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Expression of Pre-service Teachers’ Emotional Competency in Their Educational Practice

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Abstract

Nowadays rapid and complicated development of the world challenges pre-service teachers and their competencies. The article aims at defining the expression of future music teachers’ emotional competency, emphasising the necessity to reflect on one’s emotions in educational practice, while they communicate with school learners. The results of qualitative content analysis also highlighted the factors, which predetermine professional self-determination of teachers of music to be. Twenty-three 4th year students (pre-service teachers) involved in the programme of music education at Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences participated in the research, which aimed to compare students’ assessment with that of practice supervisors.

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1. Introduction

Increasing requirements for culture of teacher communication and collaboration culture, their emotional competency impose new objectives for teacher training (Education and Training 2020; The National Education Strategy for 2013–2022). On the basis of research carried out in Lithuania (Virsuliene, 2014; Kyburiene et al., 2008; Martisauskiene, 2007), it can be stated that the essential qualities that in-service teachers lack include: better self-evaluation, dignity, abilities to control emotions, to self-develop positive attitudes, to cope with tension, anxiety, fears and stress, to constructively solve conflicts and emerging problems, to tolerate different opinions of learners.
Hence, the emotional competency is underdeveloped.

Emotional competency refers to learning capability based on emotional intelligence that results in outstanding performance at work (Cherniss, 2010). This also embraces expression of skills to perceive, recognise, understand and control own emotions and those of learners in pedagogical activities. In the process of (self-)education emotional competency opens possibilities of interaction of teacher-students’ personalities and through that possibilities of positive changes of the whole society.

Recently numerous studies on emotional competency have been carried out all over the world. Authors of Western countries emphasise importance of teacher’s emotional competency and social preparation (Vesely et al., 2013; Jones et al., 2013; etc.). The peculiarities of pedagogical competencies of music teachers' personal (self-)development in Lithuania have not comprehensively analysed in the works by researchers. There is a shortage of empiric research, which would contribute to distinguishing important components, which facilitate development of emotional competency of pre-service music teachers in the university. It has also been observed that activities of music teachers acquire specific features in the educational practice both due to peculiarities of artistic expression and their links with educational activity (Girdzijauskiene, 2013; Swanwick, 2008). Emotional – sensitive component is prioritised in music education and it predetermines specific peculiarities of emotional competency expression of music teachers.

1.1. Problem statement

The problem of research is determined by the following questions: what is emotional competency of pre-service music teachers like and what are possibilities of development of students’ emotional competency at university.

1.2. Purpose of study

The purpose of study is to diagnose the peculiarities of pre-service teachers of music expression of emotional competency during their teaching practice.

The article presents one part of the longitudinal inquiry, which serves as basis revealing tendencies in pre-service teachers’ identification with the teacher’s profession during study practice.

2. Methods

2.1. Sample of qualitative research

Twenty-three 4th year students (pre-service teachers) involved in the programme of music education at the Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences as well as 3 teachers-supervisors of students’ teaching practice from general education schools in Vilnius, participated in this research. Since non-probability sampling was used for the research, the acquired data cannot be generalised; however, they may be useful envisaging certain tendencies and foreseeing further recommendations for the research (Atkins & Walace, 2012). The reflections were written after the completion of 8 week teaching practice in schools. The research was carried out in June 2014.

2.2. Data collection

The qualitative research method was chosen for this study, using semi-structured written student reflections (reflective diary), which prompted research participants to recollect, think over, reassess and describe in writing specific cases experienced during the teaching practice (Bolton, 2010). The article analyses the considerations of the research participants, with regard to the following questions formulated by the researchers: 1) students’ attitude towards their relations with school learners; 2) students’ attitude towards own pedagogical activities; 3) students’ attitude towards perception and assumption of role of oneself as a teacher to be.

The questions of the interview with teachers were oriented towards the understanding of practice supervisors about students’ relations with school learners, self-evaluation of their pedagogical activities and revelation of essential educational and psychosocial factors, which predetermine students’ professional determination.
2.3. Data analysis

The content of the written reflections was analysed on the basis of qualitative content analysis (Schreier, 2012). Making attempts to reveal the inner content of the text expressed through linguistic means, the following steps were implemented: 1) primary grouping of separate indications (‘key’ words); 2) identifying of manifest categories; several categories, which were unified by one idea, have been joined into a theme; 3) interpreting of the categories, based on extracted evidence from the text.

2.3. The research ethics

The research ethics was grounded on the principles of goodwill, voluntarism, confidentiality, explicit informing and respect for the dignity of an individual (Miller et al, 2012).

3. Results

Upon analysis of the students’ reflections on their experiences during teaching practice, 12 qualitative categories were distinguished, which can be subdivided into 3 groups (themes) (see Table 1).

Table 1. Results of analysis of the students’ written reflections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Implementation of educational communication competency</td>
<td>Communication with a learner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communication with a group (class)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tolerance for different opinions of learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Empathy-based relationships with children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning of students to express emotion interacting with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation and reflection of own activities and behaviour</td>
<td>Perception of own role in the school community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Development of abilities of practice (self)-evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expression of students’ self-confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expression of students’ self-control skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact of practice upon professional self-determination</td>
<td>Personal satisfaction with the chosen profession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of self-confidence, impatience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emotionally hard work with children</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.1. Students’ attitude towards implementation of competency of educational communication during teaching practice

Communication of teachers and learners is an essential part of pedagogical interaction. Development of a student-teacher’s pedagogical communication is an integral part of professional self-development. Therefore, firstly attempts were made to identify how students, pre-service teachers of music, evaluate their direct relations with separate learners and their groups, to what extent they are ready to tolerate different opinions of school learners, to identify needs and to consider interests, feelings, experiences, etc. of each other.

The data of qualitative analysis of written reflections allow to conclude that students’ attitude towards their own relations with school learners are rather favourable: ‘I like working with children<…>it is interesting for me to communicate with children<…>it is pleasant to help them penetrate into music, to improve in this sphere’. Individual and personal communication with learners, listening to them and sharing own thoughts are most favourably ranked. Empathy towards students creates prerequisites for better cognition of children, their understanding, for foreseeing necessary communication techniques and strategies: ‘A teacher has to respect all the learners and to implant values through music’; ‘My experience shows that to listen to everybody is very important during music lessons’. Experiencing mutual interaction with children during their teaching practice, students learnt themselves as future representatives of teacher’s profession: ‘I want to be a music teacher because children like me’; ‘I managed to attract children by my qualities’.
Communication with a bigger group of school learners or a class weaker highlighted an authentic student’s relation. Students pointed out that it was difficult to communicate because of ‘absence of self-confidence in oneself and own abilities’, ‘lack of communication and children’s cognition skills’. Coping with conflicts and tolerance for different children’s opinions were among the most challenging tasks (‘I would like to understand my learners better’) as well as to express, characterise and manage emotions interacting with others.

3.2. Reflection and evaluation of own activities and behaviour

Reflection is particularly significant improving educational activities. It embraces ability to critically analyse own activities making attempts to correct it and objectively evaluate their progress. It can be stated that students are successful at establishing direct contact with learners but their meta-analysis of pedagogical activities is rather superficial: ‘It is very important for me when a teacher is an authority. This word embraces everything: acquired competencies, collaboration with school learners and other teachers, representative and attractive appearance’. In the context of emotional competency, perception of own role at school and self-confidence refer to internal satisfaction and pride, which is based on understanding and interpretation of internal states and social signals. According to the students: ‘I want to become a teacher of music because I think I can do it well. I am a strong personality and I am able to convey own knowledge to others. I am an emphatic personality and patient’. Self-confidence nurtures self-dependency, respect for oneself and for others, empowerment for development of professionalism: ‘During practice I saw rather good examples of own activities and received a lot of positive feedback...Then my self-confidence increased’. Teacher’s self-control skills include ability to manage emotions, feelings and reaction: ‘<...>I am incapable of coping with certain awkward situations yet, which require self-control skills’; ‘I understood that it is not easy to be a teacher<...>insufficient courage and ability to solve problems in the classroom may be felt’. Students pointed out that reflection-based assignments ‘allowed them to better learn themselves and to set further goals of professional development’.

The students, who did not intend to work as teachers faced most serious problems reflecting on their activities and determining own role at school. On the other hand, students with strong determination to work as teachers more intensively reflected on their activities and made attempts to identify strong and weak sides of their activities thinking about future work of a teacher.

3.3. Experiences of professional self-determination of pre-service music teachers

The results of qualitative content analysis highlighted the factors, which predetermine pre-service teachers’ professional determination. Students’ choice to study is conditioned by learner-centred and self-realisation factors: love for children, a wish to be useful and to become a teacher before entering the university and their wish to work as a teacher graduating from it, an ambition to acquire new knowledge and experience and need to assume own professional role. According to the students: ‘I perfectly imagine myself in music pedagogy’; ‘My vocation is to be a teacher. Being a teacher you are never old, you do not stay in one place and are under constant improvement’; ‘A teacher of music has to be creative, organised and tolerant. Teacher’s speciality immediately obliges you to involve in lifelong learning and improvement’. Mutual interaction with children opened opportunities for students to self-evaluate own abilities and personal qualities (patience and self-confidence): ‘During practice I realised that I lack confidence, knowledge and courage. Many times I felt unsecure or timid’.

Teacher’s activity is determined as ‘creative’, ‘perfect’, ‘necessary’, ‘pleasant’, but ‘emotionally hard’, ‘not respected’ or ‘unpaid’. However, some students doubted their choice of speciality during their practice: ‘having weighted music pedagogy and other professions, I can state that this work demands a lot of nerves, commitment, which is not necessary in other professions. Therefore, I do not have intentions to work as a teacher of music’. It is thought that possessing weaker motivation to study, students hardly identify themselves with the role of a teacher and this hampers their communication with learners and to develop their emotional competency. Cognition of oneself as a future music teacher during practice revealed itself through the relations with children. During the teaching practice some students envisaged lack of personal abilities and this changed their attitude towards the chosen speciality.

3.4. Attitudes of practice supervisors towards students’ relations with school learners and self-evaluation of students’ pedagogical activities
The results of qualitative content analysis as an outcome of qualitative diagnostics had illuminated more critical students’ opinion while assessing their own emotional competency. Practice supervisor assessed students’ readiness more favourably. According to practice supervisors, during their teaching practice students rather frequently encouraged their school learners to self-express in musical activities, avoided comparing the value of the results of school learners’ musical activities, created conditions for learning each others’ needs, to hear each others’ interests, feelings and experiences. Practice supervisors think that emotional competency of pre-service teachers embraces students’ empowerment to self-develop professionalism during their teaching practice though encouragement of their self-confidence: ‘The majority of students in the final teaching practice felt daring and self-confident <...> they almost stop feeling discomfort, sense of fear and thrill’; ‘<...>when students express their opinion during discussions of lessons, they perceive how useful these discussions are’. Such reflecting is meaningful to students because they enhance their self-confidence.

Some students, according to practice supervisor, not demonstrating a stimulus to reflect and to empower for critical discussions, fail to develop abilities of reflection of own activities and behaviour. The results of the research highlighted that students’ communication and collaboration with school learners were most favourably evaluated by practice supervisors. However, some students failed to find their place at school. The most considerable difference between students’ and practice supervisor’s opinions was observed in regard to the following abilities: to tolerate opinion of others, to develop school learners self-confidence, empathy and self-awareness, to reflect own activity during the practice. It may be stated that the observed differences among attitudes of students and practice supervisors towards activities of teaching practice occur not because of subjectivity but because of difference in evaluation criteria.

Conducting surveys on practice supervisors’ attitudes towards factors that have influence on a positive development of emotional competency of pre-service music teachers, it was revealed that relevant factors include: ‘perception of importance of teacher’s role’, ‘firm professional self-determination’, ‘subject-specific and pedagogical competencies’, ‘constant reflection of activities’, ‘self-cognition and cognition of a learner’. The practice supervisors pointed out that the main obstacles, which hamper (self-)development of pre-service teachers’ emotional competency, are as follows: ‘infirm professional self-determination of students’; ‘failure to apply theoretical knowledge in practice’; ‘low self-value’. This revealed the problem that the majority of pre-service teachers face challenges assuming the teacher’s role. However, more attention should be allocated to self-development of pre-service teachers’ emotional competency.

4. Discussion

The works by Lithuanian and foreign researchers substantiate the importance of personality competency (self-)development of pre-service teachers. Having compared the results of similar works by the authors of this article and others (Autukeviciene & Monkeviciene, 2014; Vesely et al., 2013; Jones et al., 2013; Larsen et al., 2012; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Kyburiene et al., 2008; Martisauskiene, 2007; etc.), it can be stated that (self-)development of teacher’s emotional competency is a complex and long-term process, which should focus on the parameters, which evidence the highest maturation of teacher’s personality, such as responsibility, self-dependence, self-assessment, abilities to reflect own activities and behaviour, planning of future career. At university a student acquires not only professional knowledge but also searches for own personal meaning (Bubnys & Zydziunaite, 2008). Therefore, it is necessary to establish pedagogical conditions for activation of personal qualities, which are relevant for the profession, for foreseeing of possible challenges and mistakes, for modelling the personal career and its implementation.

There are specialists in Lithuania, who have accumulated sufficient experience in provision of services of career designing but formal training of career counsellors is not available (Pukelis & Navickiene, 2011). The majority of skills necessary to career counsellors have been acquired by the career counsellors during continuous or non-formal training. Though the Centre of Professional Counselling and Career Office of Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences provide students with the information related to the choice of profession and career as well as individual psychological support (on issues of stress, crises, communication and learning), hold group sessions on self-knowledge, self-development, communication skills development, conflict resolution, there emerges a need for development of abilities of lifelong learning and career designing targeting at teaching pre-service teachers to manage own career (Savickas, 2012). Reflection as a method provides university teachers with information about
students’ problems, expectations and needs. Therefore, it is important to enable a student during studies to analyse own experience employing reflection, revealing new insights into their personal improvement.

5. Conclusions

The results of qualitative content analysis as an outcome of qualitative diagnostics revealed a more critical students’ opinion while assessing their own emotional competency. Practice supervisor assessed students’ readiness more favourably. The most considerable difference between opinions of students and practice supervisor was observed in following abilities: to tolerate opinion of others, to develop school learners’ self-confidence, empathy and self-awareness, to reflect own activity during the practice. The research fails to provide solutions to such problems (questions); however, it highlights problematic areas that exist in modern school.

Students’ choose music teacher’s speciality under influence of the following learner and self-realisation centred factors: wish to become a teacher, love to children, wish to acquire knowledge and to improve. Undeveloped skills of educational communication and children’s cognition, insufficient self-confidence and lack of self-control skills are indicated as the main reasons for uncertainty and doubts about own professional choice.

Aiming at strengthening the expression of emotional competency of pre-service teachers, in teacher education more attention should be devoted to emotional students’ self-education and realisation of pedagogical competencies of personality (self-) development during teaching practice.

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References


