The Competent Teacher for Teaching Emotional Intelligence

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Abstract

This study makes reference to those teachers' characteristics and goals who are interested in developing their students' emotional intelligence and finding the adequate strategies for that. The training program presented below is meant for students who prepare for teaching. This program, developed after investigations into opinions and pedagogical behaviors already manifested by teachers, describes goals and strategies designed to raise awareness and guide the future preschool and primary school teachers in the direction of cultivating (self cultivating) emotional intelligence. Cultivating and expressing positive emotions, developing empathy, shaping effective communication behaviors and positive self-images are just a few goals of this program.

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1. Introduction

Life gives the individual not only professional challenges (that may be solved by theoretical and practical intelligence) but, more and more often, problems connected with his relationships (with his own self, with the other people, interpersonal, institutional, familial, organizational relationships).

Personal and organizational development, psychic balance and self organizing ability, success and individual and organizational satisfaction are largely dependent on the way the individual solves these problems. The adaptation to various new situations and the success of interpersonal relationships depend not only on the

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intellectual abilities, but also on the emotional development, affective characteristics of the individual, mainly on the way he valorizes his own and the other people's emotions. Those people with well developed emotional abilities have more chances to be satisfied during their life, to prove efficiency in several fields, to manage their own thinking style which forms the basis of their own productivity, to effectively communicate with the others, to establish and maintain adequate relationships. Those people who are not able to express their emotions, feelings and moods in words cannot acknowledge their emotions, anticipate the behaviors they will have, being dominated only by certain emotions, cannot identify the emotional state of their interlocutor and have adaptation difficulties. Emotional intelligence becomes not only as a psychological concept (theorized by Peter Salovey and Jack Meyer and popularized by Daniel Goleman), but also an indispensable dimension of personality and, although it exists in the human genetic code, it needs to be cultivated, educated and valorized.

The development of the emotional intelligence (the personal ability to identify and effectively manage personal emotions in relation to personal purposes keeping intra- and inter-personal conflicts at a minimum) becomes a fundamental target at the earliest age, even in the preschool period, when the most important mental phenomena, accumulations and transformations are known to occur.

Acknowledging personal emotions, building a positive self-image and cultivating self esteem, developing stress tolerance, teaching self control and responsibility for behavior, cultivating flexibility as a personality feature, optimism and humor – all these are subordinated goals.

2. Theoretical substantiation

In developing our training program, we were inspired by Daniel Goleman's theory of emotional intelligence and Mielu Zlate's concept on the role of motivations and emotions. By his theory of emotional intelligence, Daniel Goleman not only revolutionized the psychological science, but also resized the educational approaches. He stated that "we actually have two minds: one that thinks and one that feels" and they interact. The rational mind is the "mode of comprehension we are mostly aware of, which is more prominent in the state of awakening, operating thoughts and being capable to weigh and reflect on the things around", while the emotional mind is "an impulsive and very strong" system of cognition, although illogical sometimes. (D. Goleman, 2001, p. 23). The relationship between reason and emotion is present in a positive sense, i.e. "the more intense the feeling, the more dominantly emotional the mind becomes the mind – therefore, rationally less efficient" (D. Goleman, 2001, p. 23).

According to Goleman, in the structure of emotional intelligence, emotions play the key role – knowledge and recovery of our own emotions, knowledge and consideration for the others' emotions, interactions carried out in the context of certain emotions.

On the other hand, Mielu Zlate believes that the affective feelings (emotions, moods, sentiments) play an important role in the energetic performance of our activity: they intensify, amplify, organize, reorganize or redistribute energy (even in stressful or frustrating situations, if moderate in intensity, they help the subject to adapt himself). (M. Zlate, 2000, p.54).

As they reflect the relationship between the subject and the effective context, these feelings also fulfill the function of orientation of the subject in action (in relation with his inner self) to know the object/the other people (interpersonal knowledge), to exercise social interactions (according to Th. Ribot, "sympathy is the basis of our whole social existence"), the selection function and the evaluation function (we accept or reject objects/people according to our own affective states).This is the reason why a child has to live a diversity of emotional states, to know the factors which generate these states and their impact on his behavior.

Daniel Goleman considers that, in order to be successful in life, the individual should have certain abilities (dimensions of emotional intelligence): awareness of his own emotions (acknowledging emotions, identifying their causes and consequences on his actions and relationships), self-control of emotions and behavior (expressing personal emotions without affecting the other people, mastering his own emotions, valorizing the affective optimum), productive utilization of his own emotions, knowledge of and respect for other people's emotions ("reading", identifying the causes and consequences on the other people's actions and behavior), management of social relations (being assertive, delicate, careful, polite, friendly, involved in a balanced and responsible way, cooperating, democratic, helpful), empathy (looking from the other people's perspective, listening to them, being sensitive and sympathetic towards the other people's feelings).
These features, integrated in the personality structure in the form of emotional intelligence, should become major goals of education, being as important as the key competencies.

3. Research methodology

As trainers of the future teachers, we are interested in the characteristics/abilities and goals of the teachers aiming to develop their pupils' emotional intelligence as well as in the strategies they implement to cultivate it. In order to highlight the components of the teaching process and the teaching variables that may influence the progress of the child's emotional intelligence, we used the method of questionnaire survey. We first dealt with a sample including teachers from the educational system in Buzau (40 primary school teachers and 40 nursery school teachers). The questionnaire survey addressed the following issues:
- To what extent are the affective objectives pursued during the teaching process within primary school and nursery school education?
- What modes are offered to children in order to enable them to express their states (intellectual, motivational, affective)?
- Which are the most frequently used forms of motivation?
- To what extent do you pursue the achievement of the motivational optimum in each pupil?
- Which are the modalities used to achieve positive affective states in the class/group?

Our main goal was to train the future primary and nursery school teachers in developing emotional intelligence. We dealt with a sample including 80 university students from the Teacher Training Department - Bucharest University (Buzau subsidiary). The methods used were the questionnaire survey, the talk, the teaching experiment (focused on a training program).

4. Research results

The teachers' answers to the questionnaire used in our survey reveal a number of aspects.

The goals of affective nature are insignificant as compared to the cognitive goals (intellectual abilities, knowledge), including in the arts disciplines. The teachers' references to these goals are quite general (“the pupils should participate with interest”, “the pupils should live positive emotional states”).

The achievement of the affective goals is pursued through the same strategies which concern the cognitive goals. Thus, the forming of the other structural elements of competency, namely the attitudes - forming which has a profound proceusal character, engaging aggregations and generalizations of affective states - is neglected. And, most important, the experience and knowledge of the diversity of affective states are impossible.

Although they use differentiated motivation techniques, the teachers almost exclusively use the cognitive, the positive or negative motivation, neglecting the affective motivation.

The techniques of affective motivation are only used with the shy children.

As for the intensity of the child's motivation in solving his task, we could conclude that, for most teachers, it was not a matter of concern. Moreover, there is no consideration, not even in primary school, for the manipulation of the intensity of motivation by the child himself.

Children are usually guided to express their emotions through drawings. Very few teachers declare dancing and singing to be modes of emotional expression.

The similar opinions of the teachers working in the two educational cycles have revealed that it is necessary to raise the awareness of the university students who are preparing to become primary school or nursery school teachers about the importance of emotional intelligence and their training in cultivating such intelligence. Any teacher who wishes to develop emotional intelligence will pursue goals such as:
- raising the child's awareness of the importance of emotional states (his own and the other's) based on experiencing a diversity of states; the awareness of the fact that we are subject to an affective influence from everything around us;
- getting the child familiar with multiple modes of expression;
- identifying the sources of positive feelings and the methods to reduce the negative states;
- developing empathy;
- forming a respect for the other people, including for their needs and states;
- forming an assertive behavior;
- forming an active listening behavior.

The training program, subject to the teaching experiment carried out with the sample of university students, was focused on the following dimensions: theoretical substantiation (the importance of intelligence as a side of the personality, the forms of intelligence – their specificity and utility, the emotional intelligence - structure, utility, relations with theoretical intelligence, education), the practice of efficient communication, empathy, assertive behavior, the integration of emotional intelligence development in the teaching process.

The theoretical substantiation has been achieved through training and self-training (based on a specific bibliography), through the observation of the children (involved in the teaching practice) in different contexts, through debates.

Empathy was cultivated in students through role playing (where the focus was on the expression of the emotions felt as an onlooker and as an actor) and through the analysis of a few cases identified in school practice.

The active listening behavior was developed through the aquarium method, through panel-type talks and through creative controversy.

The rotating controversy, the compliments game, the role play enabled the formation of an assertive behavior. The students were encouraged to keep a diary of their emotions and observe their school-children from the emotional perspective.

In their diary, the students noted their observations regarding the children's emotional states during each day, the factors which caused those states, the children's reactions and behaviors, their personal efficiency (as regards task solving and interacting with the others), the effects on the other children. The observation protocol included information about the tasks, the emotional states, the modes of expression, the efficiency of the pupil.

Throughout the whole program, the university students learned that smiling (a complex and extremely diversified emotional expression) has a special role: the teacher's smile encourages the child, it confirms his success, makes him feel good; the child's smile expresses his general psychic state.

It proved to be necessary to use humor as a tool for relaxation and, at the same time, for mobilization, as well as the need to forbid irony (anti-method in education).

The praise was also a subject of the debate – when, how and why should it be used, its advantages and risks. The relationships between encouragement and punishment, between liberty and discipline, between giving liberties and imposing restrictions, between the permissive and assertive behavior were analyzed. The need to involve the child in doing good deeds and having cooperative relationships was also highlighted during the entire program.

The university students became familiar with a number of games that enable emotional expression: “The vocabulary of emotions” (the child chooses how to express each type of emotion – colors, music, dance, mimic), “The 5/6/10 pleasant activities”, “The sounds of emotions” (the child picks up a card showing an emotion and then he expresses it through a melody; the other pupils are able to identify the feeling of their colleague), “What does the child in the picture tell us” (comment on the emotional expressions), “Who and how am I” (the child describes his own features, wishes and aspirations, using various languages – speaking, drawing, singing, dancing), “The personal coat of arms” (diagram divided in 4 sections where the pupil is asked to represent, through symbol, drawings, statements, relevant aspects of his personality : a good deed of his, a deed he would like to do, his passion , the hobbies he would like to have”, “the gallery of characters” (through posters, drawings) etc.

5. Research conclusions

Based on the observations and opinions expressed in the satisfaction questionnaire, we believe that, at the end of the program, the university students became more sensitive to the children's needs, more empathetic, better listeners, more assertive and, in general, trained to develop the emotional intelligence of their future pupils.

Concretely, we found that the students included in the sample:
- were aware of the importance of the pupils' emotional states in doing their tasks and developing their inter-personal relationships;
- they identified the sources of pupils' positive feelings and ways to mitigate their negative feelings and
- found the ways to shape an assertive behavior and active listening behavior.

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