

REFLECTION AS A CONSTRUCT OF THE EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE OF THE SPECIAL PEDAGOGUE

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Abstract. The present study seeks the connection between reflection as a specific process and emotional competence of teachers who work with children with special needs. Pedagogical reflection as a personal and pedagogical trait of special pedagogues and its relation to their emotional competence as a part of their descriptive profile has a great importance for the quality of their professional activity and its results. The use of concept of social and emotional competence of special pedagogues as a theoretical ground for the stimulation of personal development appears to be effective with regard to the search of new solutions in the challenges of their professional life.

Keywords: reflection, emotional competence, professional profile of the special pedagogue

Recent years observed is an essential development of neurophysiology, sociology and almost all shares of psychology regarding human emotionality and its relation with cognitive development and behavior.

In the great variety of methods and schools in thinking about human seen can be at least two deep distinctive lines: between body and soul (psychic) and between thinking (intellect, rationality) and feeling (emotionality, affect). According to some authors the psychic life is result of a constant struggle for specific symbiosis between two brains: cognitive and emotional (Damasio, 1994).

Examining emotions is of great significance about the understanding of human's behavior in various contexts. Vocabulary interpretations bring emotion to: "every mind excitement and worry, sense, passion; every intensive or excited state of mind"; "a combination of answers with great intensity including typical expressive, physiological and subjective outcomes"; "somatic and psychic condition occurring impulsively, as a result of unexpected event, being very significant for the individual."

Latest brain researches make it clear that human reactions are in their roots emotionally based and the analysis of facts with those reactions is secondary. Our

psychic life is managed mostly by emotions, motives and wishes for which we have almost no conscious image but what we call conscious life is the further rationalization of things we do due to other reasons” (Ramachandran, 1991). In the search of a balance between rationality and emotions reached is the notion “emotional intelligence” as such is related to understanding and managing our emotions.

Emotional intelligence and emotional competence

The notion “emotional intelligence” is an interesting syntagma including two different notions – emotion and intelligence and is often reviewed as cognitive ability, social competence or personal characteristic. Definitions vary according to points of view of researches – philosophical, psychological or neurological. For H. Gardner the emotional intelligence includes the self-awareness and the skill of the individual to deal with internal experiences.

The more precise work requires marking that for Gardner there are two types of personal intelligences: (1) Interpersonal – as a person’s ability to understand intentions, motivations and wishes of other people and subsequently to work effectively with them. (2) Intrapersonal – related to the ability of a person to understand himself and has effective operating model which to include own fears, wishes and abilities as well as the ability to subsequently use this information efficiently in the process of coping with personal life (Gardner, 1999).

Understanding emotional intelligence is related to key notions for emotional development which are subordinate to the following specific categories being the structure of emotional intelligence: emotional conscious, emotional memory, emotional skills, emotional ability and emotional self-awareness.

As an ideologist of the theory for multiple intelligences, Gardner does not restrict the place of emotions in both types quoted personal intelligences but only broadens the effect on the others, included in the concept, established in the beginning of XX century, according to which there are seven different types of intelligences. The followers of the multiple intelligence theory of Gardner suggest in the applied model to accent on six main types of intelligences: abstract, social, practical, esthetic, kinesthetic and emotional (including self-conscious and skill for dealing with internal experiences) (Gardner, 1999).

There are various models for determining emotional intelligence one of which reviewing it as opposite to cognitive abilities (Petrides & Furnham, 2000), others reflecting the relation between cognition and emotion (Stenberg, 2000) or ability of the personality to ponder on the emotions and through emotions to enrich the thinking process (Mayer & Salovey & Caruzo, 2000).

Some authors introduce the idea for “reaching a minimal dose of unconscious competence in controlling emotions and the way we show them to others as well as in the observance of non-verbal behavior to establish more about what is going on in our heads. This unconscious competence is what we call emotional intelligence”.

What is then the conscious identification of emotion condition and the one of others, the understanding of the natural development of emotions and their adaptation and management, reflection on own emotions and pondering upon emotions of others, management of own emotions and those of others (?) – and all of this is result of a purposeful process – emotional competence, result of it and part of the professional competence.

Reflection and emotional competence of the special pedagogue

Professional competence is a subject of detailed debate (80s and the beginning of 90s of the past century) as with regards to structural and functional contents of the notion in the context of the assessment about the results of professional training and when searching adequate regulated level of professionalism.

Professional competence as major component of the professional profile (together with the professional competences and roles, professional direction and psychomotor and psychosensor field) as fixes the groups of abilities according to the subject of labor which result of the character and diversity of professional roles and competences. Reviewed competence is related to acquiring necessary skills, abilities for effective professional activity, with the receipt of respective vocational competences and authorizations; with the appraisal and giving the respective competence, more specifically pedagogical.

Professional competence of teachers is an integral characteristic or ability of the teacher based on a mastered system of specific vocational competences – invariant for all teachers and optional or specific for teachers in various majors, including for the special pedagogue.

Aside from the research interest on the discussed problematic remains the reflection of the teacher. This type of reflection that can be called methodic is based on the principles and experience and not constant repeating of already established methods. Formation and development of skills for analysis and self-analysis of own activity as part of the reviewed reflection suggests higher responsibility and engagement by the teacher. Methodic reflection from teachers to fix the condition of their development, the reasons for this condition, to make assessment of the efficiency of education as result of performed cooperation (Tsankov & Kovachka, 2010).

Reflection allows the special pedagogue to assess his abilities to apply various methods of training, to control emotions and “emotional burnout”, taking into consideration the range of people he works with as well as to assess the result and efficiency of his activity. All of this gives opportunity the teacher to adequately pre-formulate the targets of the training and to foresee the results of it as manages the emotional experiences during the professional activity.

Methodic reflection is a process of accepting decisions, analysis and self-analysis of professional activity, i.e. his assessment. At the same time reflection is an

integral ability of personality of teacher working with children with special education needs, based on:

- Self-analysis, included in the activity of the teacher when applying the forms and methods of training and their specific when working with children with special education needs.

- Self-analysis of retrospective type directed towards the personal and professional experience of teachers for organization and realization of training of children with special education needs.

- Self-analysis of prognostic type directed towards the abilities for development in training of specific education environment, reporting its specifics and peculiarities taking into consideration the target group – children with special education needs.

This integral essence includes various modules, included in the emotional competence of the special pedagogue.

The personal reflection of the special pedagogue as part of the methodic one is directly related to the self-management of the teacher in the context of his purposeful and aware self-awareness. Experience is a direct point with regards to methodic reflection. On one hand the methodic experience of the teacher serves as major source of empirical material for self-analysis, on the other is the role of mediator between theory and practice and is a main criteria for efficiency of training of children with special education needs. Professional experience may has its positive and negative effects on organizing and implementing educational process. Stereotypes of thinking and acting accumulating throughout the years can impede the introduction of innovative elements in training. Parallel to this the experience is a major source for development of professional competence of the teacher which is opened and dynamic in the development system.

Methodic reflection allows reaching global vision about the efficiency of methods of training and the overall design of the education environment for work with children with special education needs. It is a mean for understanding of this reality by the special pedagogue in the context of his emotional and rational existence, for reacting and operation, for finding out the reasons and results of training. Practically the reflection as a construct of emotional competence of the special pedagogue as construct of emotional competence of special pedagogue requires development and use of tools for self-observance, self-analysis and self-assessment of the activity of the teacher on one hand and on the other for the research in retrospective and prognostic plan.

During the last years in the field of education more is spoken of not just competences but “key competences”. As key competences determined are those competences (a selection of knowledge, values, practical skills) guaranteeing the successful dealing with the main living challenges before which every man is faced. In this relation there are three main groups of competences – academic (related

to knowledge of external world, acquiring during mainstream school education), social competences – related to the communication skills and establishing effective social communities and emotional (personal) competences, regarding to the skills for self-definition, self-control and self-development.

Despite the endeavors for clarification of contexts of understanding and specification of emotional intelligence and competence, the issue of its continues to be present. Which in the context of this research provokes issues as (1) why, since we have grounds to speak about emotional intelligence we do not specify the possibility for its cultivation in educational context and (2) whether or not we speak about not intelligence hear but respectively specified and affected domains of capabilities, knowledge and skills (integrated in a specific context – competences), respectively competency? (Tsankov, 2012).

Emotional competence of teachers of children with SEN we will understand as including understanding the essence of both processes of development, knowing the difference and the manner of emotional development of the child, related to the growth of overall child personality and formulating emotional environment through implementing permanent connection between emotions – experiences – feelings. In this sense emotional development is determined from external preconditions as well as from internal ones. External impacts are related first of all with the education and environment for on them depending is which subjects of experience (social, esthetic and others) will prevail in the environment of the child and the frequency of the respective types of emotions as a condition for formulating future feelings. This is appropriate design of education environment for children with special education needs is definitive for the quality of the activity.

Development of emotional competence is a key factor for the comprehensive participation of the special pedagogue in the professional activity when he acquires mechanisms not only reacts to what is happening but acts, makes decisions. Personality with high emotional competence is guided by its “internal” voice (intuition) and is able to detect feelings as ponders on them and controls them rationally and pragmatically. Succeeds in using the analyticity in decoding personal emotions and recognizing feelings of subjects with which communicates in the professional activity.

Reflection as part of the emotional competence of the special pedagogue gives an opportunity for timely awareness and demand of mechanisms for overcoming negative effects as “emotional dissonance” for example which affects the quality of professional appearance, the satisfaction of the activity and engagement to it. The emotional dissonance affects as a whole negatively the satisfaction of the labor and engagement of the special pedagogue as well as on the performance, satisfaction and engagement determined by motivation (values orientation) and the cognitive style of personality which leads to emotional burnout and causes various levels of emotional struggle.

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