

IMPORTANCE OF TEACHERS' EMPATHIC CAPACITY

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Abstract: The didactic exercise is a complex situation, where cumulated previous knowledge is always to be proved by facts, being compulsorily contextualized in compliance with the realities arisen within the teaching process. Education hardly boils down to purely technical, strategic labour, with good methodical alternation to transfer knowledge or to form conducts, but it also assumes a human reformation, psychological intervention on persons or groups with a special specificity. Teacher's words reflect ten times in the soul "resonator" of the pupil/ student which, just like a patient, is innocently waiting for truth and knowledge. Empathy in teacher-pupil relation may develop naturally pupils'/students' personality and self, the crucial role being held by the teacher's personality and the weight of his/her training, by commissioning features like aptitude, tact, competence, didactic performance, social comparison, founding new things on didactic communication especially by action hypostases and strategies related conviction and persuasion in the teacher-pupil dialogue. The formation of empathic capacity of teachers is continuous, systematized and guided and is based on the capitalization and development of empathy features as related to the assessment criteria of the teacher-pupil communication relationship.

Keywords: empathy, communication, methodology, socio-cognitive model, principles.

In a complex world, affective balance, capacity to relate, cooperation, self-affirmation become more and more important competences, as uncontrolled, negative emotions generate blockages, discomfort, while a positive management of emotional life, with empathy, leads to the growth of the flow of communication, of social motivation, developing tight connections

between emotional culture and individual performance in adapting to changes. Investigations on the size of emotional culture showed social skills, interpersonal competences, psychological maturity and emotional conscience. An increased attention is paid to emotional competences, approached as metacompetences, which determine and explain the auctioning mechanism of persons in various situations, the method own capacities are used in order to understand the persons around them and for affective self-control.

The term *empathy* was entered by Edward B. Titchener, English psychologist from Cornell University, at the beginning of the 20th century, as correspondent of the German word *Einfühlung*. He translated Theodor Lipps' notion of *Einfühlung* by the concept of empathy, from the Greek *empathia*, and kept the idea of the self projected in the perceived object. Due to its intangible nature, empathy was described and treated differently. Empathy in personalistic perspective appears like a feature of personality, sometimes being awarded skills valences, for an interpretation of the relationship life through the prism of empathy. Recognized as general skill, present within any relational conduct of the individual, it was proved that it can become as well a special skill, indispensable to the exertion of certain professions and it can be structured as an empathic style of personality.

Within the educational process, the empathic spirit must have precedence; transposition of the teacher in any difficult moment or circumstance in his pupils' shoes, getting closer to the pupil like to his own child, avoiding orders, command tone, threats or warnings, ungrounded lecture, here are several elements of learning success. There is the possibility, by the mediation of empathy, to better understand the pupil, to intuit his thoughts and affective experiences, to anticipate his conduct and even to act correspondingly.

There are two approach directions of the issues related to empathy and its nature. The **affective** vision assumes an activation of the substitutive experiences in emotional statuses of another individual, by affectively identifying with him/her and by taking over the spirit state of the other. The affective side is considered as being the closest to the psychological identification condition to partner. Some authors appreciate empathy as source of knowledge of the affective states of the others or a method to participate to the emotions of artistic and literary characters. The **cognitive** vision is based on an anticipation process, of imaginative depth in the internal reference framework of the partner; imaginative-idea transposition in the reference system of the other and

taking over his/her way of thinking, to perform the social role of the other. If the affective side regards the measure the subject assesses if he/she feels identical to another individual, then, the cognitive structure in empathy regards the fact that the subject understand what the other feels. In such process, the ways of integration of the data of the empathized model are perception, representation, deduction, imagination.

Pedagogical psychology is the main source of information and scientific substantiation of pedagogy, being in the tightest dependency and having a primordial significance for the educator and for the educational psychologist. The fundamental issues of pedagogical psychology includes psychological issues of the young generation and the psychological issues of the educational process.

Empathy is a capacity indispensable to the activity of persons, specialty of which involves interpersonal relations. One of the main types of the human activity which fully demand empathy is pedagogical activity. The role and place of empathy in the didactic activity has not been recent. There are vast researches in the field of the teacher's capacities which he/she is to hold in order to excel in his/her activity. Amongst the important capacities which provide the instrumental-operational side of the didactic activity, we also find empathy. The presence of empathy is needed in the structure of pedagogical aptitudes, especially in optimizing the teacher-pupil relationship. The educator must hold certain empathy related capacities: the understanding of the intimate universe of the pupil, art to notice all complicates and delicate nuances of his/her psychic; ability to see the world with the eyes of another; teacher's capacity to know and understand the pupil, to set the needed relationship with each and every pupil or with the whole class. In the same train of ideas, the teacher needs to know the attitude of his/her pupil to him/herself, in order to be able to choose a correct mean of expression of his/her own attitude to the pupil. The teacher must start from the elementary, but even the most difficult – from the formation of the capacity to perceive another person's state, the capacity to be in his/her shoes in various situation. In order to best influence the pupils, there is a need of two types of capacities. The first type consists of orientation capacities, techniques in the partner, like the capacity to "read faces", mimicry, behaviour. The second type consists of the capacity to passing from technique to internal modelling. The development of such capacities assumes interaction with

pupils, knowledge of the pupils' personality not in general, but a certain purpose, in a certain situation, in a certain class, abandoning stereotypes in treating pupils.

The teacher needs to be able to take over the standpoint of the pupil, to imitate his meditations, to anticipate the possible hardships of his activity, to understand how the pupil sees a certain situation. N. Mitrofan lists the psycho-pedagogical capacities needed for the good development of the pedagogical activity and finds as important and absolutely necessary the *capacity to understand the pupil, to get into his/her intimate universe*, therefore the split capacity of the educator, the possibility to orientate both towards interventions, his/her influences, and towards pupils, understanding the situation, the difficulties met by them in the learning and assimilation activity and from the pupil's perspective, remaking continuously his operative work programme. Amongst the inborn attributes of the teacher, C. Narly finds the importance of the power and tendency to understand the child: "Educator needs to have the intuitive gift to know the man, and to understand man from a gesture, a look, even without gesture and look, and more, against expression gesture and look may have the intention to have. Educator needs to clearly see into the child's soul".

Specialty studies refer directly to the definition of the teacher's empathy and the manifestation of teacher's empathy in the pedagogical activity. The famous American psychologist and psychotherapist, Carl Rogers, defines empathy in educational background as follows: "When the teacher has the ability to understand the reactions of his/her pupil from the inside, he is aware and sensitive to the way the education and learning process is seen by the pupils. Empathy increases the probability of significant teaching".

Empathy of teachers as communicative act

The teaching process is bilateral, employing two subjects, each of them performing one of the two components: teacher/trainer performs teaching, and the educated (pupil/student) performs learning. The double-unitary character of the teaching process is expressed by the mutuality report of the two subjects, which act one to one, in interdependence; they are mutually conditioned, therefore interact. Although the teacher remains the guiding factor of the teaching process, the educated individual needs to be considered active partner in charge with the learning process, who needs to be invited to cooperate. In his/her capacity of second subject of education,

the educated individual accumulates all the teaching-learning efforts. Or, empathy is compulsorily inserted in the system of the teaching process features, which is bilateral, bi-univocal, interactive.

The modern theory of the training process synthesises within the same body of knowledge data and conclusions offered by two fields: theory of communication and theory of learning. The teaching process is an act of communication (transmission) of information and ideas, messages, opinions, behaviours (actions), within which the relationship teacher – pupil (student) represents communicational interactions of cognitive, affective, volitional, behavioural (acting) nature etc.. The teaching-learning process, as specific form of communication, may be examined therefore from the prism of the models offered by communication theory.

Generally, human communication is interpersonal relation where people give a meaning and value to the received message. Communication is defined as transmission of a content (message) from emitter to receiver through a channel; it is a possible or real relationship between two or among several individuals, with an exchange of significances. Empathy regards first of all a deep and firm psychic contact, within which an individual is very careful to the experience of the other as unique individual. Empathically, the experience of the other is appreciated as it is, like **idiosyncratic** manifestation of the other in his/her uniqueness. Secondly, empathic exploration includes empathic, deep and uninterrupted investigations or immersions, within the other's experience. Third, empathic exploration assumes the resonant notice of limits or of implicit aspects of the client's experience, which helps him/her create a new meaning.

The effectiveness of the pedagogical message depends on educational ambiance – consisting of the assembly of affective states of the subject and the object of education, which influence the educational action from the inside – and the psychosocial field – consisting of the assembly of objective elements (space, time of education) and subjective (educational styles) which influence the educational action from the outside. Its efficiency is proved in the moment the pedagogic message reaches the object of education through the agency of a common repertoire. The receiver, who receives the message, identifies (decodes) it by the signs from his/her own repertoire. Emitter and receiver hold, therefore, each two repertoires of signs which are more or less common: communication is substantially based on the common part of the two repertoires.

Repertoire in the theory of communication means – assembly of signs fastened in the “memory” of the individual and logical and grammatical rules to use such signs. Within the educational context, the emitter’s (teacher’s) repertoire means the assembly of knowledge, notions, skills, abilities, experiences etc. the teacher has and whom he engages in the act of teaching. Receiver’s (pupil’s) repertoire is the assembly of knowledge, notions, skills, abilities, experiences the pupil has, the level of psychic and physical development he employs in the act of learning. Communication becomes possible only when the two repertoires have something in common, intersect. The larger the superimposed space, the higher the positive value of the common repertoire, and the better the bilateral communication. If the scope of the two repertoires does not intersect, communication is not possible. The common repertoire may be made in the extent the subject of education meets the intellectual and non-intellectual particularities of the object of education and assures the cognitive understanding of the message, its affective-motivational acceptance, the challenge of a behavioural reaction of the pupil at acting and attitude level. The projection and performance of the “common repertoire” demands the pedagogical *empathy* of teacher, proved through his/her transposition capacity in the shoes of the pupil. It represents a pedagogical aptitude engaged within the communication report between the teacher and the pupil /student, complex relationship which engages all the dimensions of their personality.

It is obvious that empathy is harmoniously registered in the structure of inter-human communication. Empathy makes the teacher able to code his/her educational message in compliance with the pupil’s repertoire. The more empathy teacher shows, the better will he know him and the best shall (s)he formulate his/her educational message. Therefore, teaching consists of a system of operations of selection, ordination and adequacy at the thinking level of pupils for an informational content and its transmission, using certain didactic strategies, in order to perform, with maximum efficiency, the proposed objectives.

Role of empathy in didactic communication

Empathy gets a role of balance reestablishment, when there appear, in the relationship teacher – pupil, dissonance, non-harmonization phenomena of cognitive, affective or attitude structures. The teacher needs to be able to notice the experiences of the child, to identify affectively and cognitively with the pupil, to transpose in his/her shoes, to be consonant with the pupil. Empathy enables communication. Perceiving the pupil’s gestures, expressions and words, teacher

understands his/her affective states and adopts an adapting conduct, that is, finds the most effective influencing methods. Empathic knowledge allows as well the forecast of pupil's subsequent behaviour and adopting proper communication strategies. The humanization of the teacher-pupil relationship necessarily involves the empathy of educator. Teacher must be able in any moment, irrespective of his/her disposition, to get into the intimate universe of pupil, his/her problems and experiences. The empathic relations between the teacher and pupil create a psychological atmosphere of welfare, trust, opening, mutual understanding, exert positive influence on the formation of pupil's personality, contributes to the development of respect.

There is a positive correlation between the high degree of empathy of the teacher and the academic successes of his/her pupils: at all teaching levels the pupils of the teachers with a high degree of empathy have higher academic successes than those of teachers with low empathy. Empathic communication develops an interactive relationship, enabling a cooperative behaviour, mutual understanding between partners, being able to launch social harmonies characteristic to interpersonal contacts. In compliance with several authors, empathy is the first factor underlying the implicit communication between teacher and pupil, the best interaction condition, of understanding and tolerance in other words, the psychological modality to provide an effective didactic activity.

In the background of the performed experiments, it was found that teachers are more empathic as related to the pupils with exemplary behaviour than to the pupils with undesirable behaviour (difficult children). In most of the cases, a deeply empathic behaviour of the teacher to the pupil is accompanied by a high empathic behaviour of the pupil to the teacher, and a weakly empathic behaviour of the teacher to the pupil is accompanied by a low empathic behaviour of the pupil to the teacher. This compatibility between teacher's and pupil's empathy does not settle for good the issues of the teacher-pupil relationship and is not the only way providing its optimization, but the phenomenon has a special weight. The authors affirm that the improvement of the empathic behaviour of the teacher may have positive consequences on the empathic behaviour of the pupil. This empathic relationship represents the place which includes the optimization of the relations teacher – pupil and is allowed to an effective instructive – educative process.

Specificity of the manifestation of teachers' empathy in their relationship with pupils

Representative researches in the field certify that the persons with a high degree of empathy, as compared to the persons with low empathy: are more tolerant; are altruist in their behaviour with others and offer to help others; are less aggressive; qualify positive social features as being important; have a high degree at moral judgment measurements; have pleasant temperaments.

R. Hogandelimits five items as being the most descriptive for an empathic person:

1. shows social perception on a large scale in interpersonal lines;
2. is aware of the impression onto others;
3. is skilled in social techniques (imaginative game, simulation, humour);
4. has intuition in own motivation and in conduct;
5. evaluates the motivations the other have when interpreting situations.

B. Cooperdiscerns several levels of manifestations of teachers' empathy in their relationship with pupils. The first level is *basic empathy*. At such level, teachers start making relations with their pupils, trying to know and understand them, it involves several attitudes and procedures communicated to pupils by various means of communication and which contribute to the initiation of making a mental model of the pupil, which enables interaction.

The second level was named *deep empathy*, empathy based on long term interaction, which involves the recognition of each value, capitalizes differences and promote tolerance. Profound empathy demands the teacher a mentally drafted model, individual, high degree, produced from the deep understanding and which incorporates features from the past and those to be manifested in future, in internal representations on it. Such mental model evolves and fluctuates from a moment to another, every day, always reviewing understanding by the answers and reactions of the child.

Unlike empathy in other interpersonal relations, as for example, physician - patient, psychotherapist - client etc., the specificity of teachers' empathy is given by the following theses:

- as the great number of pupils/students reduces the empathic capacity of the teacher in his/her relationship with pupils, he/she is compelled to capitalize other sources in order to empathise individually with pupils, formally, during class, and non-formally, during extracurricular activities.

- the empathy of physicians and psycho-therapists has the purpose to notify the intimate universe of client and its fluctuations, in order to help patients to explore themselves, to go beyond their problems; the teacher, however, besides them, needs also to advance with his/her pupils in their education, to help them explore the subject he/she teaches;
- the teacher is compelled to know the details of each and every age;

The main features of the empathic teacher are: empathic capacities (emotional responsiveness, perspicacity, emotional identification, imagination, memory in images, reflection); knowledge on the typological and age particularities of the personality, on empathy as psychic phenomenon, on the specificity of its manifestation; ability to see the pedagogical problem, to settle it from humanist solutions, to forecast the actions of pupils, to express compassion and co-living.

These features are given by the qualities needed by a teacher, and this is: solid follow up of the performance of the fixed purposes, tenacity and perseverance, patience and self-control, modesty and exigency, both to him/herself and to the pupil, qualities which should be harmoniously combined with special qualities of the teacher, which consisted of grounded knowledge of the taught material. He/she has the purpose to transmit to youngsters the specialty human experience, cumulated by generations. The results of education are not only a product of efforts and workmanship of teachers but of the pupil's efforts, the two being complementary terms of the pedagogic process. Teacher's empathy is oriented to the benefit of pupil, creates optimum conditions for his/her personality formation and training, in compliance with the individual and age particularities. Teacher's influence is decisive in the formation of the pupil's personality, either positive, mobilizing the pupil's energy, or demobilizing and discouraging.

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