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Emotional context within the teacher-student relation

Abstract of doctoral thesis

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2012
Argument

In the past, regardless the specialty field, the general tendency was to favorize the rational dimension of the interpersonal relations, where there are no emotions, not even when the work is made in the team (Gendron, 2007). The exaggeration of role of reasoning has led to the silent promotion of an inadequate and incomplete model of personality, responsible for deficiencies, at personal and interpersonal level. In the last years, new approaches suggest that reason and emotions help people find a sense of life and of their personal, social and professional identity (Schutz, Zembylas, 2009).

Acknowledging that the emotions are at the base of interaction and coordination between different actors, they aren't only individual/intimate mental states, they become social, with a direct effect upon the communication and interaction between individuals (Ria, 2007). Because we never interact with a neutral environment, but with one which is full of significances for each one of the actors, the emotional response (of acceptance or rejection) can represent a signal for the other as well as an effect of its presence. This reciprocity has been

underlined, since 1884, by W. James who suggested that “the most important part, from the personal environment that brings out an emotion, is the man, my fellow man” (p. 196). From this point of view, the emotion doesn’t only detain a function, evolutionary and adaptive in a natural way, but brings out a purpose that Stanley Cavell associates with the *knowing by feeling* process. The complement of this process can bring out different values – the individual personality, the other, the environment, as well as other elements of the personal and/or socio-professional experiences.

In the Romanian area, the contributions of the academician Pavelcu (1936/1999) remain a valuable argument to every investigational approach regarding the instrumentality of the affective-emotionally dimension within the interpersonal relations. He mentioned that “the world of values doesn’t exist for someone who lost feelings, the same way the world of colours doesn’t exist for a natively blind, [...] while knowing others [...] is an affective act by excellence” (p. 172). Underlining the functionality of the emotions, Bertrand (2000) defines them as “a knowledge and evaluation instrument that offers information for the person experimenting them, focuses

the attention towards aspects of the environment and guides the person into action through proximity or avoidance behaviours, responsible for interpersonal relations” (p. 40).

Although the emotional dimension was neglected within the teacher-student relation, the researches from the neurosciences field come to contradict the old expression ”organize the class, then teach!” in order to impose a new one “Excite the class, then teach!” (Jensen, 1998). After his research in schools, Nias (1996) noted that an efficient teaching always correlates with a correct involvement of the emotions, mostly because for the students, the positive state of mind increases both the learning of what it is transmitted and the later reproduction of the information. An interesting observation is made by Harris (2007) who appreciates that one of the incapacities of the educational systems is that they “only hire the mind of the teachers for the educational practice, without their hearts” (p. 5). In a similar manner, Day and Qing (2009) appreciates that the efficiency of the educational activities appears as “a product of support and permanent preparation of the cognitive dimension (the mind) and the emotional one (the heart)” (p. 18). We find the same perspective at Gendron and

LaFortune (2009) who sustain that no task associated with educational activities can be limited to cognitive activities, because they are involved, in an equal measure, socio-emotional processes that influence the nature of the learning and socializing climate.

International reports estimates that almost 50% of the teachers drop their jobs after the first 5 years, suggesting as main cause the emotional nature of their work (Schutz, Zembylas, 2009). Like this, regardless of their professional competences, a considerable amount of teachers abandons their work, following their incapacity to deal with the emotionally charged situations, inevitable within their work. The conclusions of similar researches underline the effect that the emotions felt in class have upon the personal and social development of the students and teachers and the relations between them. Based on the changes within the educational field, we appreciate that acknowledging and developing socio-emotional competences, specific to the *emotional intelligence* concept, cannot be considered only professional option, but exigencies.

I. Emotions – aspects, theories, educational implications

Across time, the emotions stood at the base of different types of motivations and predispositions to action, as well as for the different behaviours developed in order to cope with the environment we live in (Izard, 1991). They are essential to the existence and survival of the human specie and help us define our humanity and our attitude towards reality. For Rimé (2008), the emotions are “constellations of answers, that involve, in the same time, the motivational-behavioural, the facial-expressive, the subjective-phenomenal, the attentional-cognitive and physiological-vegetative levels of the individual functionality, succeeding, in this manner, to describe the complex processes associated with the emotional answers” (p. 84). Especially, the modification of the affective/emotional states, state Chelcea and Zodieru (2010), represent a reaction at changing the social relations. One of the explanations is the one that “the emotions have life, their own dynamic” (p. 372).

The emotions are the essence of our humanity, our link with the environment, the element that brings sense to our

thoughts and our behaviours, are important energetic resources that help us confront with the difficult situations that mark our existence. This is the reason why it is important to know and to educate our emotions in order to intelligently use them in our private and socio-professional life. Recognizing the functions that the emotions have both on a psychological and physiological level increases the level of knowledge regarding the manner in which they affect the cognitive and social processes. Another consequence of underlining these functions is represented by the opportunity to clarify the measure into which their effects tend to be negative or positive, especially because, a series of processes – attention, memory, judgement and performances – can be strongly influenced by the emotionally charged situations. The productivity of the emotions doesn't come out from their character – positive or negative, but from the ability to recognise, adjust and use them adequately in our daily experiences –varying from making decisions till the quality of interactions with others.

The educational environment is full with intense emotional experiences that influence the interactions, the learning, the performances and personal development of the

students and their teachers. In Pianta's opinion (1999), no value focused on academic, can substantially change the fact that the substrate of life in classroom is social and emotional. The emotional tone that the teacher uses in his relations with his students and that he induces in the inter-students relations conditions the general climate, favourable or unfavourable to the development of educational process. Because it represents the emotional link that the teacher develops with his students, this climate facilitates or blocks the relation, development and learning processes.

II. Student-teacher relation. Pedagogical and psychosocial perspectives

The student-teacher relation describes “the relation between the educator and the educated, which is specific to the scholar education, connection that includes a series of relations, categorised by the *content* (relations of communication, task-related relations, functional-formal relations, socio-affective relations) and by the partners (teacher-student, teacher-students, teachers-student, teachers-students)” (Truță, Mardar, 2005, p. 253). This psycho-social relation desires in an intentional,

conscious, clear and systematic way, to influence the students. The psycho-social attribute of the educational reality is also sustained by the fact that “some schools cannot focus on teaching and learning until the subsidiary problems related to the climate are solved and the adequate maintaining systems aren’t initiated [...] the schools that are successful dedicate a lot of time for ensuring a climate favourable to development, before they start to make substantial changes, visible in the students results” (Molan *et al.*, 2006, p. 18).

The quality of the teacher-student relation cannot be considered only as a product of the teacher’s behaviour, but of the collaboration that the teacher has with his students, while being conditioned by the contribution of both sides, of specific interests and motivations. Because the teachers and the students interventions are neither independent, nor contradictory, but fundamentally complementary, it is important that the roles and the behaviours of the teachers and students to be analysed in their interaction, as a dynamic system with specific processes and products and as a reunited group in order to teach the students (LeRoy, 1974). In the present educational system, Iucu (2006) brings the attention to

the new roles of the teachers: “to report to those that they educate, to establish cooperation relations with the students and their parents and with other interested factors of the society. The teachers don’t educate only when they are at their desk, in the classroom, but by every relational contact that they have with the students and the parents, they perform a work of raising and developing, of leading and directing” (p. 15). The results of the researches made by Rosenthal and Jacobson in 1968, known as *Pygmalion in class* or the *Pygmalion Effect*, have proven the role of the teachers in conditioning the performances of the students. Based on this effect, the beliefs of people and their expectations come to determine specific types of actions.

We started from the premises that the good development of the educational process depends on the quality of the socio-emotional climate and the teacher-student interactions in the classroom. The students are students and the teachers are teachers only if they are correlated to each other and, based on that simple truth, we come to an important methodological conclusion: “the isolated approach of a term, without reporting to its complimentary, is a theoretical point of view, insignificant and basically useless, and related to the practical point of view,

on the plan of educative action, inefficient” (Truță, Mardar, 2005, p. 9).

III. Intelligence and emotional competences within the teacher-student relation. Manifestation models and dimensions

In a period when the educational practice is considered to be one of the most soliciting professions (Day, Qing, 2009), recognising and adjusting the emotions represents the solution for accepting the professional tasks with perseverance and involvement, despite the inevitable challenges. These abilities are characteristic to the emotional intelligence and competences, about which Saarni (1999) appreciates that “are a necessity to every individual in order to deal with the changing environment, in order to contribute to consolidating his identity, to facilitate his adaptation, to revive his feeling of personal efficiency and self-trust and to develop positive relations with the others” (p. 34). Using an economical perspective of human resources, they are essential to every profession, especially to those involving frequent social interactions, underlines Gendron and Haenjohn (2011).

In the educational practice, says Letor (2009), without looking for explicit proofs, we assume that these competences are involved, when needed, in the activities from the classroom. Following these assumptions, the didactic personnel doesn't benefit from a previous training that will allow them to manage efficiently the affective energy from the class or to induce a constructive emotion, in order to maintain a climate favourable to learning, development and relations. We appreciate that a way to improve the teacher-student relations is for the teachers to improve their emotional competences in order to integrate them in their educational strategies and their relations with the students. By studying them we will understand that these competences increase our personal and social success and that the difference between individuals isn't based solely on managing the knowledge but also managing your emotions.

IV. Implications of the emotional intelligence upon the quality of teacher-student relation. Research results

Objectives

The main objective of this research was to examine the extent in which a certain level of the Emotional Intelligence coefficient for the didactic personnel conditions the quality of the teacher-student relation. In several phases, we tried to create, using both quantitative and qualitative data, a profile for the emotional intelligence of the teachers and one for the teacher-student relation, in order to finally underline, the possible connections between the two variables. In reaching this goal, we followed the next questions:

1. *Which is the level of the emotional intelligence coefficient of the evaluated teachers?*
2. *Which is the profile of the relation teacher-student at the observed classes and what behavioural patterns increase their quality ?*
3. *To what extent the level of the emotional intelligence coefficient conditions the quality of teacher-student relation based on the three domains studied: emotional, organisational and institutional?*

Research hypothesis

Because the *emotional intelligence/emotional intelligence coefficient* variable, as well as the variable *teacher-student relation*, are defined by scales and subscales for the first and domains and dimensions for the other, the research was based on eight specific hypothesis, except the general assumption:

General hypothesis: „*There is a significant association between the level of the emotional intelligence coefficient(EQ) of the teachers and the quality of the teacher-student relation*”.

Specific hypothesis 1:”*There is a significant negative association between the emotional intelligence coefficient (EQ) of the teachers and the dimension negative climate.*”

Specific hypothesis 2: „*There is a significant positive association between the total emotional intelligence coefficient (EQ) and the dimension attention towards student’s perspective.*”

Specific hypothesis 3: „*There is a significant positive association between the Interpersonal scale of the EQ*

and the dimension attention towards student's perspective."

Specific hypothesis 4: „There is a significant positive association between the subscale Stress tolerance of the EQ and the dimension attention towards student's perspective."

Specific hypothesis 5: „There is a significant positive association between the subscale Flexibility of the EQ and the dimension Attention towards student's perspective."

Specific hypothesis 6: „There is a significant positive association between the subscale Emotional Self-awareness and the domain Emotional Support."

Specific hypothesis 7: “There is a significant positive association between the subscale independence of the EQ and the domain Class Organization”.

Specific hypothesis 8: *„There is a significant positive association between the subscale Social Responsibility of the EQ and the dimension Quality of the feed-back.“*

Variables

1. *Teacher-student relation*
2. *Emotional intelligence (emotional intelligence coefficient)*
3. *Profile of the school* – central public, periphery public, private.
4. *The performances of the classes* – students grades for the last three years

Investigated group

In the current research we involved a total number of 222 subjects, out of which 9 subjects were teachers (feminine, age between 36 and 57) and 213 students from the primary cycle of education, fourth grade (117 girls and 96 boys, age between 9 and 11). We involved central public schools and public schools from the periphery as well as private schools.

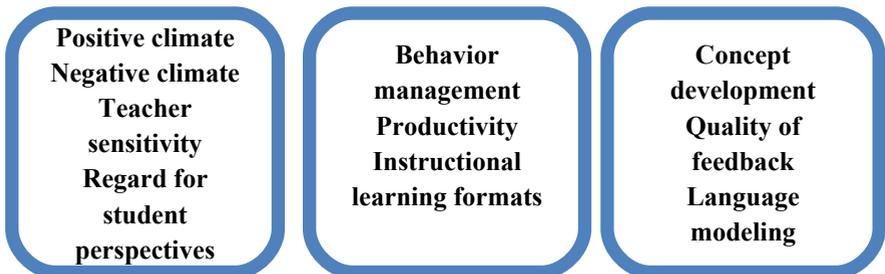
Instruments

Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS™) is an observation instrument developed in 2008 by Robert C. Pianta, Karen M. La Paro and Bridget K. Hamre in order to evaluate the quality of the teacher-student relation. The observation procedure used by CLASS respects the following rules:

- the coding process is distributed on 30 minutes cycles (20 minutes – observation, 10 minutes – scoring);
- a minimum of four cycles must be obtained,
- a permanent record is made with the teacher-student interactions that answer to the question *who, what and how?* from what is happening in the classroom.

CLASS analyses the teacher-student relation starting from 3 domains and 10 dimensions:

Emotional Support Classroom Organization Instructional Support



For every domain and dimension we analyse the specific behaviours and interactions, because after that we will establish the level where they fit. Each dimension is evaluated on a scale of 7 points, grouped on three levels (1, 2 – low level; 3, 4, 5 – medium level; 6, 7 – high level). The CLASS coding leads to a set of scores for every class of students that represent the quality of the teacher-student relation. The mathematical mean of these scores leads to the mean scores on the three domains: emotional, organizational and instructive.

Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i) is an instrument developed by Bar-On, that measures the emotional intelligence coefficient on 5 scales and 15 subscales. EQ indicates the general degree on emotional and social functionality. The test has 133 verbal items and uses a 5 points scale (from *untrue for me* to *true for me*). A high score is characteristic to a person that has non-cognitive abilities and skills that he/she successfully uses in the process of adaptation to the pressure and the requests of the environment. On the other side, a low score is characteristic to a person with little non-cognitive abilities and skills, used in the environmental adaptation.

Results and interpretation

The research focused on the effects of emotional intelligence on the teacher-student relation. Variables as the performance of the class and the profile of the school were additionally used in order to control possible connected factors. In a first phase, we analysed the EQ profile of the teachers with the *EQ-i* instrument (Bar-On, 2009), but we haven't identified major differences between the scores. The explanation is that the subjects were distributed on similar levels from a statistic point of view, corresponding to a medium and high level. In this manner, 67% from the subjects have a medium level on EQ-I, characterized by *advanced abilities* (between 110 and 150), 66% subjects have a high level, with an *efficient functioning* (between 90 and and 110) of the *intrapersonal* and *interpersonal components*, 55% have *advanced abilities* (between 110 and 150) of *stress management*, 78% have an *efficient functioning* (between 90 and 110) of the *adaptability component* and 55% are characterized by *advanced abilities* (between 110 and 150) on the scale *general state*. Similar results were reported for all schools regardless *the profile of the school*.

On the second phase of the research, with the CLASS instrument (Pianta, La Paro, Hamre, 2008) we tried to identify the specific characteristics for each observed class, with positive effects on the teacher-student relation. From a quantitative point of view, the results indicate the fact that 77% of the students had medium scores (between 3 and 5) on the *Emotional Support* domain, 67% had medium scores (between 3 and 5) in *Organizing the class domain* and 100% got medium scores (between 3 and 5) on the *Instructional Support* domain. Generally, we appreciate that the majority of the observed classes were characterized by:

- *positive attitude between the teacher and the students*, an increase sensitivity of the teacher regarding the needs and the students problems and a considerable attention towards the interests and the students' point of views;
- *expectances and clearly expressed rules* by the teacher and respected by the students. The teachers have been proactive and efficient in maintaining the order and the students worked in a productive manner while focusing on the task.
- a satisfactory level of the teachers' interventions, focused on the development of the concepts, of the

language and sending a feed-back that *sustains and promotes the cognitive development of the language*.

A final phase analysed the associations between the total and the scale level of the emotional intelligence coefficient and the quality of the teacher-student relation. The results underlined significant links between the scales and the subscales of the emotional intelligence and the domains and the dimensions of the teacher-student relation (for example the *total score of EQ-I* and the *dimension attention towards the student's perspective* - $r = 0.768$, $df = 7$, $p < 0.05$; between the *interpersonal* scale and the dimension *attention towards the student's perspective* -- $r = 0.690$, $df = 7$, $p < 0.05$; between the subscale stress tolerance and the dimension *attention towards the student's perspective* - $r = 0.708$, $df = 7$, $p < 0.05$; between the subscale *emotional self-consciousness* and the *Emotional Support* domain - $r = 0.705$, $df = 7$, $p < 0.05$)

Considering the fact that the investigated group isn't representative for the general population, we appreciate that the study confirms theoretical directions, already confirmed into practice, which suggest that, in the development of a positive,

efficient and sustainable relations the socio-emotional competences are decisive.

Conclusions

The current research started from the idea that the teachers that use in the class strategies based on the integration of the socio-emotional competences, which are characteristic to the emotional intelligence concept, are more likely to develop, in the classroom, relations based on mutual acceptance, understanding, sympathy, closeness, trust, care and cooperation than the ones that use them on a smaller level. An important argument for starting this research was the low interest, almost neglected, on these elements in the educational area.

Theoretically and methodologically, two phases had a significant contribution to the development of the research: a) the training period from 1-9 may 2011 from Virginia University, Charlottesville, USA and b) the documentation period between 5 November 2011 and 5 February 2012, from “Paul Valéry” University, Montpellier 3, in collaboration with *Laboratoire Interdisciplinaire de Recherche en Didactique Education et Formation (LIRDEF)*. The training in USA allowed the initial

training in utilising CLASS™ (Classroom Assessment Scoring System), an instrument for the evaluation of the teacher-student relation, from an emotional, organizational and instructive point of view. This trip was possible due to a project implemented by “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University from Iasi, coordinated by Mr. Laurențiu Șoitu, university professor. The training represented the condition for obtaining the CLASS *Expert Certificate*, in July 2011, with a 94%. This phase is extremely relevant because we wanted to use, in our research, objective instruments. The Expert Certificate offers the guaranty that any other certified external evaluator would code the same scores, based on the existing observations and the CLASS manual instructions. The second stage developed under the coordination of university professor Bénédicte Gendron, awarded in 2006, by the French Academy, for the essay, “The Emotional Capital”, where she combined, for the first time, theories of the Emotional Intelligence with those of the Human Capital, while creating links in the economical, psychological and sociological fields. Studying this theoretical approach was the main point of the documentation stage, during which we had the opportunity to actively participate at trainings and scientific seminars, work-groups during the doctoral seminars and to present intermediary

results of the doctoral thesis, for the Pedagogy students and the researchers from LIRDEF Department.

During the research we were interested in identifying as many possible associations between the emotional intelligence profile of the teachers and the quality of the teacher-student relation, evaluated on three domains (emotionally, organizationally and instructive). A series of other variables like the performance of the class and the school profile (central public, periphery public, private) have been taken into account as potential factors that condition the quality of the teacher-student relation. Based on these researches, we appreciate that we achieved the main objective – of underlining the close connection between a certain level of the emotional intelligence coefficient and the quality of the teacher-student relation. Recognising the socio-emotional competences, as products perfectible through education and continuous training, can mobilise sustained efforts for admitting their decisive role not only in the relations that the teachers develop with the students as well as for the individual level, in terms of performance and satisfaction level.

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