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**THE DEVELOPMENT OF PEDAGOGICAL UNIVERSITY
STUDENTS' EMPATHY BY MEANS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL
TRAINING**

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Abstract

In this article we present the analysis of the phenomenon of empathy. Being one of the most important qualities of teacher, empathy needs psychological and pedagogical support for the empathy development among students of pedagogical specialties. We consider training to be one of the most effective technologies of empathy development. We describe the results of the empirical study. 98 participants (44 students of pedagogical specialties and 54 students of non-pedagogical specialties) were assessed on a number of measures. 44 students of pedagogical specialties were divided into experimental and control groups. The experimental group participated in the work on the development of empathy through psychological training. The statistical analysis of the data including the Student's t-test helped to obtain the effects of described technologies. The results provided in our paper will be interesting to the pedagogical community, as well as to psychology researchers or persons interested in empathy and communication studies.

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1. Introduction

We consider psychological training to be relevant during the process of development of a teacher personality and professional qualities while studying at university, as well as at the start of professional activity. The first definition of empathy was suggested by Titchener (1909) who described how a person may enter into the experience of someone else to gain a deeper understanding of someone's feelings. Contemporary definitions usually highlight not only affective, but also cognitive and physiological mechanisms. For instance, Batson (2009) specifies one of the most complex conceptualization included in empathy: feel the same as another individual, know a person's emotional and cognitive state, imagine how he or she is feeling or thinking, imagine how one would think or feel in a situation, match the response of a different person, project oneself into his or her situation, feel distress for his or her suffering.

2. Problem Statement

Decety and Lamm (2009) consider empathy to be related with compassion and sympathy. Generally, there is no common definition in psychological literature. And not a one definition is consistently cited. Usually, a variety of definitions is often postulated as a distinct feature of the phenomenon (Neumann, Chan, Boyle, Wang, & Westbury, 2015; Reniers et al., 2012; Reynolds, 2000). Anyway, all the definitions indicate empathy as a fundamental emotional and motivational phenomenon that facilitates sympathy and/or prosocial behavior (Thompson & Gullone, 2003; Dolgova & Melnik, 2014; Kempe & Heffernan, 2011).

3. Research Questions

According to the Russian psychologist Boyko (2001), compassion and sympathy could be emotional means of achieving some other goal. Empathy is needed to identify, understand and anticipate the individual characteristics of other person for better communication. Thus, empathy is the most valuable instrument of comprehension of human individuality, and not just the ability to demonstrate compassion and sympathy. Also, Boyko (2001) considers empathy to be a form of rational, emotional and intuitive reflection of another person.

4. Purpose of the Study

Empathy, therefore, is a form of rational-emotional-intuitive reflection of the other person, which allows comprehending the causes and consequences of one's self-presentations for the purpose of better communication (Grigorieva & Semina, 2013). The empathy is one of the most important qualities of a teacher. Empathic attention can offer new opportunities for more effective interaction between the subjects of pedagogical communication (Yusupov, 1991). This issue makes the work on psychological and pedagogical support for the development of empathy among students of pedagogical specialties extremely important and relevant in modern teacher education. The psychological training can be used as one of the most optimal means of developing empathy in the framework of modern educational process.

5. Research Methods

Our purpose was to investigate the possibilities of developing students' empathy by means of psychological training.

We used the Student's t-test for analyzing group differences between students of pedagogical and non-pedagogical specialties and as a research method. Then we divided all students of pedagogical specialties into control and experimental groups. The experimental group participated in the work on the development of empathy during specially designed psychological training. To analyze the results, the Student's t-test (independent, by group and for dependent samples) was used.

In our study, empathy has been measured by the following diagnostic questionnaires: Boyko's (2001) "Empathy diagnostics", Mehrabian and Epstein's (1972) "The scale of emotional response" and specifically designed author questionnaire.

98 participants (44 students of pedagogical specialties and 54 students of non-pedagogical specialties) formed the sample of our study. All participants were third-year Russian students at Kemerovo State University. The participants aged 19-21 were recruited and compensated by the local research community.

6. Findings

Our study helped to obtain the following results: the importance of an intuitive parameter in the structure of empathy is higher for students of pedagogical specialties of Kemerovo State University than for students of other (non-pedagogical) specialties. The intuitive parameter indicates a person's ability to understand the partners' behavior, to be active using the person's previous experience in the situation with a lack of objective information about the other person. This fact may be explained by a specific character of the humanities focus of education which involves subject-subject relations, frequent interaction with people, and numerous interpersonal contacts.

To prove the effectiveness of our work, we surveyed our sample two times: before and after the training. The participants of the control group were assessed on the same number of measures at the same time. No statistically significant differences were found between the control group and the experimental group before the training.

The results obtained after processing the experimental group data using Student's t-test (dependent samples) demonstrated a significant dynamics of empathy in the experimental group (Table 1).

Table 01. The results of the experimental group before and after the training*

	Parameter Experimental group	
	Before	After
Level of empathic abilities (Boyko)	24.07	25.76
Level of emotional response (Mehrabian & Epstein)	52.48	55.33

Note:* The table reflects significant values $p \leq .05$.

At the same time no significant difference was found in the control group.

The comparison of experimental and control group data after training using the Student's t-test (independent, by group) helped to obtain the significant differences between the control and experimental groups (Table 2).

Table 02. The results of the experimental and control groups before and after the training*

	Parameter Groups	
	Control	Experimental
Level of empathic abilities (Boyko)	23.94	25.76
Level of emotional response (Mehrabian & Epstein)	52.48	55.33

Note:* The table reflects significant values $p \leq .05$.

Discussions

The works reviewed above have implications for our theoretical understanding of empathy and its role in successful education (Grigorieva & Semina, 2013) and teaching. As a consequence, we focus on possibilities of the empathy development in higher education. And the validity of some conclusions could be argued.

Although our examination of differences in empathy between students of pedagogical and non-pedagogical specialties as well as a significant increase of empathy after the training in the experimental group was novel, a longitudinal study which allows examining the issues pertaining to causality could better elucidate the empathy formation process.

More studies are needed to explore the role of education in the empathy development, e.g. in the present study, we did not assess how training may have changed the empathy level of students of non-pedagogical specialties.

Also, none of the employed measurements are perfect tools. As it is widely known, self-reports can be influenced by a variety of interfering factors. In this regard, questionnaires may be supplemented by an expert evaluation method, for instance.

Nonetheless, the study results clearly demonstrate an increase in the empathy level of students of pedagogical specialties after the training, which may be a reliable basis for further research.

7. Conclusion

Our work demonstrated a possibility of developing empathy of students of pedagogical specialties with the help of psychological training. The proposed program can be used both during the psychological and pedagogical support of student teachers' personality development, and independently during the psychological and pedagogical support of professional development of beginning teachers.

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