Stereotypes in the Professional Activity of Teachers

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Abstract

One of the indications of the professional deformation of a teacher is the adoption of educational stereotypes. On the one hand, formation of stereotypes is one of the advantages of the human mind. On the other hand, stereotypes introduce big distortions to the reflection of professional reality and contribute to the formation of psychological barriers. The purpose of the work is to study various types of stereotypes, diagnose teachers as having stereotypes, develop methods for destruction of educational stereotypes. School teachers and University lecturers are in general of the same mind in their evaluations (when tested by proverbs test). The majority of unambiguous answers, namely, complete consent with proverbs indicate that educators use stereotypes. According to self-evaluation of educators, stereotypes hamper communication of the majority of University lecturers, and help school teachers deal with teaching objectives and moral building objectives. As a result of training on stereotype destruction 84.6% of the educators mentioned that they used stereotypes and 15.4% of them did not do so according to their self-evaluation. The gathered professional work experience conduces to stereotyping of human thinking. On the one hand, stereotyped decisions provide more than 60% of the correct professional solutions, ensure stable development of situations and profession as a whole. On the other hand, creativity in solving problems is necessary to get to the new level of professional activity. Therefore, phenomenon of “educational stereotypes” is multi-faceted. It contains both positive and negative functions.

Keywords: Stereotypes, professional deformations, advanced training

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1. Introduction

Formation of professional stereotypes in thinking is one of the aspects of professional activity of a man. On the one hand formation of stereotypes is one of the advantages of the human mind. On the other hand, stereotypes introduce big distortions to the reflection of professional reality and contribute to the formation of psychological barriers. Prevalence of stereotyped thinking can gradually lead to professional deformation of a specialist.

The purpose of this article is to study educational stereotypes, identify positive and negative functions of stereotypes, diagnose school and university teachers as having stereotypes, develop methods for destruction of stereotypes.

Translated from Greek the term stereotype means "solid impression". The study of stereotypes began in the 1920s, when American sociologist W. Lippman made an attempt to give a definition of stereotype for the first time. According to him, they are “preconceptions” that “govern deeply the whole process of perception. They mark out certain objects as familiar or strange, emphasizing the difference, so that the slightly familiar is seen as very familiar, and the somewhat strange as sharply alien” (Lippmann W., 2004; Chaplygina Y.S., 2010, p. 679). This general negative assessment of stereotypes as suggested by W. Lippmann dominated in science until the late 1950s.

2. Types of stereotypes

Stereotype is fixed image or idea emotionally colored by prejudice or bias i.e., by steadfast evaluation. Educational stereotypes are behavioral, cognitive and affective criterions to which a teacher orient himself in his professional educational activities.

According to Buchilova I.A., educational stereotypes are fixed, oversimplified, schematized and emotionally colored ideas of educational activity, child personality, parents and teacher himself. Stereotypes begin to form in childhood under the influence of teachers and parents. In college stereotypes continue to amass and get entrenched. With age as many researchers mention, inclination for stereotyping grows stronger. Teachers of long standing usually have far more stereotypes than beginners. Oversimplified ideas and stereotypes form “relaxation circuit” and prevent from developing new approaches and methods, new knowledge (Buchilova I.A., 2002).

Stereotypes are divided into positive/negative or useful/harmful stereotypes depending on the ways and forms of their use. Let us consider positive and negative functions of stereotypes. (Tjunnikov Y.S., 2004).

Positive functions of stereotypes: they
- enable to determine general approaches, to unify life;
- stereotype is rational, it economizes time;
- enable to store in memory generalized characteristics of teacher’s thinking and activity, etc.;

Negative functions of stereotypes: they
- reproduce mainly standard decisions
- induce conventional, simplified approach to problems encountered;
- restrain creative activity;
- reduce flexibility of thinking, hamper development of teacher’s non-standard thinking;
- lower quality of educational process.

Professional knowledge and professional culture develop as a result of active professional activity. Their development conduce to form cognitive, communicative, professional behavioral, research and other stereotypes.

Professional and social stereotypes used in the teacher’s activity work together as a whole. In particular, to our opinion, when professional problematic situation arises, firstly professional stereotypes began to work depending on the level of teacher’s competence. They are cognitive, didactic, communicative, behavioral stereotypes (they can be presented conventionally as inside circle of stereotypes). They link up with social, trivial and mundane stereotypes (they can be conventionally presented as outside circle). Educational stereotypes form under the influence of social, cultural, gender, age, ethnic, religious and other stereotypes.

Social stereotypes are the result of life experience, they are over generalized representations which are not accurate on a number of occasions.
3. Educational stereotypes and innovation activity

Educators and psychologists study educational stereotypes of teachers, stereotypes of university lecturers, stereotypes of preschool teachers and students’ stereotypes.

Y. Tjunnikov identifies the following educational stereotypes: centering on studies as stereotype of perception of students; stereotype of perception of students’ personal qualities, stereotype of perception of an “ideal” student and a “bad student”, stereotype of perception of girls and boys, stereotype of perception of students’ behavior; stereotype of perception of educational successes and failures; stereotype of perception of the teaching profession; stereotype of perception of school; stereotype of perception of parents, etc.

Let us consider, for instance, stereotype of perception of educational innovations. The reason for formation of the stereotype is the attitude “You mustn’t experiment with children”. This attitude reflects well-known commandment “do no harm!” . The result is negative perception and negative evaluation of innovations, fear of them, especially of complex and radical high-risk innovations. Fear of risk-taking is often becomes impassable obstacle to practical application of new educational ideas. Any innovation in education is risky because of unforeseen difficulties as no one knows whether the innovation will produce desired results, take root in traditional educational environment and how students and their parents will regard it. Innovators always take risks, and the more complex and ambitious the innovation the more independence they enjoy the higher the degree of risk. (Tjunnikov Y.S., 2004).

The idea of W. Lippmann was furthered by John Halt. J. Halt writes that all educational stereotypes are acquired due to mistakes based on metaphors, imaginary pictures in which we believe more than in life itself (Halt J., 1966).

Negative educational stereotypes also exist. N.Y. Postaljuk identifies authoritarian style of educational guidance; formalism, focus on the form of educational activity, prevalence of educational measures (organization, administration, regulation) over self-organization, self-administration, self-regulation. This stereotype can be summarized in the following rules with which teachers comply:

1. Teachers shall teach and students shall learn.
2. The teacher knows everything, the student knows nothing (compare to the thesis of “tabula rasa” well known in the history of education).
3. The teacher thinks also for the students.
4. The teacher speaks, the students listen to him passively.
5. The teacher determines curriculum, the students obey it.
6. The teacher acts and the student puts on semblance of activity.
7. The teacher is set in authority which he puts against liberty of action of students.

J.E. Brophy and T.L. Good identify negative educational stereotype of “good student” and “bad student”:

1. The teacher gives a bad student less time for answering than to a good student;  
   - if incorrect answer is given, he does not repeat the question, does not offer a prompt but asks another student right away or gives a correct answer himself;
   - he is too tolerant, gives a good student a good mark for incorrect answer;
2. He scolds more often a bad student for incorrect answer
3. And he less often praises a bad student for correct answer ;
4. The teacher tends not to react to the answer of a bad student, asks another student and pays no attention to the raised hand of the bad student;
5. The teacher smiles more rarely, looks less frequently in the eyes of a bad student as compared with a good student (Brophy J., Good T., 1974).

V.A. Slastyonin proposed mechanism for shattering (restructuring) of negative educational stereotypes. Shattering of stereotypes as such “is not their destruction because they are easily replaced by new ones, it is the use of constructive part of stereotypes in order to restructure and reconsider them” (Slastyonin V.A., 2000).

4. Interrelation of stereotypes and professional deformation of a teacher

Stereotyped actions are an indicator of professional deformations. At first stereotypes speed up and improve efficiency of work; however, when they begin to dominate, perception of a situation gets simplified, and confidence in correctness and validity of the methods used is unfounded. This leads to decrease in analytical abilities, flexibility
of thinking and ability to look at things from a different point of view. Professional deformation is initiated by professional stagnation of a specialist. Professional stagnation is crisis stemming from professional activity and subjective sensation that there is no any progress in personal and professional development (Symanyuk A.A., 2005).

Professional stagnation is lack of progress when a teacher with sufficiently high level of competence realizes his professional activity by using one and the same means. The simple mechanism to fight professional stagnation is periodical advanced training, use of creative and innovative teaching methods (Mynbayeva A., 2012).

5. Practice of identifying educational stereotypes

Research experiment aimed to identify educational stereotypes in educational culture and develop methods of destruction of educational stereotypes. 40 teachers of Almaty took part in the research. At the first stage the teachers were proposed to express their agreement or disagreement with 16 proverbs. For instance: “Like mother, like daughter”, “Child is docile like wax”, “Children are more like their time, than their parents”, “A good example is the best sermon”, “Don’t try to teach your Grandma to suck eggs”, etc.

Both groups of respondents consisting of school teachers and university teachers are unanimous in their evaluation of the majority of the proverbs. The majority of decisive answers of consent with the proverbs (“yes”) indicates adoption of stereotypes by the teachers. 35,25 % of university teachers and only 17 % of school teachers were able to discern bad and good features of students. 17,7 % of university teachers and 28,2 % of school teachers give exclusively positive evaluation of modern students. At the same time, 26,4 % of university teachers give exclusively negative evaluation of modern students and 39,5 % of school teachers do the same. 20,65 % of university teachers and 15,3 % of school teachers did not answer or failed to answer.

Then the teachers were asked to finish incomplete sentences. The both groups unanimously agreed with the definition of educational stereotype. The respondents believe that it is “a standardized image, behavior, focus on the subject of educational activity or situation, pigeonholing”.

When requested to give examples of stereotypes the respondents were slow in giving answers. For instance, 45,5% of school teachers and 44,5% of university teachers did not answer that question. The following examples of stereotypes were given: “the character of Pavel Korchagin”, “the characters of an underachiever, military instructor, handicraft teacher”, “the similar requirements for a child and an adult”, “the teacher is always right”, “the teacher is subject, the student is object”, “young people do not wish to work and to learn”, “bespectacled people are clever and astute”, “teacher is educator by avocation”, “the bad student knows nothing”, “Like mother like daughter”, “Teachers-woman are banned from wearing trousers”. According to the evaluation of the teachers, stereotypes hamper to establish contact and to communicate, they hamper to evaluate correctly, as well as to use individual approach, to develop creativity and move forward.

Then the teachers answered the question: what should be done to overcome stereotypes. The university teachers suggested that it necessary: “to get acquainted with more information” – 8,3 %, “to look at the world with optimism” – 8 %, “to form personal opinion” – 17 %, “to carry out trainings on stereotype destruction” – 41,7 %, 25 % of the university teachers did not answer the question. The school teachers suggested: “to carry out trainings and seminars” – 16,7 %, “the teacher himself shall fight stereotypes” – 22,2 %, “to encourage creative approach” – 17 %, “to change the system of education” – 5,6 %, 38,5 % of the school teachers did not answer.

6. Discussion: methods of destruction of stereotypes

Within the framework of the research psychoeducational training for educators titled “Educational stereotypes: helpers or enemies?” was developed. It included 5 lessons and technique “Multicolored glasses”. As a result of the training on stereotype destruction according to the self-evaluation of the teachers, 84,6 % of them recognized that they had formed stereotypes, and 15,4 % - did not recognize it.

The training was tested at the school of perfecting art of teaching at Schoolchildren’s Palace in Almaty. Technique “Multicolored glasses” was developed for destruction of stereotypes in professional activity. Materials: glasses of various colors and form (pink glasses, black glasses, zebra glasses, star glasses, polaroid spectacles, underwater glasses, thick glasses).
Instructions: a group is given a certain problem for discussion. Participants are proposed to choose any glasses. They put on glasses of definite color and form and discuss the problem in accordance with the chosen glasses. After discussion they engage in self-reflection. The participants shall realize that in real-life situations it necessary to change “imaginary glasses” and not to wear one and the same habitual glasses.

Good exercises to destruct stereotypes are well known game “Mafia”, methods of 6 hats and 6 pairs of footwear by Edward de Bono

7. Conclusion

Increase in new professional information and knowledge requires constant renewal of professional competences. The gathered professional work experience conduces to stereotyping of human thinking. On the one hand, stereotyped decisions provide more than 60% of the correct professional solutions, ensure stable development of situations and the profession as a whole. On the other hand, creativity in solving problems is necessary to get to the new level of professional activity. Paradigm shift in education in the 21st century, orientation towards student-centered, individual approach require flexible thinking and reduction in stereotypization of professional thinking from an educator. Therefore, phenomenon of “educational stereotypes” is multi–faceted. It contains positive as well as negative functions. Consequently, it necessary to evaluate educational stereotypes of teachers, to shatter and restructure stereotypes. We propose a program and exercises to change them.

References