

## TEACHER EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE BETWEEN GOAL AND REALITY

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### Abstract

*This paper attempts to highlight one of the most important issues related to teacher education – emotional intelligence. Our paper is organized like an action-research study on increasing the level of emotional intelligence as a professional competence for teachers. 147 teachers from Bacău County were invited to participate to our study which was designed like a two steps research: a). Evaluating the level of Emotional Intelligence of teachers - Rocco Mihaela version after Goleman Emotional Intelligence Test (form for adults); b). Based on the findings of the testing phase we elaborated a pre-service (and in-service) teachers training course to build their emotional ability. The main conclusion of the applied study was that emotional intelligence has many characteristics that should be turned into educational objectives, empathy being only one part of it. The teacher education program presented in our paper could be a useful starting point for decision makers, regarding the implementation of a realistic teacher education curricula in Romania.*

**Key words:** emotional ability, emotional intelligence, teaching competence, teacher education, teacher professional development

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### 1. The relevance of studying teacher emotional intelligence

The quality of all education interventions depends on the teacher's personal qualities and his/her professional abilities in organizing and guiding the activities in the class and motivating the students in the learning process. Indeed, a good teacher has a unique style and the literature on education presents numerous new ideas related to the effectiveness of teaching. Being a good

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teacher is related, first and foremost, to the teaching style but authors who have discussed this topic revealed the connection with the two parts of the teaching competence: a). technical component (meaning the speciality and specific didactic skills) and, b). the emotional part of the teaching competence. We have to admit that there is a wide variety of „professional behaviours of teachers who perform well”; searching for and selecting the criteria for effective teaching has been one of our aims.

Three research perspectives were developed for defining and analysing emotional intelligence namely those of: Mayer and Salovey, Reuven Bar-On and Daniel Goleman. Based on common realities, they have attempted to facilitate the application of this concept to a certain area of social life: family, learning group, work place etc. There are several definitions of emotional intelligence (EI), but we considered the following to be the best synthesis for our study: a sum of the abilities that help a person to discriminate between his/her own and others' emotions and to build harmony between these, and the capacity to use these findings for the best orientation of his/her mind and action (Roco, 2004). The end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century brought new perspectives on the human brain and on emotional life research; the main conclusions were related to the idea that a person's success is not connected only with that person's rationality but mainly with his/her emotional experiences.

The 21<sup>st</sup>-century teacher is an important agent of the teaching and learning processes, although these congruent actions are centred on the student and developed in accordance to a unique goal: the student should become a successful adult. According to Giurgea and Bunesco (after Cojocariu, 2004, p. 14), “the principles of the formal learning process include basic theses, conduct norms that teachers must respect in order to build an efficient learning process”. These definitions lead to a conclusion: the didactic principles, like basic teaching norms, are not isolated rules but part of a highly connected norm system. A teacher applies these theses in the learning and assessment activities, on a daily basis. In today's dynamic society, the school is under continuous change, so we have formulated some questions about the Romanian educational system: Are these norms that are useful also enough? It is necessary to develop teaching norms specific to the 21<sup>st</sup>-century? Can we add other didactic principles? What would the relation be between the new and traditional ones? (Pânișoară, 2015).

In the last decades, there were published numerous studies on practical pedagogy, applied pedagogy in relation to these questions. Thus, we tried to develop a perspective in which we have to admit that there are a lot of new responsibilities and roles for 21<sup>st</sup>-century teachers, therefore we need to have more accurate purposes and strategies regarding teacher training actions.

The principles of a practical pedagogy have to be like vectors for a successful teaching action in order to educate successful students and to promote efficiency and success as life-long goals. Pânișoară (2015) presents in his book a set of such new practical pedagogy principles; for our present study, we have selected the following: the principle of personalization of the relationship, the principle of empathy, the principle of building an emotional connection with the student and the non-aggressive behaviour principle.

Maria Robu (2008, p. 86) wrote that empathy is „a specific human need for interconnection, for discovering the other based on a socially validated experience that allows for rapprochement or rejection, as a reflection of the possible entry into the psychology of the other; there is an empathic exchange between the one who speaks and the one who hears”. Pânișoară (2015) describes the teacher-student relationship like a teacher responsibility – the teacher is the coordinator, by asking students to solve different learning tasks and being the main assessor of their activity. “This is why it becomes vital that the teacher uses empathy to discover the students’ personalities and resources, understand what they are able to do, know how (quantitatively) and what (qualitatively) he/she can ask of the students” (Pânișoară, 2017, p. 191). Empathy must be used and exploited in both directions within the teacher-student relation: the teacher puts himself/herself in the student's shoes and, at the same time, the student should try to see reality through the teacher's eyes.

Our study was developed with the purpose of identifying the teachers’ training needs in terms of their level of emotional intelligence (EI). Our paper presents an action – research study with the goal to implement the development of the EI in teacher training programs. We believe that all teachers should have a high level of EI. The practical part of our paper has two sections: data collection was conducted using the test-based survey; to improve the identified state, we propose a training program, entitled Initial/ Continuous Teacher Training for Emotional Intelligence Development.

The research objectives are following:

- O1: investigation of the level of development of emotional intelligence at teachers from Bacău County;
- O2: identification of the level of development of each of the EI constructs/ dimensions (at teachers from Bacău County);
- O3: determination of emotional intelligence constructs whose development requires a training program;

- O4: designing a training program proposal that could be implemented during initial / in-service teacher training.

## **2. Emotional intelligence of teachers in Bacău County. Study design**

### ***2.1. Research Hypothesis***

Teachers from Bacău County identify EI among their professional training needs, both as a whole complex and for some of its elements (internal constructions). For this general hypothesis we have formulated two specific hypotheses:

*Specific research hypothesis 1* - Most in-service teachers in Bacău County schools have an optimal level of development of emotional intelligence.

*Specific research hypothesis 2* - Most in-service teachers in Bacău County schools have all the constructs of emotional intelligence equally developed: self-awareness, self-control, motivation, empathy, sociability.

### ***2.2. Research method and instrument***

Our study comprises three stages: applying the research tool; interpretation of the survey data and curricular analysis of the teachers initial training curricula offered by “Vasile Alecsandri” University of Bacău and by “Grigore Tabacaru” Teachers In-Service Training House, both from Bacău; 3. Designing the training program proposed for implementation. To identify the professional training needs of teachers from Bacău County, we used a research methodology with two action directions: a survey for 147 teachers from Bacău County and curricular analysis on teachers initial training curricula for the study programme of the Pedagogy of Primary and Preschool Education from “Vasile Alecsandri University, and “Grigore Tabacaru” Teachers In-Service Training House. The survey instrument used was the Test for Emotional Intelligence Assessment (adapted by Mihaela Roco, after D. Goleman).

### ***2.3. Participants***

147 teachers from schools in Bacău County participated in the study. Table 1 presents the distribution of the research lot by the independent variables.

Table 1. The distribution of the research lot by the independent variables

No.	Independent variables	Percents
1	Level of education	47,6% kindergarten teachers; 40,8% primary school teachers; 11,6% middle and high school teachers
2	Teaching Experience	32,7% beginner teachers (0-5 years); 19,7% - (6 to 15 years); 33,3% have 16 to 25 years teaching experiences; 14,3% - over 25 years

### 3. Results

Analysis of the data revealed that for six of the ten items of the test, less than half of the respondents achieved the maximum score. This result shows that emotional intelligence is not equally developed for all respondents who have achieved a lower score: self-awareness, self-control, motivation, empathy, and sociability.

We have corroborated these data with L. A. Năstasă's work (2011), regarding the relationship between areas and competencies of emotional intelligence and the description of an emotionally intelligent person. This is how we identified those constructs with a role in achieving performance that will be developed through our proposed training program, namely motivation, empathy and sociability.

From the interpretation of the data obtained after the application of the research tool, 57% of the respondents, active teachers, obtained an EQ whose value is between 100 and 150 points (average level). Moreover, the application of the test revealed different percentages of EQ depending on the dimensions of emotional intelligence. Thus, for constructs of empathy, motivation and sociability, the percentages recorded are less than 60%.

This context has led us to propose a training program, the motivation for our choice may be viewed from two perspectives: teachers themselves do not have enough/ well-cultivated emotional intelligence; each teacher is responsible for forming the personality of 15-20 students.

Centralized results from the application of these two methods for identifying training needs are outlined below:

- 42% of the respondents scored below the average in the test, 57% of the respondents obtained an average score in the test, 1.3% of the respondents scored above average, while for the constructs of self-control, motivation and social skills there were less than 60%;
- We did not identify courses related to the education of emotional intelligence in the initial / in-service training programs of teachers in Bacău County.

#### 4. Discussions

Based on the results of our empirical study we shall synthesize the main ideas resorting, here and there, to some of the respondents' words.

1. The specific hypothesis 1 according to which most of the in-service teachers in schools from Bacau County have an optimal level of development of emotional intelligence has not been confirmed;

2. The specific hypothesis 2 according to which most of the in-service teachers from schools from Bacău County have all the constructs of EI equally developed, namely self-awareness, self-control, motivation, empathy, sociability, has not been confirmed.

3. The general hypothesis according to which the teachers from Bacău County need initial and continuous training for the development of emotional intelligence, both as a whole and for some of its constructs, has been confirmed.

4. A course on initial or in-service training for the development of emotional intelligence as a whole, proposed for teachers in Bacău County, is a must.

5. Focusing this course on the formation/ development of the dimensions of motivation, empathy, sociability of EI is necessary.

Following the research steps described above, we have identified several areas where learners need training regarding the following topics or content levels corresponding to the dimensions/ constructs of EI:

- emotional intelligence-concept and models proposed by specialists;
- the dimensions of emotional intelligence - factors, areas and competences, the psychological profile of adults with high emotional intelligence;
- dynamics of emotional intelligence-exercises for educating/ developing emotional intelligence on the dimensions of motivation, empathy, social skills.

We can visualize the lack of emotional intelligence of teachers spreading exponentially, which could lead to the propagation of this situation in the future society, which is in contradiction with the educational ideal in Romania. A training program included in the initial / in-service training of future/ current teachers would have beneficial effects.

One of our conclusions is that the studies on Emotional Intelligence since 1990 may be able to answer the question – How can a child with only average school results become a successful

adult? Thus, we tried to design a Teacher training program focused on the idea of educating EI. The proposed training was construct on three content modules (Table 2).

Table 2. Three-module training - Applicative issues

<b>Modules</b>	<b>Themes</b>
Module I. Emotional Intelligence and Rational-Emotional Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Concepts, definitions, useful connected ideas;</li> <li>- Perspectives for approaching Emotional Intelligence;</li> <li>- Emotional Intelligence Models</li> </ul>
Module 2. Emotional Intelligence Dimensions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Models and Competences;</li> <li>- Positive Factors;</li> <li>- Who are the high-level EQ Adults – a Psychological Profile</li> </ul>
Module 3. Emotional Intelligence Dynamic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Theories and useful concepts;</li> <li>- Exercises for building Emotional Intelligence in terms of: empathy, motivation and sociability</li> </ul>

## 5. Conclusions

Based on the analysis of our results, empirical data and applicative findings, we have developed some theoretical conclusions.

### *1. Emotional competence - Human-specific quality*

The end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century highlights the displacement of the focus of interest of psychologists from the Rational human being model to the Human – an emotional being educational model. The answer to the question What makes a non-successful or average-score pupil (during the school time) to become a successful adult? has been identified in the human being's ability to manage their own emotions and those of others, as well as use these data to act in the direction of success.

### *2. Emotional competence – a very important quality of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century teacher*

The subject of education in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century is today's student who is influenced by today's society and is part of today's family, which are not like they used to be 20-30 years ago; people are different because society changes. Teacher's challenges are different and diverse in today's education system. To be successful in teaching, learning and educational activities, one should be an emotionally intelligent person. This means the following: motivation and passion for the teaching career, empathy, the way in which the teacher may change his/ her own position in the class or school group from leader to member when the situation demands it. We believe that these few reflections may become important ideas for up-dating the national Romanian strategy related

to teacher education and, at the same time, we hope that decision-makers would encourage some changes on the Teacher Training Curricula for initial or in-service programs to enhance awareness about the importance of emotional intelligence elements.

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