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Sebareflexia v práci učiteľa predprimárneho vzdelávania

Self-reflection in the Work of a Teacher of Pre-primary Education

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Abstract

Through the awareness of one's own strengths and abilities, a person is able to understand his or her uniqueness. Through a questionnaire devoted to the competencies of pre-primary education teachers, we surveyed by means of a qualitative method. A set of 217 respondents answered questions expressing the characterization of the teacher's personality, self-reflection. The aim was to find out which competences pre-primary teachers would change or improve, i.e. how they perceive themselves in their profession. First of all, the questionnaire asked which competences teachers consider to be essential, and then we paid attention to teachers' comprehensive view of their personality, which we divided into four competence categories, namely, disciplinary and pedagogical, social and communicative, diagnostic and intervention or emotional competences.

Keywords: Competence. Self-reflection. Self-knowledge. Teacher. Pre-rimary education.

Introduction

Self-reflection is a topic of philosophical, psychological and pedagogical disciplines. From a psychological point of view, it is defined as the idea of one's own person and, therefore, the way an individual sees himself/herself. The cognitive component is important here, which has an evaluative and descriptive sphere (Hartl, Hartlová, 2000). According to Kuneš (2009), self-knowledge as a never-ending process and is particularly important in the helping professions.

Although we can never get to know ourselves well enough, because human beings are constantly evolving and changing, self-knowledge helps us to become aware of our strengths and weaknesses. By discovering one's weaknesses, he or she can work on pushing the boundaries of commitment due to the reactions of others around him or her.

Self-reflection and self-knowledge

The philosophical notion of self-reflection speaks of the consciousness of one's reflection in the social reality around him. Philosophical reflections on self-reflection date back to the time of the famous Socrates (Hartl, Hartlová, 2000).

From a pedagogical perspective, the term self-reflection is most often associated with teacher self-reflection. Through self-reflection, the teacher receives feedback that enables him/her to improve his/her pedagogical skills and develop his/her personality. It is the systematic, conscious acquisition and processing of information about one's own teaching and the subsequent improvement of the teaching process itself.

Self-reflection in the work of a teacher

Nezvalova (2002) claims that teachers should ask themselves 3 basic questions, namely what kind of teacher they are, what kind of teacher they would like to be, and what they need to do to be that teacher. The teacher must take responsibility for his/her own actions and be able to conceive a critical evaluation of his/her teaching. Self-reflection thus includes what teachers think, a quality that tells how they think about their teaching. Through this, teachers are able to determine when they are making the right decisions (Nezvalova, 2002).

„The quality of reflection is determined by such indicators as avoidance of conformity, analysis of problems and possible solutions, and the use of evidence to evaluate professional arguments“ (Nezvalova, 2002, p. 313). Self-reflection enables the educator to understand his/her teaching abilities, to explain them, to become aware of them, and therefore to reflect on them. Self-reflections can be dialogical or written. While dialogical self-reflection, for example, taking place in dialogue with more experienced colleagues, increases the effectiveness of internal dialogue, written self-reflection in turn helps to organise teaching experience and gives the opportunity to revisit it later. Self-reflection based on an understanding of the past helps to reflect on pedagogical situations and thus influences action in the following cases (Švec, 2005).

Syslová (2013) refers to self-reflection as a complex concept that refers to the acquiring of knowledge about oneself, through internal dialogue, but also from the world around through systematic collection of information. The purpose is to improve the quality of pedagogical work and the approach to children and at the same time to oneself. We obtain information about ourselves through perception. Through perception and self-reflection we can evaluate our actions. Self-reflection acts as a feedback to human action, whereby educators are able to improve their pedagogical practice. This is one of the professional competences that is a condition of professional development. At the same time, its development requires a high degree of individual freedom, teacher

autonomy and professional responsibility. These qualities must also be associated with the ethical quality of teachers (Spilková et. al, 2008).

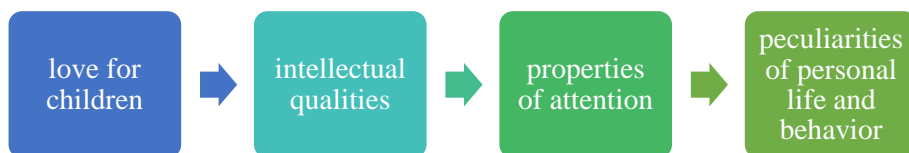
„The ability to reflect on one's own experiences is considered to be the most effective way of professional development, which relies on critical examination of one's own actions in the context of theoretical assumptions“ (Syslová, Chaloupková, 2015, p. 8).

According to Švec (In: Syslová, 2013), teacher self-reflection can be considered as a kind of superior competence or metacompetence, which can support the development and evaluation of other pedagogical competences.

Since the pupil is not competent enough to point out to the teacher a teaching error, all this work is left to the teacher. Therefore, self-reflection of the teacher as a monitoring of his own activity is a fundamental characteristic of every teacher (Nezvalova, 2002).

Perceptions of teacher self-reflection and complex teacher perspective

Shaping and having the opportunity to have a more lasting impact on the teacher's personality depends mainly on the acquired skills - pedagogical talent, on self-education, self-development, or on the very extent of the teacher's attentiveness. It is necessary to postulate pedagogical prerequisites, abilities or aptitudes. We are talking about personality characteristics conditioning positive results of activity in education. These include:



Graph No. 1 Summary of personality traits determining success in education (Own elaboration according to Ďurič, 1977).

Self-reflection is not only looking back at the educational work of the teacher himself/herself, but it also includes reflecting on communication and cooperation with parents or colleagues. It enables the teacher to assess the quality of his/her interactions and what he/she contributes to this. Thus, in addition to improving professional knowledge or the teaching process, self-reflection directly influences personal-social skills, which are very important for teachers working with preschool children and their families (Průcha, Koťátková, 2013).

The level of quality of a teacher's good preparation also influences his or her professionalism. We put forward the theory of the "six S's". It guides the teacher to become a quality professional. We talk about self-reflection, self-assessment, self-esteem, self-control, self-regulation and self-creation:

1. Self-reflection	insufficient self-perception in handling educational situations;
2. Self-evaluation	teacher evaluation of individual articles; evaluation of the teacher by the teacher; evaluation of the teacher by parents and students; especially the evaluation of the teacher's activities and preferences
3. Self confidence	is formed on the basis of self-assessment; we are talking about teachers with high or low self-esteem
4. Self control	these are assertive and dismissive expressions; all teachers should handle diverse situations, be able to resolve complications calmly and sensibly; he should be able to handle critical circumstances
5. Self-regulation	it is demonstrated above all when a person, a teacher, manages himself or controls his mental processes
6. Self-creation	we are talking about feeling, emotional, maturity; knowledge of one's goals and values; getting to know one's ways and procedures in educating students; education and others

Table 1 Six "S" principles of teacher quality level (Own elaboration according to Bezáková, 2003)

The teacher is the one who builds a positive atmosphere in the classroom, is the agent of peace in the whole process of education and training. He or she creates a climate in which pupils will not be afraid to communicate, to ask questions and to create positive relationships with each other. Through his methods, the teacher encourages pupils to be active, sincerely appreciates work and smiles back. As we have already mentioned, this is why his self-reflection is important. Through self-reflection we will be able to see ourselves from a certain perspective and view ourselves with a certain distance, more objectively. It is important to be able to work on oneself and through self-reflection we will be able to focus on our emotions, necessities or needs. We are able to talk about current experiences and openly acknowledge our feelings to ourselves. The topic of self-reflection, self-knowledge of the teacher is really up to date. If we pay more attention to the current situation in education and generalise it to education, finding a place for our own competences, talking about self-reflection and having time to work on ourselves is not easy at all. Many times the teacher's work is different from what is presented by the public. Hence our research findings, for example, teachers see their shortcomings in working with digital resources and thus feel less skilled, inadequate. Other

examples include younger teachers being too inexperienced in office work, being overwhelmed by bureaucracy. This may be related to a lack of time in learning new developments, and thus to a certain demotivation. That is why self-reflection is increasingly being talked about in the teaching society. Teachers want to know the positive and negative aspects of themselves so that they can work on themselves, which is not satisfactory for them.

Larrivee (2000) says that unless teachers develop critical self-reflection, they will remain in the so-called unexplored trap of various judgments, misinterpretations, assumptions and expectations. If self-reflection is approached practically and not just theoretically, individuals will be confident about themselves, they will know their values and this leads to professional identity.

Methods of developing self-reflection in pre-primary education

Self-reflection can be done either intentionally or subconsciously. Spontaneous subconscious reflection takes place automatically, but does not involve identifying the reasons for success. Intentional self-reflection, on the other hand, has a systematic framework and seeks to reflect on situations so as to improve the teaching process.

We know different methods of how self-reflection can be carried out:

A. Internal dialogue and self-reflective journal

In the inner dialogue, the educator talks to himself in his mind, thus describing individual situations, analysing and evaluating them. According to Svec (1998), the inner dialogue is a prerequisite for effective self-reflection. For the development of the inner dialogue, it is advisable to work with themes of self-reflective questions and to keep a self-reflective journal to begin with. In the journal, the educator writes down a retrospective view of the events experienced in the pedagogical process. At the same time, he/she also records his/her feelings and attitudes during the events. Over time, the educator develops greater thinking activity and is able to answer questions adequately and also to find connections between events. The diary leads to self-knowledge (Syslová, 2013).

B. Self-reflective questionnaire

Self-reflective questionnaires are part of the self-evaluation of schools and kindergartens. Their compilation is usually the responsibility of the institution itself, e.g. school management, etc., and the questions are chosen so that improvements in the pedagogical process in the institutions can occur.

C. Evaluation reports

Evaluation reports are a typical tool for the self-reflection in kindergartens. With the help of evaluation reports, not only does the institution gain information about the ongoing pedagogical process, but also the educator himself takes a retrospective view on the aspects of the process.

D. Inspection of classes

Inspection in kindergarten means finding out how the teacher is doing his/her job by a third person, most often a colleague or the director of the institution. In addition to the fact that the pedagogical practice is observed from the outside, the inspection is also beneficial for the educator as a way of self-reflection.

E. Video training of interactions

Video training is about recording interactions between the teacher and the student. The teacher can thus see himself from the outside, as well as others around him. At the same time, he or she can trace the aspects he or she wants to focus on and can return to certain situations limitlessly without distortion. If video training is applied regularly, it is possible to track the development of the educator over time. On the basis of the recordings, the educator can develop his positive expressions and practices (Syslová, 2013).

F. Portfolio

A portfolio in the work of an educator is not only a set of documents, but also a kind of portrait of a teacher who reflects his/her pedagogical philosophy and practice in the portfolio. The qualities of an educator are discussed in the presentation portfolio, which summarises information about the educator and his/her achievements. To be useful, the portfolio needs to describe not only the educator's strengths, but also his or her weaknesses. In this way, the teacher is able to see his or her weaknesses as an opportunity for professional improvement (Syslová et. al., 2018).

Description of the research group

The research group consisted of 217 female kindergarten teachers whose ages ranged from 18 to 60 years and above. Respondents were approached from state, private and church kindergartens of all regions of Slovakia. The criteria for being included in the evaluation of the questionnaire were the submission of a fully completed questionnaire. All questionnaires were valid. The questionnaire was administered between March and April in

2022 through an online platform. The questions in the questionnaire, in addition to the initial ones that characterized the teacher's personal characteristics such as age, length of teaching experience, were included in four competency categories, namely professional and pedagogical, social and communicative, diagnostic and intervening, or emotional. We formulated the questions in different ways. The scale asked teachers were supposed to indicate the extent to which they had the skills described in the question, with options ranging from 'excellent' to 'poor', then 'yes'; 'no' and 'don't know', or they were provided with a short-answer response. In our case, out of the 17 questions provided, we select 1 closely related to teacher profiling and perceived competencies through pre-primary teacher self-reflection.

Objective and methodology

The objective was to find out how pre-primary teachers perceive self-reflection of their own competence in their profession. We paid attention to the view of the part of the teacher's competences related to his/her personality.

We are going to survey the self-reflection of the pre-primary teacher; the question was what I want to improve about myself in my work. The respondents could answer with a short statement. The response was voluntary, with 190 out of 217 teachers responding. However, we were unable to evaluate some of the responses correctly; 168 were correct. The primary questions included the teacher's institutional affiliation, region of practice, location, age, length of teaching experience, and highest educational attainment. The age of teachers ranged from 18-30 years 19.4%; 31-40 years 19.4%; 41-50 years 25.8%; 51-60 years 28.1% and 61 years and above 7.4%. The length of teaching experience ranged from 0-5 years 20.7%; 6-10 years 18.9%; 11-15 years 6.9%; 16-20 years 8.8%; 21-25 years 4.6%; 26-30 years 8.8% and 31 years and above 31.3%.

On the basis of the qualitative research we created a table with the answers of the respondents using ATLAS.ti software, which we describe in section 1.2 Results of the self-reflection of the teacher's perception of his/her own competences, and based on the obtained information we created Picture 2.

The results of the self-reflection of the teacher's perception of his/her own competences

In the questionnaire we asked the pre-primary teachers what they want to improve in their work in order to find out their self-reflection. We used the definition by age mainly because we found some interesting differences when analyzing the answers. From each age range we select the three most recurrent answers Table 2.

Age of respondents	Competences		
18 – 30 years old	Communicativeness	Personal development	Skill development
31 – 40 years old	Communicativeness	Creativity	Professional development
41 – 50 years old	Organization	Personal development	Professional development
51 – 60 years old	Digital - work with computer	Personal development	Professional development
61 and over years old	Digital - work with computer	Creativity	Professional development

Table 2 the most frequently occurring answers in the different age ranges (Own elaboration)

When asked what they wanted to improve about themselves in their work, teachers in the 18-30 age range most often answered communicative competence, skill development, and personality competence. In the 31 - 40 age group, the predominant answers were music or art competence development, creativity, communication with parents and professional development; they have a desire to attend university. Teachers aged 51 - 60 most frequently answered that they needed help in working with modern equipment, i.e. working with a computer and an interactive whiteboard. They often forget about themselves, they would like to continuously develop themselves, self-development, further advancement of skills through education and self-education. For teachers, the age of 61+ years indicated a particular need for improvement in digital competencies, creativity and professional development; in which teachers have a desire to use innovative teaching methods in a modern society.

From our research we can conclude that teachers with younger age had shortcomings especially regarding work related to bureaucracy, communication not only with parents but also with children. At higher ages we observe especially the need for continuous training in ICT. Teachers need help not only from courses providing information on how to use digital devices properly, but also from their colleagues in the team themselves. A common feature of almost every age group is the evaluation of their shortcomings especially in their professional development, to be professional and competent.

Based on the responses of the respondents, we created a network of pre-primary teacher competencies, namely: 1. Professional competencies, 2.

Diagnostic competencies, 3. Educational competencies, 4. Skill development competencies, 5. Collaborative competencies, and 6. Personality competencies.

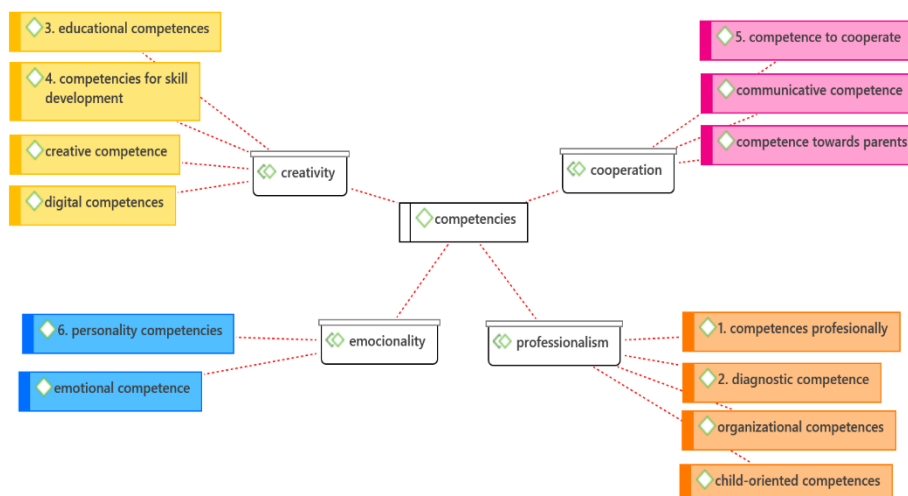


Figure 1 Pre-primary teacher competences (Own elaboration)

Professional and diagnostic competences

Professional competencies rank among the highest in our questionnaire in terms of the number of responses. Teachers reported that they would particularly like to improve "in paperwork obligations" or "to work on a better knowledge of the law". However, some headmistresses wanted „To quit the position of director and thus get more time to study literature and think of projects. “ They also see a shortcoming in themselves in the issue of „...child psychology - developmental psychology, special pedagogy“ or the need to „Learn how to develop children's linguistic literacy in a bilingual environment". Overall, we can tell that teachers have an overall desire to develop "Professionalism" in themselves. From this, we concluded organizational competencies closely related to time management: „I would like to have more time to work with the children, or "...I am always putting high demands on myself and planning lots of activities for the children, and sometimes we don't keep up".

The least number of respondents in the questionnaire commented on diagnostic competences, for example we mention „Diagnostics - more frequent and more detailed. Application of findings in planning and implementation of VET“, or „to focus on speech therapy diagnostics“. We consider these competences to be among the most important, especially in relation to children and their development. Closely related competences include child-oriented competences. The teachers have a need to „observe children more, to notice their needs and interests"; "...to teach children to be silent...", also "to focus on

'speech deficiencies'; to give children sufficient opportunities for their development". These responses can be seen as very sensitively perceived suggestions for improving teacher qualities in relation to children.

Educational and digital competences

Teachers' educational competences guide them to continuous learning, to acquiring new methods of modern teaching or taking courses. The novice teachers want to „Gain practice. “ The results of the questionnaire point to the observations that through the teacher's self-reflection, self-knowledge or emotional stability, he/she is able to correct his/her core competencies in the educational process. Thus, self-awareness can be considered as one of the elements of emotional intelligence. One of the teacher's competencies should be the ability to communicate with the outside world, he should be sociable, and so his attitude towards himself can be manifested in his attitude towards his surroundings. Also emotional stability favorably tends to professional, diagnostic, educational, developmental, collaborative as well as personal competences. These competences influence each other, complement each other and are directly dependent on the teacher's emotional equilibrium. It is necessary to pay attention to the teacher's self-reflection, to create dialogues with him/her and, on the basis of these dialogues, to create appropriate working conditions and to meet his/her needs „Take more training, maybe some additional studies.“

Among the teachers with longer experience, working with digital aids is absent. This fact was most often confirmed in the responses. Teachers want to acquire „Working with IT"; "Computer literacy", and have a need to "Make more use of interactive programs"; "...new ICT technologies".

Skills development and creative competences

Teachers have the need to go the modern way of today's world even in kindergarten. They want to improve, but especially to advance in new possibilities. Creative competences belong together with teachers' self-education. The answers I want to improve my musical or artistic skills were the most prevalent. Teachers also see their shortcomings in the preparation of aids, but also „I want to provide even more worksheets for children...“. The most important answers, however, are their desire to develop „...experience learning"; „to start a children's folklore club" or to encourage the child's "exploratory skills".

Competences to cooperate

One of the most complex competencies presented by the teachers in their responses was the competency to cooperate. They also expressed themselves from different perspectives, i.e. to children, colleagues or parents,

for example, they wanted to improve „Cooperation in the team", my "Management as a director of a kindergarten", or "to be able to defend myself more promptly in front of parents". Through communication competences, as assessed in the questionnaire, they would be able to improve their work in a team, not only with colleagues, but especially with the children's parents. They state that they want to improve „Communication - sometimes I react sharply, without thinking, I can't always communicate everything with a cool head and logical arguments that convince people, rather than offend them" or "at the moment I'm trying to understand the individuality of adults, which is strongly mirrored in the individuality of children, and to reconcile all of this into a whole“. Teachers would like to improve their relationship with parents „to be more assertive..."; "To try to be able to „persuade reasonably" the parents of children who have behavior problems", but also " Understand modern parents who are not interested in their own child or do not have the time? “ In the answers we can note a global problem with communication towards parents. On one hand, teachers want to help children, but through the lack of communication from both sides, significant problems arise.

Personality competences

The last competencies are those that are directly related to the personality or character of the teacher. Based on these, teachers want to work and improve especially in patience, assertive behavior, genuine respect, being able to justify themselves, punctuality, not being stagnant, or consistency in their work. Teachers need more „to manage outbursts of helplessness and reactions to human insensitivity“. In general, they want to have „A more optimistic approach" and "to avoid the stereotype“. Personality competencies also include emotional ones. Teachers have revealed their emotions to us; I want „to make my heart full of love"; "to be able to listen"; "to experience new methods more deeply "or to be "interested in others“. Furthermore, they want to cope more easily with critical and stressful situations or „Not to experience conflicts internally, not to take everything personally". Some of them want to "Always find motivation to prevent burnout."



Figure 2 Teachers' self-reflection in their profession (Own elaboration)

Based on all the competencies, we have created a key outcome, and that is an emotionally balanced teacher. Because of the total number of responses, we believe that the most urgent need for teachers is to develop in the educational competencies. The least number of responses were in diagnostic competencies, in which they may perceive themselves to be at a higher level compared to the others.

According to the number of the most frequent responses of the pre-primary teachers, we created Table 3, namely 1. Professional competencies, 2. Diagnostic competencies, 3. Educational competencies, 4. Skill development competencies, 5. Collaborative competencies and 6. Personality competencies, in order to show the frequency of the competencies in which the teachers perceive the need to work. The order of No. 1 determines the number of the most frequent answers of the respondents in the total number of 217:

Order	Competence network	Number of respondents' answers:	Percentage expression:
1.	Professional competences	65	30,00%
2.	Competences to cooperate	51	23,50%
3.	Personality competencies	46	21,20%
4.	Educational competences	26	12,00%
5.	Competences to cooperate	17	7,80%
6.	Diagnostic competences	12	5,50%
Answers TOGETHER		217	100%

Table 3 Ranking of competences of pre-primary teachers (Own elaboration)

Through the scientific literature and the results of our research, we think that if a teacher is balanced emotionally, he has favorable conditions for his self-development in the field of learning new methods; "Constantly participate in various trainings", and thus to prepare for the educational process and support the "Professionalism", to prepare aids, to develop in his spare time "Musical competence", to devote himself more deeply to the quality diagnostics of children. It is important to work on their communication with children, colleagues and especially parents, to feel good, to create a good environment for the educational process in the classroom and to look forward to practicing their profession.

Conclusion

The results of the questionnaire point to the observations that through the teacher's self-reflection, self-knowledge or emotional stability, he/she is able to correct his/her core competencies in the educational process. Thus, self-awareness can be considered as one of the elements of emotional intelligence. One of the teacher's competencies should be the ability to communicate with the outside world, he should be sociable, and so his attitude towards himself can be manifested in his attitude towards his surroundings. Also emotional

stability favorably tends to professional, diagnostic, educational, developmental, collaborative as well as personal competences. These competences influence each other, complement each other and are directly dependent on the teacher's emotional equilibrium. It is necessary to pay attention to the teacher's self-reflection, to create dialogues with him/her and, on the basis of these dialogues, to create appropriate working conditions and to meet his/her needs.

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