

THE PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCIES OF THE 21ST CENTURY SCHOOL TEACHER

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Abstract

According to the demands of many educational reforms, a teacher should not only be a provider of knowledge and skills, but also have a positive attitude towards innovations, feel the necessity for self-education, and adopt a student centered teaching approach. Teachers are expected to develop professional skills and always try to be “an effective model of competence” (Bruner, 1976). For example, an examination of education students found that the main emphasis in their preparedness was subject area knowledge. Students did not report a focus on the personality traits. This study reports data gathered from education graduates about their perceptions of the level and extent of professional competence experienced during their preparation. This study has been carried out to reveal the interaction quality between the professionally valuable competences and the consequences of teaching process.

Key words: pedagogy, teacher preparation, teacher professional competences, teacher training.

Introduction

The political and social changes that took place in Georgia, caused by the disintegration of the Soviet Union, altered the educational strategies aimed at producing a modern, creative, and tolerant teacher. This shift in educational strategy can be understood as a move from the old paradigm of teacher-textbook-student to a new paradigm of student-textbook-teacher.

According to the old paradigm and the authoritarian model, a teacher functioned mainly as an educator. Today, the teacher's goal is to monitor teaching process, view a student not only as a teaching object but what is more important, make the student the object of teaching process. In this respect, the focus is on the student and the development of each child. This requirement necessitates making some correction in the teacher training process on the basis of pedagogical innovations.

The teaching innovations are often established in the educational systems. They are characteristic of all educational fields representing the natural phenomena. One of the main reasons for the teaching innovations is considered to be “the crisis of education” which has been recognized all over the world (Levitan, 1994). Despite the various manifestations of innovations, they still have much in common, namely the following contradictions between:

- the actual training quality of high education and social practice graduates;
- the existing administrative and organizational structures and arrangement of high educational institutions;

- the interests and abilities of the teaching object.

The teaching innovation is diminished due to the inefficiency of teacher training process. For example, Lang & Evans (2006) argued that practice should start in the early part of the teacher preparation and be developing in a cyclical way through out the program.

A new-type of teacher should be not only an educator and practitioner of a definite teaching activity but also ought to be familiar with the pedagogical deontology, the current teaching code of conduct and rules. This new teacher must be able to analyze the new expectations and to acquire the teaching conscience that is aware of both an ideal and a real “self”. The teacher should be able to combine the two images and always strive for the ideal. On this basis, the teacher will be able to develop his or her own professional style and “self-concept”. This is the starting point of so-called reflexive education.

It is a widely-known fact that only a person educates a person and the personal example is one of the major methods of upbringing. So, a teacher has to always intend to develop professionally valuable competencies and realize that their accumulation determines the teacher’s competence. This aspect of teacher training requires special attention. Jerome Bruner once said: “A teacher should be an effective model of competence”.

Research about the ways to improve the quality of teacher training programs may be conceptualized using the *Theory of Set* developed by the Georgian scholar, D. Uznadze. The set, according to Uznadze (2005), entails the full modification of an individual that encourages him/her to acquire certain attitudes and knowledge. The set covers the integrity of the subjective (need) and objective (situation) circumstances. The following factors form the “pedagogical set”: 1) the motivation and desire of the teacher to perform the teaching act; 2) the ability of the teacher to analyze the requirements of the learning situation; and 3) the operational abilities of an individual (appropriate skills). The “pedagogical set” is developed during the whole career of a professional teacher.

Theoretical Base or Literature Review

Professionally valuable competencies have been the subject of much research and a definition has been adopted. Relating to competencies, many scientists have produced studies on the problem of designing a teacher’s personality. Brunner (1976), for instance, referred to different studies that distinguished and summarized the professionally valuable features of an effective teacher and shaped an ideal model teacher. Brunner included the following 10 components:

Emotional stability;

Positive self-esteem;

Systematic and individualistic teaching plan;

Partner approach to a student;

Advantage of indirect management influence;

Avoidance of rigid methods;

Applying the methods of group work;

Using the contrasting stimuli;

Flexibility (individualistic attitude to students, determination of teaching goals, teaching methods and means).

Later, Dietrich et al (1983) proposed other ten teachers’ competencies:

High self-control;

Emotional steadiness;

Compassion;

Objectiveness;

Friendliness;

Responsibility;

Eagerness to co-operate;

Confidence;

Amplitude of positive personality features;

Low index of depression, falsehood, psychopathy and hypochondria.

There are the differences between the above teacher training models. The second model represents personal features whereas the first one includes professionally valuable competencies alongside desirable personality traits. However, both authors clearly show the close connection with the meaning of the model. The authors pay attention to those professionally valuable competencies such as emotional stability, collaboration with students (partnership), positive self-esteem, and amplitude of positive personality features and so on.

Over the last decades, many various teacher training models have been created. It's important to notice the changing tendency of personality features and competencies. For example, Cruickshank et al. (2002) believe the effective teacher must have characteristics that include: a motivating personality enthusiasm, warmth, humor, credibility, and orientation to success.

The above-mentioned set of qualities clarifies that the effective teacher training can be understood as creating a democratic, reflexive, co-operative and caring teacher.

Methodology of Research

Population and Selection of Research Subjects

To identify the perceptions of teacher education students about professionally valuable features and competencies of an effective teacher, this study was carried out at Tbilisi Ilia State University. A student population of 156 students in the general education department and in the music education department was asked to complete an open ended questionnaire asking them to list their perceptions of teacher competencies. One hundred and nineteen (119) students (IV, V year) of the education department and 37 students (IV-V year) of music department of the university participated in the project. The data were gathered in 2007–2008.

Data Collection and Analysis

All students in the population (n = 156) completed the questionnaire. To complete their assignment, students were asked to identify the 10 most important professionally valuable competencies. The students then identified 120 qualities in all. The researcher then coded the 120 items and reduced them to 59 competency themes according to the similar meaning. The data were analyzed in a second iteration yielding the rank ordered competencies presented in Table 1.

Results of Research

The following 10 features were top-rated (see Table 1). The column reporting occurrences refer to how many times this particular competence was observed in the data.

Table 1. Ranking of Ten Top Competencies.

n = 156

Competency	Ranking	Number of Occurrences
Educated, erudite, intelligent	1	91
Orderly, well-disciplined, organized	2	88
Sociable	3	85
Objective, fair	4	83
Professional, competent, qualified	5	76
Understanding, sensitive, perceptive	6	72

Continued to Table 1

Speech skills	7	60
Capable to teach, having didactic ability	8	55
Child-loving, benevolent	9	53
Reserved, self-possessed, calm	10	46

The analysis of the result in the Table 1 shows that the list does not include the professionally valuable features such as: tolerance (15), openness to innovations (14), humanness (8), and creativity (4). Moreover, the personality features like targeting at student’s success, enthusiasm, classroom management, sense of humor were not mentioned at all.

Consequently, the results, reviewed after listing and ranging of features, indicated that a teacher’s major function traditionally remains the knowledge of subject, the ability to explain and render. So, the knowledge approach to the education of the new generation still persists as perceived by these subjects.

To establish the professionally valuable competencies of a prospective teacher and students’ self-esteem, an average test was provided for the same group of respondents.

The respondents were to evaluate the professionally valuable skills rating from 1 to 5 according to quality (Japaridze, 2005). After examining each form, the data were combined into the academic groups and the average number was calculated. Thus, a table containing ten academic groups was produced (see Table 2).

Table 2. Self Estimations of Competencies.

n = 156

(Anchors: difficult to evaluate = 1; low level = 2; mid level = 3; high level = 4; highest level = 5).

Competency	Ranking	M
Communication	1	4.2
Speaking	2	4.0
Reflexive	3	3.9
Didactic	4	3.7
Able to predict	5	3.6
Diagnostic	6	3.6
Open- minded	7	3.4
Emotional	8	3.4
Coordinative	9	3.3
Academic	10	3.2
M		3.7

The results shown in Table 2 indicate that the students actively chose professionally valuable competencies. Yet, diagnostic, prognostic, emotional, open to innovation and other skills were not selected by these respondents.

The outcomes of the average test as well as the answers to the questionnaire demonstrate that these students do not fully understand the range of competencies which current reform literature maintains as essential to for success in their future profession.

Conclusions

- Contemporary educational strategy requires a new approach towards the teacher training which will produce an active, creative and open-minded teacher.
- This study into the quality of preparation of secondary and music department graduates using the psychological methods (open ended questionnaire, test) carried out at our university showed that teacher education continues to reflect the old paradigm: teacher-textbook-student.

- However, certain movements to change the traditional paradigms should be observed (student-textbook-teacher). In single cases, the students identified the professionally valuable competencies of an effective and modern teacher, though this identification is still spontaneous.
- To be equipped for the current social order - that of knowledgeable and professionally competent individual – teacher education must produce the teacher equipped with teaching innovations and professionally valuable competencies which development represent the essential component of training.

Notes

Dimitri Uznadze (1886–1950) – was a well-known Georgian psychologist. He created the original *Theory of Set*. Uznadze produced a collection of studies into general, child and educational psychology. Uznadze established a psychological center at Tbilisi State University and The Institute of Psychology at Georgia Academy of Sciences. A large group of psychologists has been working at the institute.

The major principles of Uznadze theory have been translated into English.

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