

THE ROLE OF NOVICE TEACHERS' EMOTIONAL CULTURE IN SHAPING THEIR PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

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Rezumat: În articolul **Rolul culturii emoționale a profesorilor debutanți în dezvoltarea identității profesionale** este abordat rolul echilibrului emoțional ca factor determinant în integrarea profesională a cadrelor didactice debutante, corelând cu gradul de dezvoltare a componentelor culturii pedagogice: cultura generală, filozofică, de specialitate, psihopedagogică și socio-pedagogică. Problema culturii emoționale este abordată din perspectiva dezvoltării identității profesionale a profesorilor școlari debutanți prin mentorat. În acest context, mentorului îi revine rolul de a stimula dezvoltarea componentelor culturii pedagogice și de a menține echilibrul emoțional al profesorilor debutanți. Încadrarea reușită în sistemul educațional și programele de mentorat pot fi apreciate prin capacitatea mentorilor de a insufla profesorilor școlari debutanți încredere în competența profesională, în competența de a iniția procese, și auto-determinare, așa încât învățarea personală să se producă la nivel profesional, cu impact pozitiv asupra performanțelor elevilor.

Cuvinte-cheie: profesori școlari debutanți, cultură emoțională, identitate profesională, mentorat, cultură pedagogică, competenți profesională, sistem educațional.

Emotional culture is a system of emotional competencies directed towards the harmonization with oneself and the others during communication. Teachers' emotional

culture integrates into a charismatic style of didactic communication, generating professional comfort and emotional values. The prior function of teachers' emotional culture is to harmonize with oneself and with the others. The other complementary functions relate to: communication, motivation, professional culture increase, students' emotional development, integration and amplification of social culture. Misbalance at the emotional level generates a lot of problems alike: emotional stress, psychic extenuation, emotional exhaustion, deficit of emotional energy, groundless alternation of mood, lack of expressivity and emotional originality, emotional misbalance, interpersonal conflicts, insufficient emotional management, intolerance and lack of cooperation, low resistance to didactic communication, difficulties in assuming responsibilities etc.

Judging by the difficulties the novice teachers face at the beginning of their didactic career, emotional culture is that which suffer most of all. In this context, measures should be taken in order to reduce the number of difficulties and create an environment favouring emotional balance. The researcher, M. Cojocaru - Borozan points out some arguments for teachers' emotional culture development: responsibility of emotional self-development in order to favour pupils' emotional development and to improve educational services for a resonant career; the existence and perpetuation of emotional problems that undermine education efficacy; the necessity of knowing the methodology of pupils' emotional development in order to harmonize their IQ and EQ [2].

One of the most fundamental difficulties faced by novice teachers is interaction with students, stemming from the harsh disappointment they feel of not meeting expectations, and of not being accepted as uncontested leaders of the class. C. Maxwell [8, p. 12] characterizes five types of leaders, belonging to five different stages of leadership (from the most basic to the most desirable): (1) Position Rights - People follow because they have to [8, p. 6]; (2) Permission Relationships - People follow because they want to [8, p. 7]; (3) Production Results - People follow because of what you have done for the organization [8, p. 8]; (4) People development Reproduction - People follow because of what you have done for them [8, p. 10]; (5) Respect - People follow because of who you are and what you represent [8, p. 11].

Novice teachers expect their leadership as teachers to be readily accepted by their students out of respect, in exactly the same way that the principal stands for school leadership [8, p.12]. To their surprise, not only is their leadership not a foregone conclusion, they also encounter difficulties in interaction with the students, focusing principally on class management, namely, on coping with disciplinary problems and behaviour, leading to a sense of alienation on the part of the students, in imparting learning habits, around questions of developing motivation for learning and the class as a social group. The research of A. Hobson et al. [6] found that 56% of the interviewees reported on inappropriate behaviour on the part of their students, with the emphasis on specific incidents that left them with a nasty feeling of helplessness and even trauma. I. Harari, E. Eldar and C. Schechter [5] too found that the element of discipline occupies a central place in the daily work of novice teachers - 53% of the novice teachers in their research stated that the main factor with which they needed to cope was discipline, manifested in students leaving the lesson without

permission, noise, sassiness, lack of quiet in the classroom, disturbing other students and refusing to listen. However, in the second trimester of the year this decreased, with 42% of the novice teachers reporting on disciplinary problems. In the third trimester only 39% of the novice teachers reported having to cope with disciplinary problems. Despite this, there are still a high percentage of novice teachers who report coping with these problems and a clear uneasiness is felt. The importance that novice teachers attach to the question of interaction with the students can also be gathered from the reports on success, which appear mostly only in the second and third trimesters [5].

S. Feiman-Nemser [3] presents some of the questions novice teachers ask themselves when standing in front of the class, revealing their true concerns: "Who the students are; what their families are like; and what interests, resources, and background students bring to the classroom. For the novice teacher, the questions are unending: What am I supposed to teach? How will my students be tested? What will their test scores say about me as a teacher? What does the principal expect? Am I supposed to keep my students quiet, or do my colleagues understand that engaged learning sometimes means messy classrooms and active students? And after the first weeks of school, how can I find out what my students really know, deal with their diverse learning needs, and ensure that everyone is learning?" [3, p. 26]. The novice teachers' entry into the role of teacher comes as an outcome of their acceptance by the school principal; thus in the initial stage the students "accept" them because they have to [8, p. 12]. If so, how can novice teachers progress from the initial stage of understanding the ins and outs of the profession and accepting responsibility (starting from the first stage of leadership) to a position in which they constitute a model for emulation by their students, their greatest pleasure being the development of the students and their own contribution in this respect (according to the fifth stage). The process of development of novice teachers up to the fifth stage is not something that can be taken for granted, and they are in need of assistance in order to run the course [8, p. 14-16]. The professional literature presents a number of difficulties that touch upon the sphere of interaction on the part of the novice teacher with his students – disciplinary problems in the classroom, raising the students' motivation, coping with gaps between the students, evaluation of the students and coping with their personal problems.

These difficulties are related to the emotional intensity and pressures exerted on novice teachers, the work load, including the content of the material that must be taught and the need to cover it in time, the dilemmas involved in the evaluation process, the extensive paperwork, as well as the meetings with various entities. Most novice teachers are young and starting to set up a family and they must strike a balance between the family needs and the work load precisely when they are consolidating their perception with respect to their responsibility and commitment as teachers. It is important to take into account the fact that the novice teacher comes to the class with his own personal perceptions regarding the meaning of good teaching, proper learning and effective educational approaches. All this he crystallizes as a student in school and in higher learning institutions; when he begins work he realizes that not all his beliefs can be implemented in the reality of the educational system, so that he must make the relevant adjustments himself, professionally and

qualitatively. These difficulties lead to the ambiguity that novice teachers feel with respect to their professional identity, which has not yet crystallized, causing them a sense of malaise, frustration, helplessness and isolation. As a result of this ambiguity, they experience an identity crisis: on the one hand they like being teachers (because of their commitment and the influence they have on the children), but on the other hand the myriad difficulties they face (the struggles, tension, stress, etc.) create in them a revulsion for the profession.

The basic assumptions presented by C. Rodgers and K. Scott [10] influence construction of professional identity, with emotions constituting an integral part of the process. It must be borne in mind that interaction in various contexts affects the novice teacher's emotions and the significance that he attributes to it. Thus reforms, interaction with colleagues, children, principals, parents and others, and changes within the set of contexts, impact the emotions, which affect the components making up the professional identity. Additional support for the importance and the place of the teachers' emotions in the process of constructing professional identity is obtained from the research of K. O'Connor [9] who examined the interconnection between emotions and professional identity among teachers and concluded that teachers use their emotions to guide, shape and justify their professional decisions, as part of building up their professional identity. The researcher claims that despite the fact that emotions and the ensuing behaviours cannot be measured, they should not be ignored since they impart meaning to the work of the teacher and justify his perseverance in the profession. Accordingly, the emotions of novice teachers in their first year of work are extremely important due to their effect on the construction of their professional identity.

S. Intrator [7] is of the opinion that more meaningful consideration should be given to the emotional aspect and to training "teaching cadets" in the field of emotional intelligence, in the same way they are trained in pedagogic skills in their respective fields of study. The novice teacher copes with many and varied difficulties that affect him at the emotional level, up to the point of frustration, which can then lead him to dropping out. Training that includes coping with the classroom as an emotional arena and that imparts tools and insights for development of emotional intelligence can allow novice teachers a different view of the situations occurring both in the classroom and the school. Training should include skills geared to treating the students in a changing reality. Teaching cadets should learn to use varied tools such as interviews and questionnaires. They must learn how to extract information from corridor conversations with their students, from face-to-face encounters and from the use of technological means in order to be able to answer the questions that will lead their students to effective, challenging learning out of a desire and willingness to do so: How can they get to know their students? What interests them? What aspects of the subjects in the syllabus could challenge their thinking? What frustrates, scares, concerns them and/or causes them uneasiness? What thrills and draws them to study? etc. It is important that teaching cadets be exposed to situations involving emotional swings in the classroom and learn how to deal with them. In the induction stage the novice teacher will be able cope with a complexity of feelings and be free emotionally to provide his students with responses that are both pedagogically and emotionally sound. It is important to develop

the novice teacher's capability to be attentive to the students' needs, thoughts and emotions through development of his own ability to cope with the class dynamics in its various forms [7].

S. Intrator [7] places on the agenda the emotional difficulty with which novice teachers have to cope and suggests beginning to address the issue already during the training period. It is possible to relate to the experience that novice teachers undergo in programs that include internship workshops, but one should not ignore the time that passes between one workshop and the next and the novice teacher's need to obtain concrete support and solutions (at times even in the "here and now"). And this is where the mentor comes in, who by virtue of his traits can act according to the guidelines set by S. Intrator [7].

Reinforcing an understanding of the significance of the processes that the novice teachers are undergoing, as well as the significance of teaching will lead to positive implementation and to the existence of a connection between their sense of mission and desire to teach, which constitute some of the parameters of professional identity as defined by S. Fisherman and I. Weiss [4] on the one hand, and their potential as teachers and human beings on the other. It follows that mentoring processes that take place during the internship year constitute one of the most important factors in self-perception that novice teachers form for themselves and they are critical for the moulding and development of future teachers. In general, during the internship period novice teachers experience numerous teaching incidents, formation of personal bonds and confrontations. Some are defining events that enhance the feeling of competence and allow construction and strengthening of professional identity, while others are challenging, complex events that create frustration and could lead to a sense of low competence. As stated earlier, the feeling of competence is not a simple thing to alter and the role of the mentor in these cases is therefore significant. For example, when a novice teacher approaches a mentor with a difficulty, the mentor must question himself as to the exact nature of the difficulty, the things that are bothering the novice teacher and the factors that are motivating him. The mentor must help the novice teacher to be aware of the way the event developed and gain insights that go beyond its mere detection, while making room for statements and opinions on the part of the novice teacher and creating in him a feeling of potential and faith in himself. By managing such a process the mentor can become an agent of change and cause an improvement to take place in the novice teacher's feeling of competence.

In addition, sometimes the novice teacher works with students of high potential and does not encounter any disciplinary problems. On occasion, however, the novice teacher is forced to cope with students who have no motivation whatsoever to learn and/or problematic students. Coping with such students is not easy and the novice teacher is forced to experience things that leave him with negative feelings that are not necessarily within his control. The novice teacher must understand the language of his students, with all its implications; motivate them through positive emotions such that they will feel involved and important. This takes place through an understanding that motivating them will result in the realization of pedagogic and education goals [9]. Accordingly, apart from emotional support, the mentor must ask the novice teacher questions that will enhance his actions and

attempts to reach these students such that his feeling of self-efficacy will not be affected. A change in the feeling of self-efficacy will be followed by a change in the perception of the teacher's professional identity. A novice teacher who learns empowerment first-hand in a way that is non-threatening and directed towards advancement of self-awareness will be more aware of his students' good basic traits and will be better able to reinforce them and guide them into using these traits both as part of their learning process and later on in life. An in-depth understanding of students' traits is important for novice teachers, enabling them to influence the students' learning process out of an awareness of the difficulties they face and based on establishment of a relationship of trust with them. M. Barak and N. Barnea [1] describe how mentors identified the impact of a specific event in novice teachers' stories on the novice teachers' professional identity. The researchers suggest that mentors incorporate in their work with novice teachers "stories of novice teachers" and discuss with them difficulties arising from the stories and coping options, with a view to enhancing their self-confidence and consolidating their sense of togetherness and their role as educators in addition to being imparters of knowledge.

An additional point that deals with interpersonal relations relates to teachers who on occasion form a very close personal attachment with their students by involving them in their private lives. The blurring of the boundaries between the personal and professional realms can constitute a problematic element for teachers in general, and novice teachers in particular, since personal contact can engender erroneous connotations and attract unnecessary finger-pointing. Here the role of the mentor is essential in helping novice teachers understand the need for boundaries and for finding the golden mean despite their desire for personal contact with their students as part of their belief in the role of the teacher [9]. Along with the processes of empowerment and development of self-efficacy, it is important that mentors help novice teachers in developing the ability to evaluate themselves, allowing them to identify spots where harder work is necessary both from the pedagogic and class management angles. This concept is based on the assumption that self-evaluation has an important contribution to make to the novice teacher's self-study and professional development, enabling them to subsequently manage their professional development by themselves. A novice teacher who completes his year of internship is considered to be a teacher to all intents and purposes – one who regards himself as a professional and keeps abreast of new information relevant to his activity. It may therefore be reasonably assumed that he will take pains over his professional development as part of his professional identity.

In conclusion, we should mention that novice teachers have a vision as well as a consuming desire and willingness to apply the knowledge that they have acquired and to continue to acquire knowledge, based on the recognition that the teaching profession involves constant learning. They wish to teach and lead their students to success, predicated on the premise that this will be their own success, while also wanting to gain experiences relating to professional and personal growth. They are perhaps concerned about the unknown, and about issues such as class management and teaching strategies, but are willing to meet the challenge and fulfil their desire to be teachers.

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