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SLOVAK REPUBLIC

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE of SCIENTIFIC PAPER
AFASES 2014
Brasov, 22-24 May 2014

FORMING THE EMPATHIC CAPACITY OF THE TEACHERS

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Abstract: *The educational exercise constitutes a complex situation, where previous knowledge is always subject to facts, being mandatorily contextualised in accordance with the realities from the educational process. One of these precursors is the psychological knowledge - more precisely psychological "lecturing", understanding and signification of the education situation, with all the components and interactions making it. We hence propose the method of empathy in the educational process, which can naturally develop the personality and the self of the students.*

Keywords: *Empathy, capacity, teaching professional training, communication, reshuffle, model.*

Subject actuality. The teaching activity implies permanent communication relations between the agents of education - teachers, students, parents, school managers. An important place in this activity is held by the relation professor - student, which represents an important aspect of the educational environment of the student. This relation is a largely different from the other social relations, it is determinant in establishing the educational objectives of the contemporary school, as also to establish a healthy psychological and moral climate in the school, and it requires a good empathy from the teacher, that should be continuously developed, empathy being indispensable to an effective communication.

In the view of a number of researchers, empathy is an indispensable capacity for people activities, of which specialty involves interpersonal relations. One of the main forms of the human activity requiring empathy is the

teaching activity. The role and place of empathy in the teaching activity is not recent. There are wide researches in the field of the professor's capacity, which he should possess to perform in his activity. Among the important capacities ensuring the instrumental-operational side of the teaching activity we also find empathy. The presence of empathy is required in the structure of the teaching activity, particularly in optimising the relation teacher-student.

The teaching psychology constitutes the main source of information and scientific grounding of education, being most dependants and having an essential meaning for the educator and for the resource teacher. The fundamental problems of the educational psychology include psychological issues of the young generation's education and the psychological issues of the educative process.

The educational process is an act of informational communication (transmission) of ideas, messages, opinions, behaviours

(actions), within which the relations professor-student represent communicational interactions of cognitive, affective, volitional, behavioural (action) nature etc. The teaching-learning process, as a specific form of communication, can be therefore examined by the models offered by the theory of communication.

The Latin verb *communico,-are* had a more profound meaning, not only referring to evidencing contact, the connection, but it also meant to have something in common, to share, to put together, to mix, to unite. Romanian language has taken over this meaning of sharing, unifying, meaning retained by the archaic *cuminecare*. In the vision of *C. Noica*, the understanding is completed by what it is not expressed in the text. "We advance by a boost of communication, but we do not truly progress if we fail to obtain a boost of *cumunicare*." Communication contains the man, and the man shows or hides himself *in* and *through* communication, because in all communication acts we have, aside the common meanings, perfectly understood, also typical aspects, partially understood, as also singular aspects pertaining to the personal ineffable and they cannot be fully decoded.

In the general sense, human communication is an interpersonal relation where people give meaning and value to the received message. Communication is defined as a transmission of content from the emitter to receiver by means of a channel; it is a possible or real relation between two or more individuals, between whom an exchange of substances, energy or meanings can take place. Empathy firstly refers to making a profound and sustained physical contact with the other, within which contact a person is very careful with the experience of the other a sole individual. In an empathic manner to be, the experience of the other is appreciated as it is an idiosyncratic manifestation of the other in its uniqueness. Secondly, empathic exploration includes empathic, profound and continuous investigations or immersions, in the experience of the other. And thirdly, empathic exploration assumes resonant observance of the implicit limits or aspects of

the client's experience, which can aid it to create a new meaning.

Inter-human communication represents one of the supreme values of the man. In the modern world, marked by informational explosions and by the impetuous development of the information and communication means, of globalisation of all the field of public life, inter-human communication becomes more and more important.

All the conceptual documents of the education reform advances as constitutive principle of education the recognition of the personality of the educated one as a supreme value of education, its uniqueness, this fact claiming continuous harmonisation of the inter-personal relations between education and educated, as inherent conditions of the consolidation of the humanist character of education in the modern world.

The process of forming the empathic capacity of the teachers is grounded on the development and valuing of the empathy features, related to a the evaluation criteria applied to professor-student relation, adapted to the educational context, which are also formed as empathic capacities.

These are: *opening to communication; adapting to the communication way of the interlocutor; self-analysis; active listening; non-verbal language; emotional responsiveness; putting in other man's place; putting in the role of the characters from literary works, movies; factional situation.*

Because both from the theoretical and experiential framework one can decide the need to elaborate a model-instrument that would intensify the empathy-forming process, oriented towards improving the professor-student relation, the researchers have elaborated a ***Model for forming the empathic capacity of the teachers (Model)***.

The ***Model*** implementation period can vary from a half a year to a year of education. Within the continuous professional training activities from the training centres, this period can be equal with the period of their presence in the training centre. Although it is a short period, it is sufficient for the teachers to become aware of the need for form empathy, to accumulate certain knowledge and to train



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the empathic capacities, all of them constituting a launching track for subsequent self-training of the empathic capacity of the teachers, which would lead to the reshuffle of the communication relations with the students. By *reshuffle* we understand *change, modification, improvement*. We used the term *reshuffle* with the meaning of *improvement*. The selection of the term *reshuffle*, is stained theoretically and praxiologically, both research sources revealing the fact that certain aspects of the professor-student relations, particularly - equitable treatment for the students with learning performances and with desirable behaviour and for the students with undesirable performances and behaviour, are "deteriorated" or reduced and require a reshuffle, i.e. a change to good, an improvement.

The scientific meanings of the term *model* are: graphical or tridimensional representation of an idea, of a process or of a system (form, structure, scheme, illustration); an assembly of elements or variables composing a symbolic or social system (system, plan, configuration); temporary truth (assumption, hypothesis, opinion); logical representation of a theory (formula, theoretical model).

The teaching model "tends to reproduce" the essential elements of the original, natural or social phenomena and processes, studied according to the specific and concrete objectives of the teaching activity in question. The model achieves a double teaching function: *of initial information*, which triggers the logical and epistemological mechanisms specific to the analogue reasoning; *of final validation* of the formed knowledge and skills, at the level of some different reference systems that employ the specific resources for formative, permanent, continuous evaluation.

To model means "to execute something based on a given model", i.e. modelling means "the action to model and the result thereof". In

educational modelling as a teaching method, the action of indirect investigation of reality by elaborating and using models predominates.

Modelling assumes facilitating the discovery by the trainees (teachers) of the properties, information and relations between things (objects, phenomena, processes from the nature and society, which such models reproduce).

The elaborated model met the following requirements:

1. The need to become aware of the purpose, training objectives, principles, conditions, forms and methods of the training process by moderators and by the members of the training groups (self-training).
2. The need for a motivation to form empathy with the teachers
3. Joining theory with practice
4. Achieving the training activity by integrating the evaluation in the empathy-forming process

In building the *Model* specific theoretical benchmarks have also been applied. *The model* presents a theoretical system, made of the components:

- the training purpose and objectives, the principles, the contents, the forms, the methods, the conditions and stages of training the empathic capacity, which also represent the essential items of the empathy-formation process for the teachers, as reshuffle of the professor-student relation.

The purpose for applying the model: forming the empathic capacity of the teachers as a reshuffle of the professor-student relation, particularly, the performance of an equitable

treatment for the students from professors, the constitution of some cordial relations between professors and students.

The training objectives are elaborated based on the empathy features, related to the evaluation criteria for the communication relation professor - student:

- initiation in the theme of teacher's empathy;
- forming the capacity to be open for communication;
- forming the capacity for affective response to the others' emotions;
- forming the capacity of self-analysis;
- forming the capacity to observe and use own and interlocutor's non-verbal language;
- forming the capacity to put in the place of characters from literature, movies;
- forming the capacity to put in the other's role;
- forming the capacity of active listening;
- forming the capacity to adapt to the communication way of the interlocutor;
- forming the capacity to act, after passing through the aforementioned situations.

Principles. Their definition/ determination is necessary for an efficient performance of the process of training the empathic capacity of the teachers in order to improve the professor-student relation. Two types of principles were applied:

General educational principles adapted to the approached issue

- *The principle of organising and of continuity of the empathy-formation process for the teachers* stipulates that the efficiency of the empathy-forming process is determined by the way it is organised and directed, by the organisation of the training actions, by the presence of a purpose and of a system of well-

delimited training objectives, of some principles specific to the training activity, as also by the rigorous staging of the training process.

- *The principle of integrating theory with practice* determines that the empathy-forming process implies integration of the theoretical activity with the practical one.

Specific principles for the empathy-forming process

- *The principle of integrating the evaluation in the empathy-forming process of the teachers* provides the performance of an initial, formative and final evaluation during training. Effective empathy integration process will foster the diagnosing, monitoring, adjustment and correction of the training, as also of the empathy-formation action itself, because the performance of tasks such as *imaginary transposing in the other's situation*, for example, also represents an act of empathy, therefore it is not an exercise of empathy.
- *The principle of forming and valuing the empathic capacity from the perspective of the professor-student relations* establishes that the empathy-forming process necessarily implies the formation and valuing of the empathic capacities of the teachers, oriented towards the improvement of the communication relation between professor and student. The principle was constituted on the theoretical thesis about the formation of empathy in teachers as a path of improvement of the professor-student relation.
- *The principle of interdependence of forming the empathic*



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capacities assigns to an interdependent character to the empathic capacities, the formation of an empathic capacity implicitly leading to the formation of other empathic capacities. The principle is deduced from the analysis of the empathy features, which demonstrated that an empathic feature necessarily implies elements of other features.

By contents of training the empathic capacity we understand the theoretical matters on the concept of empathy, the nature and its functions, the psychological mechanism of formation, the factors influencing empathy in communication, the features of empathy related to the evaluation criteria of the communication relation professor-student, the particularities of manifesting empathy of the teachers in their relations with the students.

The forms of the empathy-forming activity are: collective, in group, individual, in pairs. The collective and group activities can be performed within the continuous professional training courses, within the methodological meetings, seminars, prelections, trainings. The individual activity can be performed in parallel with the group one, as also separately, and it involves: theoretical documentation in the matter of empathy problematic; study on the structure, mechanism and features of the empathy; application of the knowledge in interpersonal communication; drafting the work sheets. The activity in pairs is efficient in making some diverse exercises.

The methods for forming empathy have been conventionally classified in evaluation methods, applied in the determination and control experiments, and training methods, applied in the training experiment.

Applied evaluation methods: testing, enquiring, conversation, observing the professor-student relations, the study of the analytical programmes.

Applied training methods: exhibition, explication, prelection, debate, brainstorming, essay, exercise, case study, work sheets.

Training conditions. There were established for an efficient formation of the empathic capacity, the following conditions: initiation in the problem, becoming aware of the need for form the empathic capacity and the empathy features related to the evaluation criteria of the communication relation professor-student; complying with the principles at the basis of the model, appropriate application of the methodologies.

The stages of empathy-forming

1. *The initial evaluation of the empathy of the teachers and of certain aspects of the professor-student relation.* The evaluation is made by means of tests and enquiries
2. *Becoming familiar with the purpose of the training objectives, with the principles, forms, methods and conditions for forming empathy.* This is an initiation and explication stage.
3. *Using the results of the evaluation in order to form empathy.* Establishing, by teachers, the own level of empathy and its features. Drafting the individual scheme of the levels of formation of the empathy features. Evidencing the low-developed features in relation with the others. Taking the decision to grant special attention to the low-developed features, but without disregarding the other features of empathy.
4. *Detailed knowledge upon the basic notions on empathy and motivating the need for form the empathy capacity.* In this stage, the basic

notions and empathy features are introduced; arguments and examples are made in favour of the need for form empathy as a capacity contributing to the improvement of the relation professor-student; the theoretical sources are individually studied in the given issue, which continues in all stages; the self-training direction for teachers' empathy is evidenced by studying the literature and applying the knowledge acquired in the relations with the others.

5. *Performing the practical activity, using the theoretical material, combined with the formative self-assessment of the teachers.* The practical activities take place using the theoretical material concerning the concept, nature, functions, mechanism, features of empathy, related to the evaluation criteria of the professor-student communication relation, the particularities of empathy of the teachers manifested in their relations with the students. The application of the assimilated knowledge -e .g. the cases of interaction of the teacher and students in terms of place and role of the teacher's empathy; case studies, situations - problems, exercises etc. Work sheets are drafted to prepare, achieve and analyse the communication situations, which include the use of the empathy features, and which ensure formative self-assessment of the teacher's empathic capacity and the self-training direction of the empathy.
6. *The final evaluation.* In this stage, the evaluating itself takes place, the progress of empathy and of the professor-student relations is determined; decisions are made for improvement/ detailing of the process; discussions, proposals, summaries are made. In the last training stage, the professors are required, according to the sheets, exercises, tasks, to continue

independently the empathy self-training activity, based on the model given, operating the usual improvements and modifications, which will lead to an improvement of the empathic capacity and, respectively, of the teaching activity and of the professor - student communication relations.

The synthesis of the examined theoretical benchmarks allows us to elaborate an operational definition of the teacher's empathy as a capacity contributing to the improvement of the professor-student relation; definition deduced from the features of empathy of the teachers related to the evaluation criteria for the professor-student communication relation. Hence, empathy is the teacher's capacity:

- *to self-analyse* in communicating with students, to examine his way of communicating with the students, the successes and failures in communication;
- *to be open to communication* with the students, therefore encouraging to come close to him; to treat them equitable, excluding the prejudgments and achieving a positive attitude towards them;
- *to adapt to the communication way* of the student, considering his features, his individual and age particularities etc.;
- *to actively listen* the students, manifesting interest for their speech and opinions;
- *to appropriately use the situation of the non-verbal language* - to be more accessible to the students, more intimate with them, to stimulate them in study and training-development, to evidence his positive attitude towards them;
- *to carefully observe the non-verbal indices* of the students - to better understand their concerns, their needs, their desires etc.;
- *to "permanently put in the position of the student"*- to determine the situation from the student's perspective and to understand him better;



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- *to be capable of sharing* the emotions of the students;
- *to act* according to the previous indices.

The indicated capacities represent features specific to teacher's empathy, as also evaluation criteria for the professor-student communication relation, which produce concomitantly and as necessary capacities for the teachers.

The profession of a teacher, as any other profession, is the result of training by studies, accumulating a certain professional culture, at the level of some specific teaching competences. Therefore, the initial and continuous formation should contribute to the accomplishment of the professional culture, general and philosophical, but also of specialty and resource teaching. Only through acquiring as more competences, the cultural formation of a teacher will be more valuable. As entity of the professional culture, we also subscribe the **emotional culture**, as a psychological and pedagogical component of the teaching professionalism, as an element with enabling role upon the functionality of the entire personality of the teacher.

Professional culture has a wide field of manifestation and it redefines the dimensions of professionalism at the level of the psychological and pedagogical competences, which determine continuous efficiency and development of the teachers, professional and social remodelling. From analysing the concept of efficiency, we acquire the role of the teaching actions, performed by the teacher for fulfilment, creation, production, efficacy, power and positivism. The key note acquired by defining efficiency in the educational field is expressed, in the term of particular success or success, which has become the supreme model to appreciate the quality of a person, "social systems whereby the society makes its values".

In a complex world, the emotional balance, the ability to relate, cooperation, self-assertion skills are becoming increasingly important because uncontrolled, negative emotions are generating blockages, uncomfortable, while a positive management of the emotional life with empathy leads to increasing the flow of communication, social motivation, revealing strong emotional connection between culture and individual performance to adapt to changes. The investigations upon the dimensions of the emotional culture have illustrated social skills, interpersonal competences, psychological maturity and emotional consciousness. An increased attention is given to emotional competences, approached as meta-competences, which determine and explain the way of acting of the people in various situations, the way they use their own capacities to understand the ones around them and for an emotional self-control.

The special literature analyses emotional culture under all aspects, converging towards a close connection between the emotional potential and the emotional orientation of an individual and the level of development of the emotional culture of a personality. This is a construct of intellectual acquirements reflected in knowledge about emotions, which conditions the social happiness of the individual, contributing to an optimum social and emotional adapting. Emotional culture is the basic condition for a person to operate effectively and efficiently in social terms. With emotional maturity and creativity, a personality can be aware of, decode and develop the emotional information and to elaborate strategies of adaptation to new situations.

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