

**DCCD 2020****Dialogue of Cultures - Culture of Dialogue: from Conflicting to Understanding****CREATING SECURITY IN THE TEACHER-STUDENT  
RELATIONSHIP FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE  
EXISTENTIAL-ANALYTICAL APPROACH**

Elena V. Nekhorosheva (a)\*

\*Corresponding author

(a) Moscow City University, 4 Vtoroy Selskohoziaystvenny proezd, Moscow, Russia, sjelene@yandex.ru

***Abstract***

Education today is focused on the development of a personality that is capable of exerting a personal attitude towards the world and oneself and dealing competently with various issues. Full-fledged development of a personality is possible only in good safe conditions. A significant role in the formation of a safe protected environment for the development of a student's personality is assigned to the teacher. From the perspective of the modern existential analysis, the participants of educational relationships need, on the one hand, protection, space, support, and, on the other hand, intimacy, time, and interaction in order to form a sense of security. This research was conducted using the qualitative phenomenological descriptive design. The phenomenological approach made it possible to understand the experiences of primary school teachers in their relationships with students in the context of holistic human experience. The interview was focused on the issues of primary school teachers providing personalized care to students in the aspect of creating a sense of security. The results of the qualitative analysis include the following observations significant to teaching practice: teachers experience difficulties in defining and understanding the concept of personalized care; good relationships, intimacy and time do not correlate with the perceptions of security of all educational stakeholders; care in educational interaction is perceived and implemented from a functional role of a respected teacher, there is a distance associated with a professional role, and as a result, a trusted contact often turns into a method of task-solving, while no space is left to access the feelings and their expression; good relationships are considered to be a practical asset; there is a lack of time for interaction with students. The key factor in the inability of teachers to personally deal with the teaching reality is not so much the lack of professional skills, but rather a personal factor – insufficient maturity of a teacher's personality, rigidity of attitudes, lack of phenomenological openness, the complexity of integrating experiences and the need to solve problems. The article also considers the issue of advanced professional programs for personal development of primary school teachers.

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**Keywords:** Security, care, acceptance, existential analysis.

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## 1. Introduction

The formation of personal academic achievements and personal development of a student in the educational relations is possible if there are safe conditions. Training and development of a student's personality is conducted, first of all, within the system of "teacher-student" relationships, which places serious demand on the professional competence of teachers and their personal characteristics.

In terms of regulations of professional positions and attitudes, the approved professional standard for teachers sets requirements for teachers' readiness to implement labor functions for didactic and development activities (Professional standard "Teacher (pedagogical activity in the field of preschool, primary general, basic general, secondary general education) (educator, teacher)," 2013). Performing an educational function, a teacher regulates the behavior of students to ensure a safe educational environment, designs situations and events that develop emotional and axiological spheres, the culture of experiences and value orientations of a child, creates and supports the practices, atmosphere and traditions of an educational organization, develops tolerance and behavior skills in the changing multicultural environment. These activities assume that a teacher must have the ability to communicate with children, recognize their dignity, understand and accept them.

In developing activities, a teacher is focused, according to the professional standard, on identifying behavioral and personal problems of students associated with the special aspects of their development, evaluating and designing a psychologically safe and comfortable learning environment, developing programs for the prevention of violence at school, building a system for regulating the behavior and activities of students. The document particularly emphasizes the importance of the skill of mastering a professional attitude to support any child, regardless of their actual learning abilities, behavioral characteristics, mental and physical health.

The encounter with the first teacher at the initial stage of school training is fundamental for the entire educational future of a student. Primary school age is the age of an open, trusting attitude towards a teacher, to his or her assessments and judgments, at this age children are still fond of play, they are emotional and direct. Within the framework of the modern existential analysis, the age of students at primary school is sensitive to the formation of the ability to relate, experience intimacy, to a sensory interchange with the World (Barannikov & Barannikova, 2009). According to the fundamental psychological thesis of the existential analysis, life is carried out in relationships (Längle, 2016). Therefore, formation and development, as expressions of life, are embodied only in relationships. In order for something to appear and be able to develop, the forces of a subject must meet with external objects and encounter opportunities provided by them (Längle, 2019).

A primary school teacher is responsible for constructing a formally secure framework for educational relationships, and filling it with personal relationships. This imposes requirements on a teacher, who must focus both on forming the ability to learn and on developing relationships. This heterogeneity of professional tasks often creates internal tension and difficulties in the daily practices of primary school teachers (Dubrovina & Lubovsky, 2017; Gemmink et al., 2020). The professional standard that is specific to a primary school teacher highlights the ability to respond to children's direct requests and recognize actual personal problems behind them.

Only those teachers who freely and openly accept the pedagogical reality, who can personally address themselves and their students are able to provide a protected environment with good warm relationships that will be lived out by the teacher, the students, and their parents, and where children of primary school age can freely and fully solve their learning and existentially significant task – discover the world of relationships and values.

## **2. Problem Statement**

From the point of view of the modern existential analysis, each fundamental motivation has a fundamental aspiration (Längle, 2011). Thus, the first motivation seeks to protect (security). The strongest support for "can-be" is to gain experience of acceptance. People receive mental protection where they feel accepted. Biographical experiences play a special role here. With the experience of being accepted children gain the experience that they are not a threat to others. At the same time, a sense is cultivated that one is not a danger to oneself, I can let myself be, which allows self-acceptance to shape later. Being accepted and, as a result, self-acceptance forms a protective shell around one's own being, in which one feels well-settled. Thus, the experience of the extent to which a person has been accepted by the important others during one's own life determines the degree of confidence/uncertainty they possess in this regard. The second motivation seeks warmth, relationships, and a sense of intimacy and requires a certain amount of time. When a person receives care, it activates in them a feeling about themselves, contributes to the development of the ability to care about others, fills life with feelings, gives warmth and intimacy.

The first and the second fundamental motivations strive for security (Längle, 2013). A brief definition of practical significance was given by Längle (2013): security is a combination of space and intimacy. In other words, security means "being able to be here" and at the same time experiencing intimacy with the place, experiencing it as cozy, close, caring. Security incorporates an experience of protection (being accepted) combined with an active personal care (an offer to enter into a relationship with oneself and with the other, to receive and give care).

Due to sensory impressions children experience these motivations, but if the necessary conditions cannot be formed, the feelings may arise that lead to rigidity and deviations. A threat at the level of the first fundamental motivation leads to uncertainty, anxiety, apprehension, fears. If a person feels that the other is unwilling to enter into a relationship or does not recognize one's value, it may become an obstacle to establishing relationships and intimacy. If a person does not experience safety in the form of sympathy from the other, a situation may become threatening, and grow into something that can greatly hurt.

The experience of acceptance creates a space for existence – a protected living space. A person wants to live one's life and feel that it is good that I am. This experience is only possible in a relationship. According to Längle (2016), relationships are as fundamental to life as protected living space. A person always lives in the space of relationships which is a space of values that are passed from generation to generation and acquired by new members of society (Längle, 2016).

The development of a personality as a complex process is carried out in relationships, in dialogical emotional contact with the other. Emotions provide the necessary signals and impulses for understanding the contradictions and conflicts that inevitably arise during the life and activity of a person, while the

emotions of the other become the most important source of feedback from the world in which everyone is looking for their place.

In the modern existential analysis, the emotional focus of attention that makes it possible to understand one's own feelings and the feelings of the other is defined as care. Care as an attitude incorporates an active readiness to perceive impact, an active movement towards the other (intimacy), expressing the willingness to let oneself be affected. In other words, it is the willingness to perceive one's own self and the personality of the other.

This study considers not so much the cognitive representation of the quality of the "teacher-student" relationship, but rather the attitudes of primary school teachers as the basis defining their behavior in specific situations of classroom interaction. Attitudes determine the individual style of handling the professional reality and oneself in educational relationships, which are closely linked by personal values (Waibel, 2018).

Care incorporates attention, willingness to reveal oneself and show interest, proactive counter-attitude towards the received impression. However, being attentive does not necessarily mean giving or receiving care. Attention is only related to consciousness. Real care assumes being open, friendly, emotional and close to the other.

The formal conditions that make it possible to provide care include protected environment based on acceptance, relationships with the other and with oneself, time, and intimacy. Care is always linked with relationships. Relationships create a secure framework for giving and receiving care, prepare a space for communication, provide support and reliance. Strong, reliable, permanent relationships are essential for children's healthy mental development.

Receiving care contributes to the development of the ability to give care, takes root in a person, forms the ability to actively care about oneself, about others. This is especially important in childhood, when a culture of feelings is formed and emotional and moral development occurs (Kim et al., 2018). Care of oneself creates an internal balance: a person does not feel oppressed or burdened, but free inside. If there is no such internal care and its consequences, a person is constantly demanding care from others, and cannot in turn care about others.

In a class, younger students look at each other through the eyes of a teacher. They assess the actions of their classmates by the standards of their teacher. Teacher has a great responsibility for the quality of the microclimate in a class. Teacher determines the experience of a sense of security and balance, the quality of relationships with peers, especially for children with attachment or development problems, or from unfavourable social environment (Spilt et al., 2018; Zee & Roorda, 2018).

Considering the role of a primary school teacher in creating a secure environment from the perspective of the modern existential analysis, we will focus on the professional requirements to the teacher's personality. Teachers must respect and support every child on a daily basis, feature a calm, supportive, understanding and sensitive personality, be able to listen, have adequate realistic expectations about the abilities and successes of children, be able to show that the personality of each child is an absolute value for them, take seriously successes and failures of children, be able to notice and accept individual characteristics of children, do not bring personal problems and negative feelings into class (Siller & Waibel,

2018). Modern children demand that the dialogue with a teacher is personal, they need a teacher that can transmit values and one's own individuality, and this means a teacher who can build relationships.

### **3. Research Questions**

The feeling of security is formed by the experience of being accepted in combination with active personalized care. The pedagogical task of forming a student's personality can be solved if a teacher cultivates a caring attitude towards students and oneself. Acceptance from a teacher provides protection to a student, and also creates a safe space for teacher's own existence. Two-directional care enables to relate to feelings and experiences, enter into resonance, live a valuable life. A teacher in a state of reaction who is not engaged in personal relationships experiences uncertainty and insecurity, and therefore cannot be supportive, give protection and care about a student, cannot create an atmosphere of intimacy and care (Skinner & Beers, 2016). This, according to Längle (2011; 2013; 2016; 2019), will have consequences, such as students' experiencing threat, insecurity, which triggers coping reactions.

The research considers the questions of analysis and description of the actual implementation, understanding and experience of professionally significant values and attitudes of teachers in everyday interaction with students. The research is aimed not so much at measuring and evaluating the personal qualities of the teacher, but to understand and describe how they experience significant teaching attitudes, how they perceive their relationships with students, difficult or unusual situations, how they see and understand them, what impact do these experiences have on the relationships between teachers and students, what personal contribution does a teacher make to solve the task of creating a comfortable and safe environment for a child at school.

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to describe the experience of personalized care provided by primary school teachers in the aspect of forming a sense of security in students.

### **5. Research Methods**

This study has been conducted using the qualitative phenomenological descriptive design (Giorgi, 2016).

The participants of this study included primary school teachers from six educational institutions of Moscow. They were 8 female teachers with the teaching experience from 3 to 30 years.

The data have been collected using a semi-structured qualitative interview. The questions of the interview were formulated in accordance with the concept of personalized care in the modern existential analysis, and the necessary preconditions for its implementation: relationships, quality of contact, intimacy, feelings, time, etc., with the focus on specifying the understanding and actual implementation of the concept of personalized care in a teacher's behavior.

The interview was conducted in a separate room with no non-involved people present, the duration of the interview was from 50 minutes to 1 hour 10 minutes. Before conducting the interview, the respondents voluntarily agreed with the right to refuse to participate in the study at any time, and

explanations were given for maintaining confidentiality. During the interview, it was important to provide an atmosphere of acceptance and personalized care in order to create a secure framework and an opportunity for teachers to frankly speak about their experiences.

In qualitative analysis, the interview is focused on the experience (De Castro, 2018) as a central psychological phenomenon. The actions of a teacher when addressing a particular situation of educational interaction are very important. However, of more importance is the way a teacher acts and experiences relationships with students, deals with difficult or non-standard situations, how a teacher perceives and understands them.

## 6. Findings

*Summarizing the results of the interview, we obtained the following results:*

1. Primary school teachers experience difficulties in defining and describing the concept of personalized care.
2. Caring for a child within the educational interaction is understood and performed from the role-functional position of an authoritative teacher. Care includes distance associated with professional role.
3. Teachers are very attentive to students in the classroom, take interest in their conditions, talk to them about this, but their attention is only associated with awareness of what is happening and control over the situation, there is no true care or openness.
4. Good relationships as a protected environment for care are defined by teachers mainly from a practical point of view: as an opportunity to be with children and ensure mutual development.
5. All teachers have good contact with children when they are ready to share their experiences, but teachers do not devote enough time to establish intimacy in order to have an opportunity to experience and perceive the children and themselves within their relationships.
6. Trust and contact with a child very quickly transforms into problem-solving method, a teacher does not leave space to the other and time for expression of student's feelings or emergence of one's own feelings.
7. The following attitudes in teachers' experience were defined as hindering care:
  - the clear attitude to surgical intervention and rapid resolution of the problem;
  - the way of handling children's experiences: explanatory-calming, explaining, reproaching;
  - the attitude that there is no time for each student in the class during the day;
  - the belief that a teacher cannot spend a lot of time on one student;
  - a teacher cannot provide personalized care to a particular child in class.
8. The key factor in the inability to deploy a personalized attitude towards handling the pedagogical reality is not so much the lack of professional skills, but rather a personal factor – insufficient maturity of a teacher's personality, rigidity of attitudes, lack of phenomenological openness, lack of integration in addressing experiences and solving problems (Pogere et al., 2019).
9. The issue of children's experience of security in educational relationships is addressed by all primary school teachers. Good relationships, intimacy and time are not considered as conditions for experiencing security.

## Illustration of the results

### Case 1

The teacher understands personalized care as having a personal contact with a child, openness, dialogue, conditions when a teacher can ask a child about some issue, ask to do something, talk about some subtle personal topic. Despite the fact that the teacher understands the need for personalized care, she does not experience this attitude.

In.: How do you know that you have a good contact with a child?

T: He trusts me. He feels that I will not hurt him or deceive him.

In.: And how do you know that he trusts you?

T: When I talk to him openly, try to answer honestly, even at the moment of assessment, when I see that a child is upset, I always say, please do not get upset, my dear, you will succeed, I will give you another task, you will work everything out, and everything will be fine. And when a child asks for a personal task, it's pleasant to me, I understand that he has a sense of responsibility.

It is concluded from the dialogue that the teacher does not address her personal experiences, but remains at the level of the role-functional interaction with the child.

### Case 2

The teacher understands personalized care as addressing a child by the first name, focusing her attention and establishing a contact with a child, entering into a dialogue. A good relationship between a teacher and a student is characterized, according to the teacher, by the fact that teachers listen, follow the rules set by the school, and understand. Good relationships are manifested through interconnectedness, feedback from children, when children have an understanding of what and when they must do, and teacher sees the fruit of her work and feels that her time is not wasted. The teacher could hardly define her emotions describing a good contact with a child, though she indicated pleasant emotions, joy.

When working with the class, the teacher pays attention to the state of students, if one of the children is upset, she tries to ask about the situation and comfort the child. However, when talking of a specific example, the teacher spoke with an edifying tone, and gave explanations that if a child is in a bad mood, they should not come to school so that they do not spoil the mood of other children. Several examples characterize the way of dealing with children's experiences as explanatory and seeking to calm a child down as soon as possible. The teacher does not directly talk with children about their feelings, her demeanor is reserved, her attitude of an observer, she expresses a desire to explain everything at once, sometimes this leads to misunderstandings and problems with parents. The teacher only talks about feelings at the lessons of literary reading. There is a belief that it is very dangerous to give one child more attention compared with the others, since it becomes very noticeable in class and children feel jealous. Therefore, the teacher tries to keep distance when addressing children.

### Case 3

Personalized care is understood as an involved way of asking the other. When a child is upset, the teacher offers communication, asks what happened, offers proactive support, tries to calm down; when describing examples she uses phrases "nothing is wrong", "everything will be okay", "think logically".

The teacher assumes that the dialogue with a child is based on the rules and norms that a child must know. In a conversation, ethics and knowledge are expected from a child. But there is no appeal to the

child's personality. When asked about the mood or feelings of a child, the teacher gave a vague answer that sometimes she might enquire about feelings.

The teacher considers it obvious and natural to address the feelings of children, but points out that often all their feelings are visible and understandable. A good relationship is described as a trusting relationship without fear, friendly, but with a degree of respectful distance and understanding of the roles of "teacher" and "student", preserving the hierarchy.

#### Case 4

For a good relationship, it is important to show children that their teacher is happy to see them. Good contact with a child is expressed in good feelings, desire to do something together, perform, participate. A child trusts, shares personal experiences. The way the teacher communicates with a child about their problem is based on the need to quickly resolve the situation. This method is associated, according to the teacher, with much pressure and the requirement to respond quickly.

This way of dealing with students' requests is also associated with uncertainty about how far a teacher can go in handling a child's situation and providing support. There are concerns about the ambiguous consequences of teacher's intervention.

The teacher differentiates between the presence or absence of contact with a child. Even when a child does not clearly show his or her affection, the teacher knows exactly who is in contact with her and who is not. In the absence of contact with the child, there is anxiety. There is a desire to approach a child, to say something. To establish contact in personal communication with a child, the teacher changes the tone from formal, as at a lesson, to a softer one, asking what is he or she upset about. However, when describing a specific situation, the teacher's speech takes on a moralizing tone, the information given to the child is instructive, the example shows that when a child gets upset they must already understand what is the right thing to do, what needs to be changed in their attitude and behavior.

#### Case 5

A good relationship is comfortable and mutually beneficial relationship in terms of mutual interaction that promotes development, a common understanding of why we are all together despite different personal motivations; when these personal motivations intersect, the relationships are considered good. Good contact with a child is considered through confidential communication with the child that is not related to the learning activities. In this case, the teacher feels good, "like a mother". The teacher pays attention to unusual behavior of children, "senses them", there is an understanding of "parallel" presence in the same process during the day, when a child is present only physically but not actually with the teacher. In this case the teacher begins to experience anxiety, necessarily approaches and talks to the child, touch is very important for her. She talks to children about feelings, not only at the lessons of literary reading, but also when children quarrel, something happens in the classroom, children are willing to share their experiences. The first impulse of the teacher is to "give a hug", and then the clarification follows. The teacher does not face anger in children in her class, and is convinced that it does not occur out of the blue, especially in relation to the teacher and children. In her experience, she does not see protective behavior in children, and is sincerely surprised at this possibility.



#### Case 6

Good contact with a child is described as the ability to listen to each other, unspoken understanding, feeling of warmth, eye contact, touch.

The teacher assumes that addressing the feelings of children should, first of all, be performed within the program conversations at the literary reading lessons. The teacher keeps all children in sight, many children share their experiences, the teacher expresses the reactions of understanding, sharing experience, reflecting feelings, giving advice. The keynote of her attitude is "Tomorrow will be different from today". The teacher considers it very difficult to personally address a child in front of the entire class, allows talking to a child privately, considers personalized care as "listening", addressing the other, seizing details of a child's behavior. When detailing her understanding of personalized care of a particular child, the teacher gave examples of situations where addressing the feelings of children was necessary. However, the teacher sees her task in the objective assessment of a situation and providing information and advice, such as Do not pay attention; Do not take to heart; Stop contacting the offender if possible; or explaining the behavior of the offender or the situation as a whole.

#### Case 7

Personalized care is considered as first-name address, eye contact, so that a child can pay attention. Good relationships are considered as trusting, developing, when a child can feel relaxed.

T: For a good relationship with a child, I need the parents to get in touch, understand what I require, and support me, and I need to understand what they want from the child.

A good contact between the teacher and the child is built when the child works, responds, shares thoughts, sits quietly, catches the eye, while the teacher feels responsible for offering interesting activities, so that children are not bored and feel motivated. Bad contact with a child is defined by the teacher as a violation of discipline during the lesson (which is openly ignored by the teacher). Verbally, the teacher acknowledges the need of children to be understood.

#### Case 8

In general, the teacher correctly defines good relationships with children. Good relationships create a secure framework, where there is goodwill, trust, and mutual affection.

T: For me, it is very important that teacher does not use his or her power in the relationship, because children are in a subordinate position, they have no influence, they cannot protect themselves.

When there is a good contact, the teacher feels fulfillment, joy and dedication. A bad contact provokes anxiety, bad experiences, the teacher feels offended. In a good relationship, the teacher can address a child's situation, talk to them, but in difficult situations, the teacher is reserved and does not address them.

## 7. Conclusion

The development of a sense of security in students is possible only in case there is personal initiative of a teacher, which involves the acceptance of oneself and the other, the formation of existential reality on this basis and proactive care of oneself and the other. The perspective of the structural model of the modern existential analysis revealed that it is very difficult for teachers to leave something as it is (for example, children's appearance or their behavior), they experience inability to let it be and cannot feel peace.

Teachers' personal experiences deprive them of their own space, strength, and security, which leads to reactive behavior. Teachers often do not feel safe. Dialogue is blocked, they become reserved both towards oneself and students. Instead of being open and using a phenomenological approach, teachers have a prevailing attitude of expectation, which creates a lot of pressure. The requiring attitude, which results from the created image of the other based on one's own conclusions and expectations, has a strong influence on the development of students' personality due to increasing frustration and hurt. Expression of true care becomes impossible, since the conditions of the first fundamental motivation are not fulfilled – the protected framework is not created. The fundamental principle of caring for the other is caring for oneself. The interviewed teachers do not demonstrate this personal ability. We have not identified in the interviewed teachers the willingness to perceive and understand behavior of their students, parents, their own feelings and experiences; the teachers do not want to spend time and establish closer relationships; the relationships are reduced to role-functional activities. Thus, the good quality of relationships is often lost, all participants of the educational process may feel uncomfortable, the space of the relationships devoid of personal attitudes may become threatening to everyone. This, in turn, makes it possible to hurt one's self-esteem, prevents personal development, leads to alienation and loss of motivation.

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