

Consensus and Tendencies in Learning Approach Management

Valeria Pestean^{a*}

* Corresponding author: Valeria Pestean, valeria_toma@yahoo.com

^a "Vasile Goldis" Western University of Arad

Abstract

<http://dx.doi.org/10.15405/epsbs.2016.05.18>

The meaning teachers assign to the concept of "student's safety" is varied and predetermines multiple ways to take action. We ascertain that, in order to ensure emotional, social and existential comfort for students they work with, teachers are conditioned to engage diverse sources which, to a great extent, they do not directly coordinate or are not in their power.

© 2016 Published by Future Academy www.FutureAcademy.org.uk

Keywords: Learners' safety ; psychological security ; emotional comfort.

1. Problem Statement

We tackle the learning process in the context of this paper from the perspective of social constructivism, which "starts from the premise that individual development and higher mental functioning originate from social interactions" (Opre, Benga, Baban, 2015). Participation in joint problem solving activities leads to normalization of group work effects, so that the person acquires new strategies and knowledge about world and culture (Bruner, 1996).

Obtaining higher performance in students' learning activity is a goal that can be achieved if the teacher is concerned about the actual research of those general directions for action they may choose from the arsenal of solutions made available by the research conducted in the education field today. It goes without saying that any teacher will understand that training strategies which work with each student, depending on the situation, will be established by them, while specialized literature remains a reference point for strategies that are more likely to become useful in a certain instructive- educational context. Another way teacher may follow in order to lead students to successful learning with maximum efficiency is to maintain a constant concern to reflect on the efficiency of teaching designed,

organized and led by direct and constant reference to understanding of the particularities and specific needs of each student.

Class management techniques chosen, adapted and put into practice by the teacher represent determining elements for teaching that lead students to experience the feeling of success at the end of the learning process carried out under the leadership and coordination of the teacher. In other words, educator's managerial skills include those directly related to the social dimension of classroom management. These, according to Iucu (2005), "must be acquired in classroom/ group work, to ensure that educational process takes place under the proposed standards and that learning is effective and long-lasting."

The procedures which, when put into practice in the educational space of the classroom, have the function to facilitate a productive teacher-student relationship are, according to the specialized literature, quite hard to find although their importance is recognized: "The causes of many classroom behaviours considered as breaking the rules, and thus punishable, actually come from the problems students and teachers have regarding interpersonal relating" (Sheets, Gay, 1996). At the end of each learning situation the extent to which the teacher involved in the educational relationship experienced values such as patience, enthusiasm or solicitude becomes relevant, as well as the extent to which such experiences had an effect on learners' behaviour.

According to Marzano (2015) there are two fundamental elements that ensure the efficiency of an effective relationship between the teacher and their students: on the one hand, behaviours that communicate an appropriate level of consideration and cooperation and, on the other hand, behaviours that communicate an appropriate level of guidance and control. In order for students to apprehend or understand implicitly that the teacher considers their opinions and is willing to cooperate with them during the training, it is important for the teacher to show a behaviour that denotes a certain degree of affection, to know aspects of their personal life integrated into their interactions, to show physical behaviours that demonstrate their interest towards students, to personalize learning situations creating a connection between the specific interests of students and new concepts to be learned, to use humour at right times. As mentioned above, we consider - Marzano (2015) – that it is as important for the teacher to create students' belief that teacher is responsible for offering a clear direction in terms of behaviour and learning, by expressing themselves calmly, by applying constantly positive and negative measures and by communicating the impression of emotional objectivity. All these implicit and explicit manifestations are able to ensure psychological security and emotional comfort for learners.

2. Research Questions

The problem we have stated at the beginning of the study conducted was related to the ratio established between the solutions adopted in the teaching approach to ensure that students experience values supporting successful learning, and training management provisions rules. We aimed to discover, in the teacher's behaviour, the proportion of techniques, procedures validated by education management science, compared with strategies, procedures they follow in educational practice, by valuing the practical experience acquired while performing this job. The procedures in the latter

category were ranked as trends, due to the fact that they are not listed among practical actions validated as theory worth to follow, but they are placed on different positions of this process.

3. Purpose of the Study

The research we have carried out aimed at identifying elements that are understood as common procedures in managing the learning act performed by students at school. The features of innovative strategies which, if applied by the teacher, can guarantee the success of the fundamental act that carried out by the student at school, are also elements our research intends to identify.

4. Research Methods

The survey questionnaire is the fundamental method used in the research. The questions are open and allow the teacher to provide answers involving their professional experience, as well as the result of personalized reflection they performed in relation to the specific provisions of the training management, each teacher receiving at least one initial training session in this field.

The sample group involved in the research consisted of 70 teachers who work at different levels of education: primary, lower secondary, upper secondary, and university. By choosing this kind of configuration for the sample of subjects, we have ensured representation and diversity for the conclusions we have drawn as a result of the investigation.

5. Findings

Teachers understanding the concept of “student safety”, as well as the specific ways in which they are placed in connection with it, represented a focal point of the investigation we carried out because we grant value to the experience of this feeling by the students in the educational context of class, school. Blending it with predictability and control provides the foundation for an efficient educational environment in the contemporary context of the education systems’ functioning: “the necessity and relevance of the rules is supported by the fact that a structured environment, based on the expression of clear expectations regarding the behaviour of teachers and children, promotes a sense of security, control and predictability” (Kerr, 2004).

Following the analysis of the answers given by the respondents to the question regarding how teachers engage in ensuring safety in school environment, we found out that we had the possibility to divide the responses into two main categories: teachers who consider that student safety is a state which emerges from their direct contribution and teachers who consider themselves directly involved in predetermining the experience of this value by students whom they train. Furthermore, the significance teachers assign to the concept of “student safety” is varied and predetermines multiple ways of action for them: a large proportion of the respondents (60%) consider the body of the student when dealing with the issue of student’s safety and only 24% of respondents indicate personal commitment as a way of ensuring the safety of students. We would like to specify that the number of

teachers who work in the higher level of education is bigger in the former group compared to the second. The explanation of such a state of affairs could be related to the fact that functional analysis of the behaviour of students they interact with in the training process is no longer a main goal, by consensus, in the Romanian education system, in comparison with the specific goals of educators working in preschool and primary education levels.

We consider that- in the light of the types of answers given by those from the first category - imposing several procedures for quality assurance in a very strong mark in Romanian formal education. The need for such procedures seems to be understood implicitly by teachers surveyed but, in our opinion, it is also a “solution” for the functioning of pre-university education institutions, which releases the teacher from the responsibility of personal involvement in ensuring safety for students. Thus, we explain the occurrence of such answers as the following: presentation of rules and penalties in front of the students, video surveillance, wearing uniform to be mandatory.

Teachers whose responses fall into the second category mentioned above are the ones who value and assume direct, personalized involvement, to ensure the safety of students whom they support during the learning activity they perform. They bring up the value and relevance of prediction exercises they organize for students (“What do you do in case of fire?”), of expressing attitudes such as tolerance, reciprocity, collaboration, materialized in increased interaction between teachers and students. Teacher’s consideration for their students emerges from those listed above and leads us to conclude that, even if it does not represent a practical consensual value for the teachers surveyed, ensuring safety through emotional involvement of the teacher in managing the learning process performed by the students, is currently a tendency expressed in Romanian education system.

Among the respondents we included in this category, a significant part (60%) specify that, in order to ensure the safety of students, what interferes with the direct relationship the teacher develops with students is relevant: exercises to strengthen students’ self-esteem, the use of active-participative methods, improvement of students’ motivation to carry out learning activities, discouragement of the attempt to ridicule the classroom level on the basis of the belief that the mistake is part of learning, offering help to find the best way of expression. We appreciate that such responses are the closest to the appropriate direction mentioned in the specialized literature: the teacher gives the student clear direction in terms of behaviour and learning act.

A significant part of the answers offered to the question: “What actions do you undertake in the school environment in order for the learners you interact with to feel safe?” are correlated with the attributes of the environment that are more or less directly influenced by the teacher (32%): atmosphere based on respect (thus, teacher’s personal involvement, not defined), arranging classroom in order to look attractive, pleasant climate, calm atmosphere, healthy environment.

Thus, we conclude that training management specific provisions are dominant among the procedures applied, and the consensus has more power than innovative trends regarding students experiencing safety within the educational space of the school.

The theoretical premise from which we started the investigation conducted for discovering the trends and consensus occurring in the Romanian education system with regards to ensuring emotional comfort and psychological security is directly related to the importance that specialists in the field of

education attribute to these two dimensions: “a climate where safety, responsibility and involvement prevail, results in greater attachment to school and positively influence the socio-emotional and cognitive development of children” (Blum, 2002).

On the basis of analysing the results obtained following the investigation concerning indicators offering the teacher the certainty that the student whom they are interacting with in the process of training experiences a state of emotional comfort, we delimited three categories: indicators correlated to the specific properties of the student's body, indicators connected to the attitudes expressed by the students, and the category of indicators overlapping students' concrete behaviours revealed during the time they are engaged in the learning process.

Many of those surveyed (26%) presented descriptive elements of learner's body as indicators of the state of emotional comfort experienced by the student during the learning activity, such as: students' facial expressions while working or during activities, lack of discomfort materialized in the absence of fatigue, cramps, headaches, or breathing difficulties.

A larger part of the respondents indicated the attitudes manifested by students as landmarks, specific indicators to validate the presence of emotional comfort in the area of internal states specific for the students. Thus, among those who responded to the questionnaire, 48% indicated attitudes to be noticed for confirmation of students' emotional comfort by indicating their attributes: calm, relaxed, open, friendly, or consequences of the manifestation of such an attitude: they prove their ability to respond appropriately to emotional manifestations of others, understand their emotions and other colleagues' emotions, they easily engage in various activities, relationships based on respect and communication, pleasure in following the teacher's specific actions.

From the category of students' concrete behaviours that can be noticed by the teacher and that represent indicators of students experiencing emotional comfort we mention a number of illustrative behaviours specified by 32% of respondents: ask questions to the teacher, answer questions without fear of being wrong, respond positively to learning tasks they receive.

The reference to the procedures followed to discover clues regarding students' experiencing emotional comfort, was revealed at the end of the research undertaken as a response manner chosen by 38% of respondents. The procedures were mentioned instead of indicators, and our explanation for such an attitude is related to the belief that teachers surveyed have: if they follow procedures, then they would certainly ensure emotional comfort for the students they work with. Therefore, we ascertain a strong adherence to the consensus resulting from studying and developing the education management. However, among the answers teachers gave to the questionnaire, we noticed that innovative procedures are mentioned, which may be listed as examples of good practice to ensure students' emotional comfort. We appreciate that they are mentioned because of the beneficial effects that occurred after their implementation. They oppose conformism and complement what currently represents trends in learning process management. We mention the following procedures that can be implemented by the teacher: breathing exercises to reduce stress, singing a slower or a dynamic song to increase energy level, creating conditions and valuing of the contexts in which students inform the teacher about what they have not understood, without any trace of apprehension, or fear, in which they recognize their mistakes made during the complex learning activity they perform in the school educational space.

Thus, we ascertain that, in order to ensure emotional, social and existential comfort for students they work with, teachers are conditioned to engage diverse sources which, to a great extent, they do not directly coordinate or are not in their power.

6. Conclusions

In accordance to the findings resulted from the analysis of teachers' answers to the questionnaire, we keep in mind that there is a tension that can be easily identified in school environment, between pupil's autonomy that teachers allow in the learning act and managing a learning programme that allows pupil self-management exclusively within predetermined frames. Satisfying the students' need to succeed is combined in an interesting manner with procedures applied by teachers to allow their students to be active.

References

- Blum, R., W. & McNeely, C., A. & Rinehart, P., M. (2002). Improving the odds. The untapped power of schools to improve the health of teens. *Minneapolis, University of Minnesota, Center for Adolescent Health and Development*
- Bruner, J. (1996). Towards a theory of instruction. *Cambridge, Harvard University Press*
- Iucu, R. (2005). Managementul clasei de elevi. Proiectul pentru învățământul rural
- Kerr, D. & Ireland, E. & Lopes, J. & Craig, R. & Cleaver, E. (2004). Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study: Second Annual Report. *National Foundation for Educational Research*
- Marzano, R., J. (2015). Arta si stiinta predarii. *Editura Trei, Bucuresti*
- Opre, A. & Benga, O. & Baban, A. (2015). Managementul comportamentelor si optimizarea motivatiei pentru invatare. *Editura ASCR, Cluj-Napoca*
- Sheets, R., H. & Gay, G. (1996). Student perceptions of disciplinary conflict in ethnically diverse classrooms. *NASSP Bulletin*