

Chapter 14

Case Study of a Hybrid Undergraduate Elementary Certification Program

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this study was to assist instructors and leadership of a hybrid weekend pre-service teacher education program at the University of Oradea to improve their effectiveness with students. Specifically, this study sought to gather and analyze data from three program constituents: students, instructors, and program leadership. The preschool and primary weekend education program at the University of Oradea was developed to be suitable for students who for various reasons cannot attend the traditional day classes. In 2011, the weekend program was changed into a hybrid program in an effort to more directly meet the needs of the student population. In order to more effectively meet the needs of the students, it became obvious that the pedagogy and structure of the program needed refinement. The data gathered in this study allowed the research team to develop recommendations for program, pedagogical, and textbook improvements.

INTRODUCTION

The University of Oradea, which was chartered in 1990, is housed in Oradea, Romania. There are 108 undergraduate programs, 86 master degree programs and 10 doctoral programs offered by

the university. The university is organized into 15 faculties at the undergraduate and graduate levels and three independent departments: the Teacher Training Department, the On-line Department, and the Life Long Learning Department. The University has adopted the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) in

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order to allow students to participate in classes throughout Europe and transfer their credits to the University of Oradea. This agreement also allows students from other European countries to attend classes in Oradea and transfer those credits to their home universities. Approximately 11781 undergraduate students are enrolled at the university and 2931 students attend graduate levels classes. The Sciences of Education department houses 457 students. The weekend program for primary and pre-school pre-service teachers hosts 184 students.

The mission statement for the university states that its goal is to promote knowledge, research and training through partnerships among teachers, students and the community. According to its mission the University seeks to train and educate undergraduate and graduate students on a large scale and at a high level. The weekend education program was developed to be aligned with and assist the university in accomplishing this mission.

The Pedagogy of the Primary and Pre-School Education program is housed in the Department of Sciences of Education from the Faculty of Social and Humanistic Sciences. There are seventeen full-time instructors in the department. Associate instructors are also hired by the university on a need basis. The certification program is a three year process. Students progress through the program as a cohort with all students taking the same courses together during their program. Each cohort is assigned an advisor who remains with the cohort for their three years at the university. Students participate in 60 courses in three categories: Core Education courses (9 courses), specialty courses (43 courses), and elective courses (8 courses). Students participate in community schools every semester, usually one day per week. Courses are usually divided into two types, theoretical and practical. In the theoretical classes students learn educational and psychological theory. The practical seminars are organized to give students more real life experiences related to the theories studied in the theoretical classes. In their specialty courses students also participate in laboratory (e.g. music,

art, etc.) and practicum courses (methods of teaching), based on the discipline under study. At the completion of the program students are certified as Pre-School and Primary Teachers.

The teacher certification program has a long tradition, starting in 1785 with a vocational high school. In 1989 the state changed the certification process and required all teachers to be college graduates. The first weekend classes for education majors began in 1997 as an independent department. In 2005 the program was transferred to the faculty of Social and Humanistic Sciences in the Department of Sciences of Education. University weekend classes were endorsed by the national government in 2001 based on Government Decision No. 1101, and the law was updated in 2011 by the National Education Law. According to national standards weekend programs can only be instituted if there is an identical program in the day program. The education weekend program at the University of Oradea is the only teacher certification program that uses a hybrid weekend model.

In 2011, during the accreditation process, the weekend program acquired its present hybrid format. The program changed its philosophy from being a traditional weekend program running traditional face-to-face classes to a hybrid program based on a tri-dimensional pedagogical model. Online resources were added to the program and policies and procedures changed to adapt to the new roles of instructors in a more student centered and hybrid process. The program identified the non-traditional nature of its weekend students and developed the present instructional philosophy. Instructors who were not experienced working online had to learn how to use a new platform, new procedures, and new technology. Some instructors quickly adapted to the new systems while others struggled with their new teaching environment. Some instructors use the online portion of the program as a significant part of their teaching while other use the online resources to give out information and class resources for students. The format and content of the class texts changed

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