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## **The specific competences: a pedagogical model of valorisation**

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**Abstract.** The aim of the paper is to design a possible pedagogical model for the use of specific competences, in their quality as learning purposes. Thus, a theoretical approach to the nominal and operational definition of the competence is proposed, as well as an approach to their processing by derivation in order to obtain some micro objectives of the lesson. An important dimension of discourse is represented by a critical analysis scenario of the specific competences proposed by the intended curriculum (syllabus). In this sense, a structural analysis grid of these prescriptive and anticipatory statements is outlined, a grid that contains the three key elements: knowledge, skills and attitudes. One of the conclusions of the theoretical study is the need to re-dimension the statements, both by introducing the missing component, as well as by pedagogical reformulation of these statements. The hard core of the reflexive approach is represented by the processuality of the transformative use of specific competences at each level of learning programming: calendar, learning unit, lesson. Also, for the first time, a functional typology of these specific competence.

**Keywords.** competences, learning, assesement, evaluation, derivation

### **1. Introduction**

In tempore, there have been numerous definitions of the notion of "competence", loaded with the imprint of the context in which they were issued. Thus, McClelland (1973, apud Wong, 2020), conceptualized competence as a set of knowledge, skills and personality traits such as perseverance, patience, leadership quality, interpersonal and communication skills, likely to ensure efficiency and sustainability of the actions carried out. McClelland's idea (1973, apud Wong, 2020) about competencies had a significant impact in organizational praxis, especially at the level of human resources management, because it opened a new perspective on the development of tools that can predict the performance of individuals at work. According to Boyatzis (1982, apud Wong, 2020), competencies are characteristics that influence individual work performance. For L.M.



Spencer and S.M. Spencer (1993, apud Wong, 2020), competencies are motives, traits, values, attitudes, knowledge, cognitive/behavioral skills, or any other measurable individual traits that contribute to a meaningful differentiation between poor and superior performance. Page and Wilson (1994, apud Wong, 2020) define competencies as knowledge, skills and personal traits needed to be successful in the activity. Athey and Orth (1999, apud Wong, 2020) see competencies as a set of elements - knowledge, skills, behaviors, collective values - associated with a high level of performance. A generic definition of competencies, widely accepted (Palan, 2003; Campion, Fink, Ruggeberg, Carr, Phillips, & Odman, 2011, apud Wong, 2020), assumes the existence of five observable, measurable factors (by reference to a criterion/standard) and responsible for ensuring efficiency in the activity: 1. knowledge, 2. skills, 3. values, 4. personal traits and 5. motives.

From a psychological point of view, the core of the concept of competence lies in the person's ability to respond effectively to tasks. It is basically a dynamic relationship between (self)imposed demands and the person's potential to meet these demands (Reinhardt & North, 2003). Beyond this explicit, functional, socially necessary perspective, the development of competencies has as its implicit purpose individual evolution (Schneider, 2019). Competence does not imply actual performance, but rather refers to people's potential to become and perform superiorly in various contexts (Palan, 2003).

Porvaznik (2013, apud Skorkova, 2016) presents a holistic approach to the concept of competence based on three constituent elements: professional knowledge, social maturity (responsibility, moral conduct) and application skills.

The dynamics of contemporary society require changes in the conceptualization of competencies, so that they are adapted to current economies. In this context, competences are not simply knowledge and skills. They assume the ability to effectively respond to complex requests by mobilizing psychosocial resources (which also involves the attitudinal element).

According to current OECD regulations (Ananiadou & Claro, 2009), competences can be thought of in terms of three dimensions:

1. The informational dimension involves searching, selecting, evaluating and organizing information, but also restructuring, modeling and generating one's own ideas;
2. The communication dimension includes the capacities of effective communication, collaboration, flexibility, adaptability;
3. The ethical dimension and impact presupposes an awareness of multiculturalism and social responsibility.

Competence is not a simple notional knowledge (e.g. physical phenomenon), but a dynamic knowledge, i.e. a potential knowledge, mobilizable in a large number of different situations of the same type (e.g. recognizing a physical phenomenon). It mobilizes knowledge, prior knowledge ("knowing how to do") and conative knowledge ("knowing how to be") (De Ketele, 1985; De Vecchi, 1992, in Minder, 2011).

The advantages of learning centered on competences in school (Rey, Defrance, Pacearcă, Carette, Kahn, 2012, 37):

- It avoids fragmentation of tasks and loss of meaning for students.
- Encourages active learning.
- It reproduces the purpose and meaning of school knowledge.
- It helps the learning process to operate a profound transformation of the learning subject.
- It can help reduce selectivity and the 'culture of failure'.



Two existing definitions in the National Education Law have the value of useful operationalizations for the proposed study. First, competence is the proven ability to select, combine and adequately use knowledge, skills and other acquisitions consisting of values and attitudes, for successfully solving a certain category of work or learning situations, as well as for professional or personal development in conditions of effectiveness and efficiency (RNEL, Appendix /14). Second, „The education and professional training of children, young people and adults have as their main purpose the formation of competences, understood as a multifunctional and transferable set of knowledge, skills and attitudes, necessary for...”(RNEL, 4th art.). In a image:

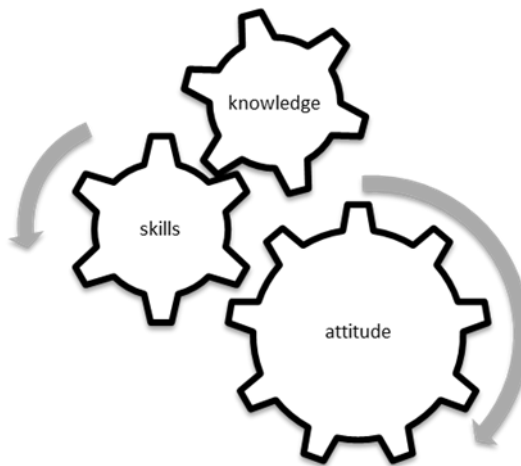


Figure 1. The composition of a competence

## **2. Specific competence as aim and content**

As a curricular variable that dimensions the entire school and meta-school pedagogy (v. curriculum centered on competences), competence fulfills a double role. On the one hand, it represents the aim (finality) of learning efforts. Whether as a set of key competences, or as a set of professional or transversal, general or specific competences, the pedagogical discourse on competence recognizes the prescriptive, anticipatory, value-regulating and evaluative roles of competence. Within the school program (intentional curriculum), general competences and specific competences (in particular) constitute the intentional milestones of the learning activity of each discipline. Specific competences represent the intended acquisitions during the study of a school year, revealing the desirable instrumentation for a discipline and providing an answer to the question "why do we learn?".

On the other hand, competence also associates another role: content of learning. "Deconstructed" by the answer to the query "what is being learned?", the content of learning signifies the elements that ensure the equipping of students with the set of specific skills, and the disclosure of these elements is ensured by the operational definition of the competence: set of knowledge, skills and attitudes. In other words, students must equip themselves with knowledge. What is the appropriate content for this target? Compatible knowledge, be it factual, conceptual, procedural or metacognitive (to refer to just one known taxonomy: Anderson and Krathwohl, 2001). Adapted through transposition, the set of specialized pedagogical knowledge constitutes the tool, the means by which the acquisition of the first (homonymous) component of the competence



is ensured. The skills component of the competence positions us in the territory of knowledge utilization. The skills are challenging, both theoretical and practical in nature: „Skill is one of those social science words in common parlance with many meanings, numerous synonyms such as “ability”, “competence”, “knack”, “aptitude” and “talent”, and varied imprecise translations in other languages” (Grren, 2011). Whether cognitive (such as analytical or critical thinking skills, decision-making skills, or general problem-solving skills), practical, socio-emotional skills and metacognitive skills (OECD, 2016), skills are tools obtained through practice, tools that ensure effectiveness and efficiency in actions/activities. From a pedagogical perspective, the acquisition of a skill involves the valorization of knowledge through practice. The most useful and easy to exploit in the formation of a skill are procedural knowledge, but other types of knowledge can also be involved and materialized in the form of skills.

Attitude, in its quality of "constant, structured orientation" (Ștefănescu, Bălan, Ștefan, 2015, 23), represents the means of character expression (Zlate, coord., 2005) having a heterogeneous composition: cognitive component, motivational component, affective and voluntary component (ibid, 117). The attitude represents a pattern of relating to various aspects of the human being's life: self, others, life, nature, social phenomena, etc.

The key "ingredient" of the attitude is the value, the one that orients, regulates, nurtures the human being's way of relating/reporting. Internalized and stabilized, value is the hard core of any attitude.

As a result, the main challenge for the teacher is to ensure that the student becomes aware of, and then practices, the various values that support the behavioral manifestations. In other words, the content of the attitude is the value, and the necessary pedagogical mechanism is the practice (exercise) of various behaviors - value. In conclusion, the appropriate content for the formation of any competence is represented by the set of learning experiences composed of knowledge and exercises – practices compatible with the skills and attitude derived from the competence. The pedagogical approach through which these three categories of specific competence components are identified is called derivation. The first level of derivation is the specific level, a useful approach for designing/planning the calendar (annual) of school learning. The components obtained will retain the same level of generality as the specific competence:

The specific level component of the competency	Enunț	
Specific level knowledge (Ks)	Ks1	
	Ks2	
	...	
Specific level skills (As)	Ss1	
	Ss2	
	...	
Specific level attitude (Ats)	At2	

Figure 2. Specific competence derivation table. Specific level



The second level of derivation is the operational one, accessible when establishing the key contents of the specific level components, within the programming of the learning unit (specific competence).

### **3. Specific competence as a challenge statement**

At the level of the school curriculum, each specific competence is expressed as a statement and is identified by a numerical code. Examples: "Respecting some personal hygiene rules" is a specific competence of the Personal Development discipline (second class) and has the code 1.3. Another example: "Exploring moral values that underlie relationships with other people" is a specific competence of the subject Civic Education (grade four) and has the code 2.1. The critical reading of the various statements with the status of specific competence allows an important finding: their formulation does not allow the visualization of the three necessary components (knowledge, skills/skills and attitudes). This is the case with most "specific competences": their content makes transparent only two components: knowledge and skills. Attitude is almost always missing. As a result, the teacher must become a curriculum creator, completing the statement with the attitudinal element that he considers appropriate (e.g., on his own initiative, practicing collaboration, showing autonomy, expressing interest, showing conscientiousness or perseverance, etc). Thus, each statement is enriched in the sense of completion that gives it the authentic status of specific competence. To vitalize the statement, you can substitute the long infinitive of the verb in the statement with the future of this verb. In addition, another welcome intervention of the teacher is to ensure the statement - competence and an authentic pedagogical appearance, by introducing the expression "every student", an expression that confirms the individual dimension of transformational experiences through school learning. The result of the steps to complete/process the existing statements in the program would look like this: "Respecting some rules of personal hygiene" will become "Each student will respect, on her own initiative, some rules of personal hygiene", and "Exploring some values morals that are the basis of relationships with other people" will become "Each student will explore, autonomously, moral values that are the basis of relationships with other people".

Use of specific competence: planning of school learning

To plan school learning is to plan to equip students with the set of skills prescribed in the school curriculum. There are three levels of learning programming at which the specific skills prescribed in the curriculum of a discipline must be capitalized: the level of the calendar (annual) programming, the level of the learning unit programming (of the specific skill), the lesson level.

Learning planning at the calendar (annual) level represents the approach of associating two types of curricular variables: the "learning" variable and the temporal variable. The "learning" variable is represented by the set of specific competencies associated with a discipline and involves a pedagogical approach to their analysis, analysis which consists, on the one hand, in the derivation of each competence (to visualize its components) and in ensuring a succession adequate of these competencies. By appropriate sequence is meant that ordering of the specific competences which, following the derivation, allow the identification of complementary or continuity relationships between these competences. Aici este necesar un demers de analiză tipologizantă a competențelor specifice. Thus, from the point of view of the duration required to equip the student with the respective specific competence, a distinction can be made between punctual competences and long-term competences. Punctual ones are purchases that can be made in relatively short time intervals;



instead, the longitudinal ones require long intervals of time, even the entire duration of the school year. An example of a point competence: "Using elements of active listening" (2.2., personal development, second grade). Why is it a point competency? Equipping students with the set of knowledge, skills and attitude (constructed by the teacher!) takes (in the school calendar) a maximum of three (3) – four (4) lessons.

But a longitudinal competence can also be "broken" into specific competences: based on the key contents, specific (sub)competencies are established.

Based on another criterion, instrumentation synchrony, specific competencies can be independent and synchronous. Independent competences are those that are implemented without any temporal overlap with another, while synchronous competences are those that are implemented, at least partially, over a common period.

The temporal variable also requires a separate analysis: based on the time markers existing in the education plan (the number of hours for the weekly study of a subject, at a certain grade level) and in the structure of the school year (which makes visible the total number of active weeks dedicated to didactic activities, i.e. those obtained after eliminating the "the different week" and the "green week"), a number of active didactic hours can be calculated. However, the number obtained is not final, as it depends on the position of the discipline in the weekly schedule: it is possible that certain hours are "lost" if the discipline is placed on days that turn out to be legally free. After this new processing, the time resource (the final number of active teaching hours) must be related to an official regulation existing in the National Education Law: For each discipline and field of study, the school curriculum covers 75% of teaching and assessment hours, leaving the disposition of the teaching staff 25% of the time allocated to the respective subject/field of study: „Depending on the characteristics of the students and the strategy of the school, the teacher decides whether the percentage of 25% of the time allocated to the subject/field of study is used for remedial learning, in the case of children with special problems, for the consolidation of knowledge or for the stimulation of able students of superior performance, according to individual learning plans developed for each student” (LEN, art.66 (3)).

As a result, the total number of active hours must be distributed over two units: 75% will be hours for teaching - learning - evaluation, and 25% hours at the teacher's disposal (HTD)

Only "now", after they have been derived and arranged in sequences of continuity/complementarity, each specific competence can be associated with a certain number of hours, represented both by hours from the teaching-learning-evaluation category and by hours from the category at the disposal to the teacher.

The appropriate table for this level of learning planning will look like this:



Specific competence (code + statement)	Total number of hours	Distribution of hours		Week / Date	Remarks
		Teaching/Learning/Assessment (Synthetic)	HTD		
		Teaching/Learning/Assessment (Synthetic)			
		HTD			
		Teaching/Learning/Assessment (Synthetic)			
		HTD			

Figure 3. Annual planning model

The next level of designing/planning school learning is that of the learning unit. A first challenge is of a conceptual nature: the learning unit is not synonymous with the thematic unit, always expressed as a content unit. Previously, the learning contents were codified, as a result they cannot be confused with thematics (thematic units). If school learning (associated with a discipline) is represented, in its entirety, by the instrumentation with the set of specific competences, naturally, a unit of learning represents a unit of this set of specific competences. This is the reason for the identity between the learning unit and the specific competence. As a result, the design/planning of the learning unit is identical to the design/planning of a specific competence.

The processuality of this design/planning is complex. Based on the level-specific derivation, the set of knowledge, skills and attitude (all level-specific) were obtained. Visibility on the content of each specific competence allowed their sequential association within the (annual) calendar design/planning. In addition, this design/planning allowed the distribution of a number of hours for each specific competence, number of hours obtained from two sources: the activities of teaching - learning - assessment and HTD (improvement / recovery - consolidation / practice - deepening / progress). An important consequence of these types of didactic activities is the need to include them in the design/planning of the specific competence (learning unit). A necessary clarification: the assessment that the teacher carries out in relation to the acquisition of the components of a specific competence can be continuous and synthetic. The continuous assessment involves checking/confirming the students' instrumentation with the components associated with a lesson, and the synthetic assessment is the one that checks/confirms the students' acquisitions with all the components of the respective specific competence.

As a result, a design/planning of the specific competence (learning unit) must make transparent all three didactic territories: teaching – learning, assessment, the hours available to teachers and, within these territories, make transparent the important curricular variables: time milestones, strategies, key contents.

For the teaching-learning area, a possible template is the following:





<i>Derived components at the specific level (type and statement)</i>	<i>Data</i>	<i>Key-content</i>	<i>Strategies</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
Ks1				
Ks2				
Ks...				
Ss1				
Ss2				
Ats1				
...				

Figure 4. Learning unit design/planning template. Teaching – learning

For designing/planning assessments:

The type of assessment	Week/ Data	The components (of the competency) that are assessed	Strategies/ Tools	Remarks
continuous				
	.....	.....	.....	.....
synthetic				

Figure 5. Learning unit design/planning template. Assessment

For the last didactic dimension, corresponding to the HTD, the following template can be used:

Type of activit	Data/ week	Derived components of competence	Key contents	Strategies	Remarks
amelioration					
consolidation					
thoroughgoing study					

Figure 6. Learning unit design/planning template. HTD

Based on the key contents, quantitative benchmarks are identified that will be capitalized in the next level of derivation, the operational level.



An example. Specific competence: Using elements of active listening (Personal development, second grade)

Reformulated and supplemented, this competence becomes Each student will respect, on his own initiative, some elements of active listening.

Specific level derivation:

Ks1: Each student will know the non-verbal behaviors specific to active listening

Ks2: Each student will know the verbal behaviors specific to active listening

Ss1 (related to Ks1): Each student will practice (use) non-verbal behaviors specific to active listening

Ss2 (related to Ks2): Each student will practice (use) verbal behaviors specific to active listening

Ats1: Each student will practice (first) with external regulation (of the teacher) behaviors specific to active listening

Ats2: Each student will practice behaviors specific to active listening on their own initiative

Two clarifications:

1. the verb in the specific competence statement has been substituted with a more appropriate one.

2. knowledge is obtained, first of all, by studying specialized literature, the only one capable of providing relevant key contents; sure, the manual can also be used, but there is a chance that it will not capture the key contents.

These identified key contents are: eye contact, appropriate posture (for non-verbal behaviors) and asking questions, paraphrasing, giving answers (for verbal behaviors). So two non-verbal behaviors and three verbal behaviors.

As a result, the operational level derivation can be done:

Ko1 (Knowledge operational level): Each student will know two non-verbal behaviors specific to active listening

Ko2: Each student will know three verbal behaviors specific to active listening

So1 (related to Ko1): Each student will practice (use) two non-verbal behaviors specific to active listening

So2 (related to Ko2): Each student will practice (use) three verbal behaviors specific to active listening

Ato1: Each student will practice (first) with external regulation (of the teacher) five behaviors specific to active listening

Ato2: Each student will practice five behaviors specific to active listening on their own initiative

These components derived at the operational level can be capitalized within the objectives of each lesson, in the form of operational objectives. In this context, a new clarification is required: the time reference "hour", used in the design/planning of school learning should be read "lesson", as a didactic time reference, which includes two types of learning activities: classroom learning and learning from home and a type of assessment, the continuous one (performed at the beginning of each school hour):

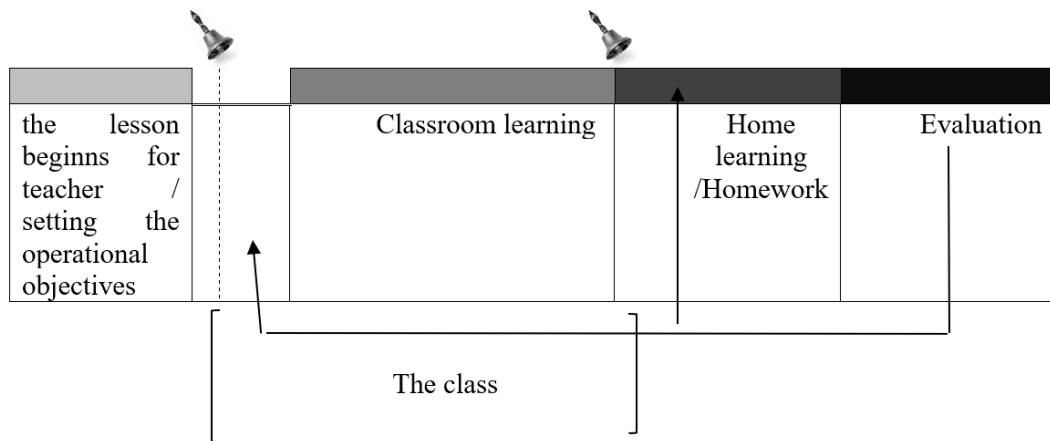


Figure 7. The structure of lesson (Petre, 2015, 2016)

Thus, the four major phases of lesson management can be anticipated:

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
The teacher starts the lesson / the setting of the operational objectives	Classroom learning	Home learning / Homework	Assessment

Figure 8. The four phases of lesson (Petre, 2015, 2016)

### Conclusions

Specific competence is the most important curricular variable for designing, implementing and evaluating school learning. As the finality of learning, but also as the source of the contents of this learning, the specific competence obliges the teacher to critical and creative approaches to curriculum design: completion and reformulation of the competence, derivation at the specific level and at the operational level, multilevel design/planning, information management thematic (in many subjects/subjects of study).

Only in this way can compatibility and identity be ensured between the four types of curriculum: intended, taught, learned and assessed.

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