

UNIVERSITATEA DE VEST DIN TIMIȘOARA

DOMENIUL ȘTIINȚE ALE EDUCAȚIEI

**Învățare și dezvoltare profesională în domeniul didactic: Practici în
formarea inițială și în formarea continuă a profesorilor**

REZUMATUL TEZEI DE ABILITARE

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Professional learning and development in education. Practices in pre-service and in in-service teacher education

Abstract

This habilitation thesis presents my most significant scientific, professional, and academic accomplishments since completing my PhD studies at the "Al. I. Cuza" University of Iași, Romania, in 2009. The thesis is structured into two thematic sections and includes a list of references.

Section I, entitled *Scientific, Professional, and Academic Achievements on Thematic Directions*, highlights the primary outcomes, published works, and projects completed to date, representing ontogenetic milestones pertinent to my research interests which reflect my focus on the intersections of knowledge, learning, and professional development in the educational domain. Drawing on the publications and research projects I have undertaken so far, I have demonstrated the relevance of my professional and academic achievements and contributions to the field of teacher learning and professionalization – a thematic focus that shaped my research activity over the past fifteen years.

The first section of the thesis showcases my ability to coordinate complex educational research, proposing a comprehensive socio-cultural approach to current issues in learning and professional development. I present how, evolving from an objectivist to a phenomenological, systemic, and contextually sensitive approach, my research has investigated learning in both initial and continuous teacher education over the past fifteen years of academic and educational research activity. By studying institutional, individual, and dialogical discursive practices, I have argued the interdependence between these levels and the process of professional identity construction, emphasizing the importance of considering cultural traditions in interpreting meanings. In conducting comparative research in various European cultural spaces, I highlighted the importance of recognizing and understanding cultural differences and the need to adapt best practices to local specificities. By exploring dialogical relationships and the pedagogy of collaboration, I propose a reconceptualization of how professional learning is understood and implemented. Drawing on critical reflections on the difference between professional development and learning, I emphasize the ethical and political responsibility in revisiting current epistemologies, especially in the context of the inequities exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Ultimately, my research advocates for collaborative and critical participation, informed by systemic thinking and a complex understanding of issues and

practices in education. I envision that such an approach can positively influence the quality and sustainability of formative initiatives in the field of learning and professionalization within the Romanian education system and beyond.

In presenting the main studies and research I have led in the field of teacher learning and professionalization after earning my PhD in Educational Sciences, I aim to underscore the thematic development of certain research interests and questions that gradually crystallized, generating various relevant sub-themes. Reflecting on my academic course in educational research has had the effect of consolidating and deepening my motivations and interests in the field, ultimately leading to the identification of three main thematic units: (1) teacher learning and professionalization through initial training programs, (2) continuous teacher learning and development, and (3) learning in relation to the issue of (in)equity and the notion of crisis in education.

A central theme in my research is the professionalization of teachers, with a specific focus on the processes of learning and identity formation in both initial and ongoing teacher education. My work explores how novice teachers build their professional knowledge and navigate the critical transition from university-based education to the realities of the teaching profession. Within this context, I have analyzed the role of mentorship, the impact of the institutional structures that support or hinder professional growth, and the importance of epistemological shifts in the understanding of teacher learning.

A key contribution to this theme is the study of identity construction during the early stages of teachers' careers. Drawing on theories such as Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) and situated learning, I have examined the narrative practices through which teachers develop a sense of professional agency. This work has led to insights into the interrelationship between teachers' personal experiences, institutional expectations, and broader cultural traditions. Adopting a comparative research lens, I have explored how these processes unfold in different cultural and educational contexts, highlighting the need for contextually adapted approaches to teacher education.

Furthermore, my research underscores the ethical and political dimensions of teacher professionalization, particularly in addressing the inequities in education exacerbated by global challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic. I have critically examined the current educational epistemologies and advocated for inclusive, socially just professional learning opportunities that consider the cultural and socio-economic diversity of teachers and students alike.

Collaborative learning has emerged as another central theme in my work, reflecting my commitment to understanding how learning partnerships among various educational

institutions can enhance teacher education. I have examined the dynamics of university-school partnerships, focusing on how collaboration facilitates the development of shared professional knowledge and the building of learning communities. This research draws on the theoretical framework of communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and collaborative pedagogies that emphasize dialogue, reflection, and shared responsibility in learning.

In this context, I have explored the role of inter-institutional partnerships in initial teacher training, particularly the collaboration between universities and practice schools in Romania and other European countries. These partnerships are conceptualized as systems of activity where the curriculum is continuously problematized and improved through the joint efforts of educators and researchers. My research proposes designing these partnerships following models such as Engeström's (1987, 2001) developmental work research, which emphasizes co-creation and iterative problem-solving to improve educational outcomes.

I have also critically analyzed the political and practical implications of these partnerships, especially in how they can support innovative reforms in teacher education. My publications in this area emphasize the importance of collective competence in teacher professionalization, arguing that effective education requires not just skilled individual teachers but also collaborative educational teams capable of addressing the complex challenges of modern schooling

A third major theme in my work is educational reform, particularly in the context of arts education and the integration of diverse learning experiences into the curriculum. I have consistently advocated for a holistic, interdisciplinary approach to education, where the arts play a critical role in shaping not just academic outcomes but also students' broader socio-emotional and cognitive development. My book "Artele și învățarea școlară" (2016) (*The Arts and School Learning*) reflects this interest, as it explores the potential for a comprehensive integration of arts education into the school curriculum.

Beyond arts education, my research on reform extends to the restructuring of teacher competency frameworks, particularly focussing on how these frameworks can more accurately reflect the collective and collaborative dimensions of professional competence. I argue that competencies should be understood not merely as individual attributes but as collective practices that schools and educational communities engage in. This perspective is especially critical for reforming initial teacher education programs, where the integration of dialogical learning and interdisciplinary teaching practices is essential for the success of future teachers.

In recent years, my research has also addressed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on educational reform, focusing on how the crisis has exposed and intensified pre-existing

inequities in the education system. Through international collaborations, I have investigated how different countries in Central and Eastern Europe responded to the pandemic, particularly in terms of policy and practice. My findings emphasize the need for long-term, equity-centered reforms that go beyond crisis management, addressing the structural challenges facing education today.

My academic work is deeply rooted in the intersections of theory, practice, and educational policy. Whether examining the nuances of teacher identity formation, the collaborative dynamics of teacher education partnerships, or the broader implications of educational reform, my research seeks to provide contextually sensitive, evidence-based insights that contribute to the ongoing professionalization of educators and the improvement of educational systems. By addressing local and global challenges, I aim to foster an inclusive and sustainable vision for education that supports teachers and learners in navigating the complexities of the 21st century.