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Teachers' professionalization process in a postmodern world for social cohesion

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Abstract

Changes in the society and education system show the need to discuss about professional development of the teachers in the postmodern era. Those changes encourage and make us define the teacher's professionalization process in the postmodern world and analyze the competencies of the contemporary teachers. It is stated that is very important to describe the professionalism of the teachers in such a way that they would not „stand on the pedestal” higher than parents and community but were developing more open and interactive communication. Analyzing the professional relationship of teachers in the communication system “Teacher – students – parents” the teacher is considered to be the main organizer, carrying out several managerial functions which include creating and maintaining constructive interaction and communication climate as well as formalized communication and formal relations with children.

This paper **aims** at identifying whether and to what extent Lithuanian teachers (based on the research methodology developed by the INCLUD-ED project international team) contribute to community building within the school and beyond as one of the important means for social cohesion.

Key words: communication, competence, community, professionalization, social cohesion.

Introduction

According to Katus (2002, p.7) “We learn how to be citizens by practicing it. Citizenship is, therefore, a matter of lifelong learning, and the place where this for the greatest part takes place is civil society”. As a member of the European Union, both Lithuanian (Population: 3.4 million inhabitants; area: 65 thousand sq. km.) state, and its citizens are challenged by a number of new responsibilities; and the ability to exercise these responsibilities is to be acquired. One of these new responsibilities is to exercise national and global citizenship adequately. An important challenge is to reflect and start more intensive practices of social cohesion, as new forms of social exclusion start to be more evident. For further analysis, at least two contexts are discerned here: international and national. International context acts as a significant catalyst of change as it preconditions global integration and integration into the EU. At the national level, interrelated process of iterative relationship between development of educational practices and initiatives for social cohesion in education is identified. As one of the major factors, we identify teachers' reflexivity on their role in community building within and outside their schools.

Analyzing the professional relationship of teachers in the communication system “Teacher – students – parents” the teacher is considered to be the main organizer, carrying out several management functions which include creating and maintaining constructive interaction and communication climate as well as formalized communication and formal relations with children (Kardelienė, 2004; Zulumskytė, 2004). On the other hand, teachers indicate that their relations with students (as well as with the administration and their colleagues) arouse stress and anxiety. Education and growth of the society, which is of vital importance to our economy, culture and social relations is not so rapid.

This contradiction can be explained by the findings of other research in Lithuania (Jucevičienė, Bagdonas 2002; Želvys, 2003; Katiliūtė, 2005), which revealed that there are many differences between the educational policy and educational practice, and they could be alleviated by such actions as modern learning through partnership relations and networking, observing, reflecting and evaluating one's activities, participating in the activities of communities and in this way influencing the decisions of the governing bodies, innovating educational practice and seeking for systemic changes, e.g. school autonomies.

And therefore this stage of the study was focused on teachers' as active agents on whom directly depends whether the opportunities available legally will become the established practices, and also, whether authentic needs identified in practices will to some extent be translated along the decision making ladder.

This paper **aims** at identifying whether and to what extent Lithuanian teachers (based on the research methodology developed by the project INCLUD-ED (No. FP6-028603-2 Integrated project, VI

Framework Programme) international team) contribute to community building within the school and beyond as one of the important means for social cohesion, and, consequently, building of civic society.

Teachers' activities and competence as one of the prerequisites for social cohesion

Changes in the society and education system at the beginning of the XXI the century show the need to discuss about professional development of the teachers in the postmodernism era already (Hargreaves, 2000). How to understand professionalism of the teachers? The author thinks that postmodernism in the profession is professional versatility, width of professional activities and involvement in-group activities outside the classroom keeping to democratic principles, which was unusual of the periods of teachers professionalism already discussed. Social movement is suggested which unites both the teachers and other people who would cooperate and create postmodern professionalism – open, overall and democratic professionalism. However, according to the author, there are people who say that in the post professional period or the period which can be called postmodernism in profession there will be no teachers' professionalism or its role will become not so relevant.

In the period of autonomic professionalism several elements of teachers' professionalization are envisaged in a modern model of postmodernism. Teachers should struggle the discourse of the teachers and their work derision, blaming and shaming which is popular in the speeches of politicians and media. This does not mean that teachers should hide their mistakes and restore the state when their activity was assessed because shame is not so bad. According to Giddens (2005) when a person denies the shame (such kind of behavior is dominant in Western countries) and projects it onto others as a blame, such negative results as conflict and estrangement (isolation) are possible. The society will be more positive towards the teachers when politicians emphasize the efforts and achievements of the teachers more than give criticism. Here again the statements about the shame would be relevant: that parties in conflict should make up („rise above the conflict“), everybody has to regret for the actions against another and that means that it is necessary to apologize and think over ones actions. In other words, everybody has to take up the truth and reconciliation as the prerequisite to the common activity. Such an activity will improve the situation and the members of former conflict will now together be responsible for the results of the actions. Hargreaves (2000) notes that the government could recognize that it was weakening education quite often not giving enough finances, that was worsening the quality of teaching and learning by implementing the objectives of the education reform inappropriately; and the union of the teachers should talk that in the past were solving issues about competence inadequately and were analyzing average professional activity very little; besides, teachers were contradicting more than initiating the changes which would require additional powers (even if that had been useful for the pupils).(Teresevičienė, Zuzevičiūtė, Tūtlys, 2007).

Hargreaves also notes that teachers should be interested in pedagogical work to be done even by people without special education. The members of community (who are both paid for the job and not paid) working together with teachers could help to solve the above mentioned problems. It is suggested that some everyday jobs of the teacher like writing or cleaning the classroom could be done by less qualified persons. Teachers must appreciate their profession and education which makes the basis of the professionalism. Intelligence allows denying the superstitions of the preprofessional period only in practice because the activity can be improved. Besides, the education teachers have allows selecting out of the given educational researches the things that could, to their mind, help to make teaching and learning effective, which helped to improve the management and could

That is why it is suggested that teachers should negotiate in communities that they need cooperation at school during the lessons but not after they are finished or during the holidays. Why? Firstly, because teachers desperately lack time for planning the educational process, preparing for organization of teaching and learning, evaluation and registering the marks, meetings with the colleagues. Such an amount of work seems endless for the public. Besides, the results of the research do not allow arguing much because it was determined that cooperation prolongs teachers working time (Želvys, 2003). However, the gulf between the society and professionals continues to exist when speaking about the time necessary for cooperation, and teachers have to overcome this gulf by talking about that to the parents and administration.

The necessity for the teachers to cooperate among themselves and with the community proves the community crisis seen in postmodern age. The crisis was caused by several reasons: modernization and rational planning; peculiarities of urbanistic planning determining the working place to be far away from a living place; insularity of a private space; usage of the cars as a factor reducing the abilities for communication; home entertainments; organization of consumer trade. The above presented reasons of

community crisis „eat“ human relationships because consume time and work, that is why schools should be understood as the source of refreshment and nourishing the communities (Laker, 2000; Hargreaves, 2000). It is stated that is very important to describe the professionalization process of the teachers in such a way that they would not „stand on the pedestal“ higher than parents and community but were developing more open and interactive communication. As one of the biggest challenges of postmodernism for the teachers is to be able to communicate differently with parents, that is create meaningful relations, it is worth considering the interactions, never minding that communication with parents had always been part of the teachers activity and the teacher was responsible for the quality of such communication because the support and understanding of the parents has influence on the successful pupils' studying at school.

Communication and cooperation forms of parents and teachers are described both by foreign and Lithuanian scientists (Laker, 2000; Lukošūnienė, 2000; Litvinienė, 2002; Fawcett et al., 2004). Nowadays, when schools become more and more open to the society, communication between parents and teachers is becoming not only more intensive but more complicated too. Teachers tend to recognize that work out of classroom (in this case, it is the activity in the community, communication with parents) is related to big emotional and intellectual investment. That is why the teachers, who would like to further maintain their professional authority, agree with the opinion that parents could be their supporters or the persons who can be consulted or asked for a piece of advice and so on. Such a sharing of the roles means that parents help the teacher when they raise the funds, organize special dinners, renovate the classrooms, prepare the materials for the classroom tasks, outings or events; besides they do some practical work during the lessons: read for the children or listen to their reading. Such an activity allows parents to understand what difficult job teachers are doing. Parents are suggested to organize seminars or conversations and in that way to discuss new tendencies in the curricula; communication form is also presented as an agreement on pupils' learning and behavior (Hargreaves, 2000). The author thinks that who communicate with the public, communities and particularly with parents have to communicate with the colleagues as well, because postmodern professionalism is also a communicational professionalism.

Teachers have difficulties with the expectations in communication with the parents who are socially and ethno culturally different (Hargreaves, 2000; Gevorgianienė, 2003). It is stated that teachers mistakenly interpret the absence of the parents in the meetings, try to convey their not always socioculturally acceptable understanding, what a good parent means, to social groups which follow other values. Besides, teachers recommend organizing classes and schools in the way which allowed the communication with the parents in different forms and methods and speaking in different languages was possible if required.

When speaking about postmodernism of professionalism some authors (Meškinienė, Liniauskaitė, 2003; Laker, 2000) suggest teachers to begin learning from the parents, and the parents begin learning from the teachers. They present various ways of doing that: e.g. two-sided reports of the pupils, conversations of pupils and their parents about amounts of work during the meetings at school. These conversations mean that not only teachers are responsible for the success of the communication in the meeting. Besides, it is believed that homework tasks can be given that all members of the family could do them; parents group could be organized where everybody could discuss their concerns and teachers first of all would listen and learn and not only contradict and argue. However, it is believed that partnership of the parents and the teachers in mutual learning process should not be idealized and one should admit that parents are often not so perfect and altruistic (Hargreaves, 2000). It is even said that parents as well as their children can be a real headache to the professional teacher with post modernistic attitudes: it means that parents can seek for some concessions for their children, let's say better marks; one teacher's replacement by the other, a better one to their mind; transferring from one group to another and so on, maybe look at personal notes of the teacher when he is not in the classroom.

The above-mentioned statements show that teachers have to devote a lot of time for communication and cooperation with the parents, which is one of the ways allowing convincing the society that financing of the education is a necessity, as this is what could guarantee the quality of education and consequently the development of the society.

However, as our study reveals, even if families and communities in Lithuania are encouraged to participate in school's life; however, here at least two dimensions should be identified. On the one hand, legal documents provide possibilities and even encourage families and communities to join decision making. As it is stated The Act on Education of the Republic of Lithuania ((Lietuvos Respublikos Švietimo Įstatymas (New edition 2003-06-17, Nr. IX-1630, Article 47)), parents can participate in

choosing moral educational programme (ethics or confessional) until a child is 14 years old, also, in choosing whether a child will cover programme in national language (if families originate from minorities) and to have representatives in school's council. Another example is families' with certain socially dysfunctional behavior patterns to ensure their children's engagement in educational programmes; these facts encouraged authors of Paper on Lifelong learning 2003-2012 (2003-2012m. "Mokymosi visą gyvenimą užtikrinimo strategija") emphasize in one of the articles of the document the need to relate parent's responsibility for child's education to financial support mechanisms: „<...personal responsibilities of parents for children's school attendance should be implemented. Financial family support should be connected to parents' responsibility for children's education". Another issue is relatively low activity of parents, as some research reveal, the activity degree decreases even in first – fourth year of schooling. Another dimension that should still be addressed is school community's readiness to participate actively in education of students with special needs.

Methodology: Communicative focus group with professionals in the prolonged day time program for additional support

The research was organized in one of school's classrooms. The school is situated in a village in Kaunas region (population: 1038 inhabitants). Chosen time and place ensured the possibility for open discussion, i.e. it was aiming that people, who were not the members of the research team, would not disturb the discussion.

The research was performed at the end of schooling year following the methodology developed by the international team working in the Framework 6 project INCLUD-ED ("Strategies for Inclusion and social Cohesion in Europe from Education" Contract No. FP6-028603-2 (2006 – 2011;). There were seven (7) participants (women) performing various roles in the programme - prolonged day group. The group aims at development of schoolchildren competences that meet the interests and requirements of school community, i.e. of schoolchildren and their parents or legal guardians.

A discussion between focus group participants, who have different life experience and professional attitude, was active. This enabled the discussion of programme related questions in the light of community participation, while aiming at successful socialization of primary school children, developing various competences of the children. Due to the discussion participants became more open. This can be stated according to the records – research participants not only shared their own experience about community life, but also suggested various ideas and ways for overcoming communication difficulties in the community.

The research results were started to be reflected and analysed after the pilot interview. After the survey the researcher was provided with the information by participants, for example, prolonged day group teacher, school psychologist, and other teachers. The information appeared to be essential for the analysis of research problem. It means that some of the specific research questions were reformulated. For example, first question asks to introduce yourself referring to the participation level in the programme. The second question was divided into two: what are the main problems of prolonged day group in the field of education and what are the main difficulties in children development in general? And what are the difficulties of schoolchildren development that are typical for the pupils? The third question was also divided into two: How does school solve difficulties you have been identified? How does school cooperate with the community while solving problems you have identified?

It should be emphasized that research participants understood community as the school community in the first place, i.e. they saw it like – school personnel, pedagogues, schoolchildren's parents or legal guardians, and the pupils. So it had to be reminded more than once during the discussion that various community institutions and organizations and their involvement in the prolonged day group were being discussed. The fifth question is worth particular attention. It was found out that its formulation should be revised. It was formulated the following way: How is the decision making process performed in the prolonged day group? A pause before answering in the pilot research revealed that the fifth question should be reformulated into the following: Who decides what activities should be performed in the prolonged day group? We chose to present categories, subcategories and the examples of contributions without trying to attribute idea to the contributor; the relative amounts of ideas shared are evident in the table (Table 1). On the one hand, this should be considered as a limitation of a study; on the other hand, as it is illustrated above, some of the trends can be identified anyway.

Results

It should be emphasised that for the programme that is being researched - prolonged day group - through the evolution of this kind of programmes in Lithuanian education, was not common that parents would

participate in the prolonged day group together with their children. They would play, read, draw and do other things together. The results revealed the necessity to develop activities of the prolonged day group in the way that parents, grandparents and other relatives would be involved in the collective activities enriching children competences that way. Main results are provided in Table 1.

Table 1

Qualitative analysis results collected in the focus group

| <i>Category</i> | <i>Subcategory</i> | <i>Examples of expressions</i> |
|--|---|--|
| Advantages of the program and motivating aspects | Emotional parents' experience | It is the main problem here: the first of September came: how can children be home alone till the evening; ...parents often complain, they say that when they return home they watch TV or play computer games;...child returns, doesn't turn the heater on, it is cold at home. And it's warm here, they are looked after; ...now a lot of parents work and they are afraid to leave children alone; child won't come home alone; road, coming home, staying alone, you don't know who can come when he's/she's home alone... |
| | Schoolchildren's achievements | ...assignment is needed or playing of some games – they are necessary for memory development...; ...teachers come in and discuss what difficulties they face working with children during the lesson; ...parents come and ask, how they can help their children; ...this kind of programme is adjusted for the children demands, to what they need, that is given to them; ... |
| | School as Active Developer of Community | activities will not be as interesting if community representatives are not participating... for example, police officers came to <i>Kaziukas</i> fair {March 4, religious festivity of the Saint Kazimieras, King of Poland and the State of Lithuania, beginning of 15 th century – Note by Vaiva Zuzeviciute and Laimute Kardeliene}>.. Then all of us did something together: painted; played outside... children want to see and meet somebody else, rather than the same teachers again and again... or the other hand, teacher has to know specifically, what are the problems, and for solving of which problems requires involvement of other members of community.. it is important to have a variety of activities, because when there is variety, there is also a possibility to meet specific needs of children... |
| Barriers for Program | Rigid Concept of Community | ...parents sometimes do not understand that after work they have another work – education of their children...parents do not participate in any Church activities...;.. we do not have experience in community building...may be we could involve Church and other members more, may be we could find sponsors even...; yes, may be we just should start from an hour once in a while, and we would build up our own experience?...; .. yes, I agree, sometimes I think we left a teacher {the teacher who is directly responsible for the program of additional support in a prolonged day group-Note by VZ and LK} alone with the huge responsibility...; let's be honest, it's us who have to invest more, parents really work quite late into the evening, and they really don't have that much time to spend with children...; |
| | Community Recourses | ...I don't know why we do not expand lack of finances?...; but we have <i>logoped</i> {specialist, who supports children with speaking difficulties – Note by VZ and LK}, and we have special pedagogue {teacher, who helps children and families, if families have problems} .. but we lack money to go outside the school more often, to visit museums, or just go around in big cities...;... yes, we cannot afford hiring a bus for children... only sometimes...; |
| | Competence of Children | ...children are great...they learn to come back home on their own, to unlock the door and they even stay alone before parents come;.. yes, and play computer games, most of the kids have a computer at home – is it for good I don't know...; |

| | | |
|----------------------|--|--|
| Value of the Program | Cognitive Development of Children | ...when they walk around with teacher, <i>logoped</i> and psychologist, when they talk with specialists and between themselves...they really learn a lot, they reflect on what they've learnt at school, and when they see other places {museum – Note by VZ and LK}, their horizon expands...; they talk about Easter, about Christmas, and teacher {responsible for the program – VZ and LK} asks them questions about families, what they do at home...; yes, this individualization is very important for success at school, then they have more courage to tell things in regular classes...;yes, and teacher {responsible for the program} has more time to address each child's needs: to write with the one who needs writing - you cannot do that at regular class, you have to follow curriculum...; |
| | Development of Behavioral Patterns of Children | ...children change, they see how adults: firefighters, librarians, police-officers behave, they want to behave the same way...; they go to shopping centers, forester's office, they go to clean up city..., and start feeling the members of the community...; ... and also we use computer games as the way to learn to behave: they all want to plan, so we make a schedule - 15 minutes for each child; and they have to respect that...and therefore, bit by bit community starts building up.. a community of children..; |
| | Emotional development of Children | ...yes, local children come...; not all the time, as long as children need that...; parents come every day, they share problems, and express appreciation...; We are all happy about the success...; sometimes parents ask - even if a child is not enrolled into a program – could we have him or her on some specific day...; the main thing is that children want to stay and want to come into the group...; children come from such different families, such different, and still they love being with each other, they have different experience, but here they learn – and quite willingly – to adjust to each other...; children are happy, they have fun here...; ...for me the best thing is to hear a child asking Mom could he or she stay a bit longer after school in the group, to play a bit more with friends...to go to library, to culture centre...; that is the greatest thing – they love being here...; |

Conclusions

It would seem that Lithuanian society, which has suffered a pressure of external power, after gaining independence overemphasized individuality. On the one hand, individual responsibility is one of the main founding ideas of market economy that Lithuanian society joined 19 years ago, and therefore such concept seemed to be both logical and functional. On the other hand, with traditional social networks gone, with families getting smaller and more fragmented, the fact that new patterns of social networking are not as influential, may cause a number of negative outcomes. As participants of the focus group noted themselves: teacher of the program is left almost alone, they do not help her as much as they can, and they acknowledge that. Moreover, they even acknowledge that the village community will not be build, if they – psychologist, teacher of the program, special pedagogue and others – will not work towards that. It seems that professionals in the field have come to understand that social network is - paradoxically – their direct responsibility, as if the network exists, if children see good examples, if they are taken care by more people - education of those children is of higher quality. And education is a direct responsibility of teachers and social pedagogues and others. This change (towards understanding of the importance of social networking, of community, and of the need to actively influence development of community) seems to this research team one of the most important findings in this stage of a survey.

Another important finding is the fact that according to participants of focus group, children's participation in the program of additional support influences positively their cognitive, emotional development and their behavior. Even if participants themselves identify a number of ways to improve the program (and this is an advantage of the program to have such committed professionals), they acknowledge the positive changes in cognitive and emotional development that children demonstrate in regular classes.

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