorted perceptions of some primary school teachers regarding the organizing of the differentiated learning situations.

3. The comparative analysis of case studies to identify the demotivating/ motivating effects of pupils' learning, removal of inappropriate practices and to promote teachers' efficient abilities in projecting and organizing of the differentiated learning situations.

We have identified as general hypothesis of the research project:

If there are studied compared two case studies on different ways to project the differentiated learning situations, then there can be dismantled the distorted perceptions of primary school teachers about them.

From this general hypothesis derives the following specific hypothesis:

1. If there is applied a distorted model of differentiated learning situations, then there can be identified demotivating effects on pupils' learning and removed teachers' inappropriate practices.

2. If there is applied an optimal model of differentiated learning situations, then there can be identified positive effects on pupils' learning motivation and promoted teachers' efficient abilities.

2 METHODOLOGY

Sample

We opted for a fixed sampling (panels) to obtain information about similar problems in the same subjects. The target population consists of primary school teachers and pupils. The sample comprised 2 teachers, 29 pupils of class IA and 27 pupils of class IB in Gymnasium School "Traian" from Craiova.

In selecting the sample we followed that the two classes of pupils to have an approximate equal number, school results to be at the same level, to be part of the same educational institution, so that to have similar conditions of educational environment.

Methods and instruments

The basic method of our research project is the case study. Thus, we realized two case studies where we followed the analysis of the teachers' skills to establish homogeneous groups according to the level of development of each pupil; to apply differentiated learning by setting learning tasks, exercises and practical assignments,

to guide the activity of each group level, to ensure the possibility of regrouping of the pupils by reference to the fulfilled objective.

To check the first hypothesis of our study, through which we follow to identify the demotivating effects on pupils' learning and removing the improper practices, we asked a teacher for primary education to apply a distorted model of learning situations where pupils are divided into level groups after the general perception of the teacher.

In order to check the second hypothesis, through which we wish to identify the beneficial effects on motivation of pupils' learning and to promote the efficient skills of teachers in selecting, initializing and the development of the differentiated learning situations, we asked another teacher of primary education to apply an optimal model of differentiated learning situations, in which pupils are divided into level groups by reference to certain criteria.

Using the observing method, we followed to record teachers' behaviors to select and organize differentiated learning tasks by relating them with the operational objectives, reporting criteria of learning situations, forms of organization and teaching methods.

In this regard, we realized as research instrument one observation grid where we have recorded the analyzed data of educational reality perception. (see Table 2)

The presence of the observer, in our case, will not change the following variables: teacher's ability to select, organize and integrate into lesson the differentiated learning situations.

Table 2. ***Observation grid (structure)***
Lesson's Subject: ....
Class:....................

Operational objective (category)	Learning tasks	Reporting criteria of the learning situations	Learning forms involved in learning situations	Organizing forms	Used methods

Source: Elena Joiţa, (1994). *Didactica aplicată* -partea I. Craiova: Editura Gh. Alexandru

3 RESULTS AND INTERPRETATIONS

Applying the two case studies in order to study the research project's hypothesis, we will analyze and interpret the obtained results of each case study, but we will also make a comparative analysis of the research results to underline the beneficial effects of selection and organization of learning situations differentiated on level groups, where group's level is based on a criterion.

Thus, we asked the two teachers in the sample to apply one of the two projecting modalities of learning situations having as subject: "The sentence" for pupils of class I, in the research group. In this way, we indicated to the teachers to think designing lesson as a chain of differentiated learning situations, and as organizing form to use the level groups. One of the teachers had to organize the class into groups of level set by the general impression of the teacher, the other one had to report the level groups at the criteria of the operational objectives.

The application of distorted model of differentiated learning situations in order to eliminate the inefficient practices

In the first case study we propose to prove that, in the application of differentiated learning situations where pupils are organized into homogenous groups by teacher's subjective criteria, there can be removed these inadequate practices following the recording of the results, of their analysis based on observations grid, by identifying the demotivating effects on pupils' learning. (see Appendix 1)

Applying of the optimum model of differentiated learning situations in order to promote the effective practices of teachers

In the second study case we intend to prove that, following the application of some differentiated learning situations where pupils are organized into homogeneous groups after reporting their results on certain objective criteria, will be promoted teachers' efficient skills, as a result of results recording, of their analysis on the base of observations grid, by identifying the beneficial effects on pupils' learning. (see Appendix 2)

The comparative analysis of the results of the two case studies in order to remove distorted perceptions of teachers on differentiated learning situations

The first projecting modality is to divide the group of pupils into two groups: "*good pupils*" and "*weak pupils*", the classification being performed by subjective impressions.

We believe the division into groups must not be done by labeling "*the good group*" and "*the weak group*". To realize such a verbal calibration implies a moral punishment on pupils, these ones feeling offended will not have the courage to engage themselves in educational activities. In the literature of specialty these offenses were called "killer phrases" (Joița, 1994).

This way, we consider that the level group must be built based on the knowledge level of pupils in terms of settled objectives for the learning situation and not by pupils' reference to certain standards *pupils with learning difficulties, pupils with slowly pace*.

Learning tasks must be advanced by professor comparing them to the operational objectives of the lesson and finding a type of failures or excesses.

We believe that, from these types of level groups, can be part pupils ranked by teacher as poor pupils, but who in that time to have completed the pursued objective and to receive tasks of practice or development.

To assign the pupils of the second group to group level relative to the achieved level in the fulfillment of the operational objective: *pupils to compose sentences from two words after a given image*, the teacher tested the initial level of pupils by frontal organizing pupils' activity, asking them an oral composition of sentences from two words after the given image. Thus, following this initial assessment, he has divided the pupils into three groups level: Group I pupils that make oral sentences with two words, but helped by the teacher's questions; Group II - pupils that make sentences from two words without help; Group III - pupils making sentences of two expressive words.

To these three groups, he has given to solve differentiated learning tasks: to the first group he gave as task of learning to form sentences in writing from two words, being helped by teacher's guidance; to the second group, he gave as task of learning to compose a sentence from two expressive words after image, aided by the text of the manual, involving in this way a research (exploration) action; and to the third group, he has requested to compose three sentences of two expressive words retained by pupils from the studied texts.

Object's achieving, O_2 - *to compose sentences from three words after images*.

For an efficient-formative approach, there should be aimed that all pupils to achieve the creative learning strategies. Thus, we believe that pupils in group I had to succeed to achieve to realize the learning tasks of the group II, too, by composing sentences with expressive words independently studying the given texts. Through research, exploration, pupil's thinking becomes formative, creative.

We notice that if in the group III there are pupils who have failed to form three sentences using expressive words retained from texts, these pupils will not be part of Group II from O2, but they will be included in Group I of the O2 object, asking them to form sentences of three words after a given image. Pupils belonging to the Group I of the O_2 objective will solve the learning tasks of the O_2 Group II, only if they easily compose sentences of three words after the given image. Otherwise, they will receive another image after what they will solve the same learning task until they will carry it out.

We also find that pupils in Group II - O_2, were asked to solve a creative learning task for the fulfillment of the O_2 objective: *to form after an image, sentences of three words which to be linked by meaning*. If previously, at O_1, to these pupils have been assessed their operating abilities with information stored in memory, association abilities, of analysis, now, by solving the learning task of O_2, it is seek the creative learning, to compose sentences of three words, ordering them by meaning, hence uniting them in a short text.

We believe that learning task, S_2 (G II), is a task of practice and development.

Regarding the objective *to form sentences by logical arrangement of the words*, the teacher divided the first group of pupils, according to its subjective opinion, into two groups, asking to those of (Group I) to form sentences by uniting the words from two columns, and to those in (Group II) asking to logically rank the words of some sentences. We find that the learning tasks elaborated for the first group are of application, analysis, association.

Unlike the organizational methodology applied to the first group of pupils, in the second group, the teacher made the organizing by dividing the pupils into three groups:

- Group I - pupils who hardly compose sentences with three words;
- Group II - pupils who easily compose sentences with three words;
- Group III - pupils making sentences of three expressive words.

In this way, the first group had as learning task to form sentences by merging three words from different columns. Those who hardly composed sentences of three words were guided by the meaning of the words establishing the corresponding after analyzing the meaning of each word.

To those in Group II, he has given as learning task to organize some words in sentences after meaning, implying the analysis of the meaning of each word and their synthesis by combining in sentences.

To the pupils in Group III, he has made as learning task to form sentences ordering the words by meaning and adding of an expressive word. This learning task develops their logical and creative thinking, thus becoming a task for development.

Analyzing the above-mentioned, we find that the learning situation aims the formative aspect and ends by developing the skills, abilities and capacities of pupils through their activation in order to solve the given task.

A new learning situation is based on updating previous knowledge, identification of pupils skills as a result of an assessment.

This initial knowledge is achieved by reference to the stated objective and not by subjective calibration *good pupil*. Thus, knowing the initial level, there can be given to the pupils differentiated learning tasks referred to the same objective, progressively dosed. For pupils *to learn how they have to learn,* it is necessary that the study material to be shaped, to build synoptic charts and pictures, as a basic element of independent work, forming in this way study skills, nurturing the creative imagination.

Thus, by realizing the differentiated learning situations on level groups it is made the transition from instructional activities of the formal education, which emphasize the accumulation of knowledge, to a formative education, which enables pupils' thinking.

Professor in the second case study conducted the organization of learning situations by integrating them into the lesson with the following objectives:

- monitoring all pupils' appropriation of the notion of sentence, deepening the study by establishing the level groups in relation to each pupil's assimilation capacities based on diagnostic examination;

- differentiated treatment of pupils by groups of level setting the learning tasks, the exercises, the practical assignments;

- adequate guidance to each level group;

- pupils' regrouping possibility according to the achieved level of the operational objective.

Achieving these goals of differentiated learning situations involves a formative organizing of the lesson, centered on pupil, on its intellectual abilities and skills, pupils being engaged in learning tasks corresponding to the level groups, stimulating their creativity, flexibility of thinking, essential steps to an efficient learning. Relating to the set targets, for the second group of pupils have been efficiently established the intermediate behaviors and identity exercises that lead to the achieving of the operational objective established.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The undertaken research study had obtained the teachers' adherence to organize differentiated learning situations setting the level groups by reference to certain objective criteria, into the lesson to the operational objectives, so dismantled teachers' distorted perceptions about this, encouraging the promotion of the efficient skills of teacher.

Summarizing, we can specify the following aspects:

The paper presents some ***personal contributions***:

- The scientific reasoning of teacher's manager role to organize the instructive-educational process; the description of teacher's management skills in organizing differentiated learning situations; the study of the integration ways into the lesson of the differentiated learning situations by tackling the lesson as a sequence of learning situations.

- Bringing into question of a less studied concept in the literature of specialty, of organizing forms in homogeneous groups of the differentiated learning situations;

As *open questions* for future studies, we propose the development of a research based on the results of this very research project, the detailed analysis of the concept of organizing forms of the differentiated learning situations, by relating them with other forms of organization; providing supporting points for teachers in order to design and implement the differentiated learning situations by combining different organizing forms of the learning situations in order to determine the direct relationship between the requirements to achieve a learning promoting effective participation of pupils and the way of joining the organizing forms deployed on groups or individually, as "There is a growing need of standardizing teaching training activity, enacting European regulations concerning quality, curriculum, achievement and evaluation." (Strungă, 2014)

The study presents *research limits* determined by the following factors:

- The small number of teachers under investigation, given the fact that our research was situated at project level, does not allow the formulation of relevant generalization.

- The obtained results following the case study method did not allow a quantitative analysis.

In a synthesis approach we can consider that in order to adapt the learning situations to the individual characteristics of each pupil, the goal of differentiated

treatment, have to be valued the educative interventions in a learning situation and the learning activities comparable with the operational objectives proposed by undertaking more intermediate variants of learning situations. The intermediate learning situations are only intermediate behaviors that comprise the ensemble of activities and actions that determine the achievement of the given behavioral objective. The intermediate behaviors are selected based on particular characteristics and skills of the pupils.

REFERENCES

Bârsănescu, Ş.; Salade, D.; Stoian, S.; Todoran, D. (1982). *Sinteze de pedagogie contemporană*. Bucureşti: Editura Didactică şi Pedagogică- 4 vol.: II.

Bunăiaşu, C. (2014). Teacher`s asserting premises and possibilities of efficient managerial styles. In *Social Sciences and Education Research Review*. Nr2/2014. Craiova: Editura Sitech.3-9.

Corley, M. (2005). *Differentiated instruction: Adjusting to the needs of all learners. Focus on Basics: Connecting Research and Practice*, 7(C), 13-16.

D'Hainaut, L. (1981). *Programe de învăţământ şi educaţiei permanentă*. Bucureşti: Editura Didactică Şi Pedagogică, p. 170.

Davies, P. (2000). *Differentiation: Processing and understanding in teachers' thinking and practice*. Educational Studies, 26, 2, 191-203.

Iucu, R.B. (2008). *Managementul clasei de elevi. Gestionarea situaţiilor de criză educaţională*. Iaşi: Editura Polirom, 136

Jinga ,I.,Negret,I.,(1999). *Învăţarea eficientă*. Bucureşti: Editura Aldiri.

Joiţa, E. (1994). *Didactica aplicată*-partea I. Craiova: Editura Gh. Alexandru.

Joiţa, E. (1998). *Eficienţa instruirii. Fundamente pentru o didactică praxiologică*. Bucureşti: Editura Didactică şi Pedagogică, pp.170-245.

Joiţa, E. (2000). Management educaţional. Profesorul – manager: roluri şi metodologie. Bucureşti: Editura Collegium, p.128.

Slade, D. (1982). Profesorul – modelator al personalităţii elevilor. În Slade, D.(coord.) *Didactica*. Bucureşti: Editura Didactică şi Pedagogică, pp.216-220.

Strungă, A. (2014). *Imaginile mentale europene şi identitate profesională în formarea cadrelor didactice: aplicaţii în domeniul învăţământului primar*. Bucureşti: Editura Universitară.

Strungă, A. (2015). Using virtual learning communities in shaping the professional identity of primary and preschool pedagogy specialization students: a knowledge management approach. In *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 180. 460 – 467.