

**MODERN STRATEGIES FOR STIMULATING THE
SOCIOEMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE STUDENTS IN
THE EARLY SCHOOL PERIOD**

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ABSTRACT:

The socialization in the early school period is crucial for the development of the students into socialized individuals who will manifest real life values. Through the social behavior, the students manifest their ability for coping, communication and interaction with the environment, which in fact reflects the degree of development of the social competences of the students. The social behavior manifested in this way is closely related to the emotional development and the development of the social perception and the social understanding. The emotional development of the students implies empathy, development of the emotional and moral understanding of the social phenomena, art, music, creation and the moral values, as well as development of the abilities for cultivation and stimulation of the positive emotions, including the development of skills for restraint from impulses evoked by negative emotions. Generally in the instruction, many modern strategies for stimulation of the socioemotional development of the students are used. In this context, our scientific interest is focused on the analysis of their role and importance with the goal to determine whether they stimulate the development of the socioemotional competencies of the students.

Considering the character of the matter and our efforts to do a thorough research of the matter, we decided to carry out a quality field research, which was realized in grades I, II, and III in the primary school VojdanChernodrinski in Skopje. Our observation spanned over 20 work days in the previously mentioned samples, in the school year 2016/2017. The paper is going to present the results, as well as our suggestions for improvement of the instruction in terms of this matter.

Keywords: *socioemotional development, strategies, competencies, students, early school period, instructional practice.*

Introduction

The socioemotional development is an important part of the development of the students. Unlike other domains, it is much more difficult to identify the developmental stages in the socioemotional development. Also, the social and emotional components of the domain are complementary and very closely connected. This means that they

complement each other, i.e. by developing social skills, the students also develop emotional skills.

Children live in a complex social environment in which on daily basis they establish a variety of contacts and interaction with their parents, teachers, peers and other adults. The quality of the interaction with the immediate environment, where the students live and develop, dictates their social development. The process of social development is based on development of the students' competencies to interact with others. To be more specific, these competencies include initiating interaction, adequate response to the initiative of others, their ideas and feelings, resolving conflicts peacefully and giving and receiving emotional support.

The process of learning socioemotional skills is a never ending one. It constantly requires modification and development. The only way for the teachers to make sure that the students have acquired the social skills is to continuously monitor them and assess their behavior. The ultimate goal of the procedural learning is for the skills to become an automatic response of the students.

The positive socioemotional behavior depends on the development of a positive self-concept and self-confidence in the students. In the simplest context, the self-concept is a complex set of answers to the following questions: Who am I? What do I want? What can I do? What am I allowed to do?, etc. Each of us has a unique image about one's own personality (the physical appearance, the abilities, capabilities, habits, character traits, value, attitudes, etc.). Also, each of us has a unique relationship with the surrounding environment (the position in the family, among the peers, friends, the expectations, etc.). All these factors are integrated in the concept of I, i.e. into a specific self-concept.

The development of a positive social behavior is closely related to the positive development of the self-concept. The high levels of self-confidence are the basis for good communication with the environment. There is also a reverse process. The more constructive contacts a person makes the more the person develops and forms a self-concept.

Description of the research

Our scientific interests were directed towards the instructional practices employed to understand the use of real strategies for developing the socioemotional competencies of the students. The basic motive of this research is to highlight the importance of the socioemotional domain for the overall development of the personality of the student. The instructional practices included numerous teaching-learning activities. The goal was to learn new terms, information, and knowledge, develop process skills and abilities and develop abilities to apply the acquired knowledge

and skills in new situations. In this context, our findings show that in the early school period, apart from the realization of the educational goals, a special emphasis is placed on realization of the upbringing goals.

Results from the research

Complying with the modern active approaches in the instructional practices, the teachers used a variety of strategies for the development of the socioemotional competencies of the students. Generally, based on an analysis of the complete documentation from our observation, we present the following findings:

1. The quality of the interaction among the student and others, in the environment where the student lives and grows, is largely preconditioned by the place where it takes place. Basically, the interaction is established more quickly and with greater ease in a familiar environment with familiar people. Hence, in the institutionally organized education, a special attention is given to creating a pleasant, positive, emotionally stimulating environment which allows seamless interaction among the students. A variety of strategies were employed in this environment with a predominance of group activities, which allow the students to gain a greater socioemotional security and develop their social skills more quickly.

Recorded social skills which are developed through group work:

tolerance	active listening to others	respecting opinions different than one's own	justness	sympathy	empathy	getting to know each other and one self	accepting people who are different than us	conflict management
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Developing a socioemotional climate in the primary school class depends on the quality of the interaction between the teacher and the student and among the students themselves. The attitude of the teacher towards the behavior of the student, his or her activities and results is very important. In the observed instructional practices, the behavior of the student and the character of their emotional reactions was greatly determined by the activities, behavior and the emotional expression of the teacher. Evoking pleasant emotions in the students created preconditions for joy in all participants. The good mood of the teacher has a humanistic educational value and it positively influences the students, their experiences, reactions, activities, the spirit of the group and the class and the type and volume of the interpersonal interactions.

2. In the process of socialization, the students are educated in acceptable and constructive ways of behavior through daily developmental activities that are achievable. The establishment of interaction among the student and his or her peers was based on the processes of imitation and

support. Accordingly, different strategies were used in the work with the students, such as: reading applicable texts, role-play, drama and simulation, different types of games, etc.

Game is generally the most adequate strategy for developing the social and emotional competencies of the students. The use of game was a learning model which strengthened the children's self-confidence, critical thinking, respect for others, collaboration with the peers and adults, participation in problem resolving, all in accordance with the children's nature and the laws of their psychophysical development. Through playing games, the students form their self, they emphasize the need to be active participants in the life situations without the limitations imposed by the adults. Through the mediation of games, the social experience accumulated through the historical development transfers into the personal experience of the student. In this process, the students have an opportunity to develop the social and emotional competencies through their personal life practices.

The symbolic games were especially important for the understanding of the socioemotional relationships. They contained material and topics from the everyday family life, topics related to different professions and the cultural and social life. Depending on the personal psychological capabilities, the students use these games to learn about life in order to adapt to life as much as they can. Games with rules on the other hand contributed to the development of the socioemotional feelings: sympathy, thoughtfulness, sacrifice, solidarity, etc. By playing the game, the students created rules to regulate the relationships in the class, which placed the foundations on the future social relationships.

3. We were able to see that when conflicts had the tendency to undermine the relationships among the students, the teachers carried out a variety of activities to resolve them. Conflict resolution begins with releasing the energy from the negative emotions which appear in a conflict situation. The emotions were recognized, accepted and understood which opened the possibility for their resolution. The further activities involved choosing adequate strategies for resolving conflicts, mostly negotiation, mediation or group conflict resolution. Making a decision for active participation of the opposed sides was very important in the process of conflict resolution.

Recommendations and suggestions

- Regarding the initiation of interaction

The instructional practices should mostly contain symmetric partner relationships based on uniqueness, trust, mutual respect. The development of human interpersonal relationships between the student

and the teacher creates conditions for interiorizing the social values of behavior. The primary task of the teacher is to get to know the students, their age and individual characteristics, interests and needs, abilities and character traits. This is the most important precondition in order to find the most effective and human approaches to the soul of the child.

The style of the teacher regarding the work with the class is very important. Without any doubt the democratic style of the teacher encourages development and active learning. The democratic emotional climate allows establishing a dialogue and changing of the roles in the relationship, true partner collaboration and stimulating initiative and independence. The effectiveness of the socialization of the student depends on the character and the content of the communication in the educational process. Communication is the most important determinant of the emotional condition of the personality. In the process of pedagogical communication the students not only convey information but also an emotional context (an entire range of emotions). The emotional expressive means in the process of pedagogical communication are paramount for the students of early school age.

For this purpose, *the pedagogical tact* is an important prerequisite for human communication which should be based on the following principles:

1. Tolerance

In modern instruction, the emphasis is placed on tolerance in the relationships. This practice offers more possibilities for respecting the individuality of the students and it encourages their potentials.

2. Trust

The demonstration of trust is an important principle in the human interpersonal relationships. The teacher will be able to stimulate future success and positive actions only by demonstrating trust in the abilities of the student.

3. Justness

Justness is one of the most valuable human qualities in the interpersonal interactions. The students are especially sensitive to breaking the norms and rules of human behavior in the interpersonal relations. The teacher must bear this in mind and must not underestimate the sensitivity of the children.

4. Mutual understanding

A basic characteristic of the mutual understanding is adequacy. It depends on several factors such as the nature of the relations, the quality of the relations (sympathy, antipathy, and indifference), the attitude, some

personality traits, etc. Understanding others is a rational basis of the human pedagogical interaction in the instructional process and it improves the quality of life.

5. Respecting the right to freedom

This principle requires the respect and encouragement of the children's independence and activity, creating necessary conditions for freedom in the expression of their creative potentials, the development of their abilities, i.e. in the expression of the individuality of each student.

6. Respecting diversities

Respecting diversities implies the understanding, accepting and respecting the ones different from us and developing cultural and inclusive sensibility. The need for this is even greater due to the fact that the Republic of Macedonia is a social community of many cultures, languages, religions, traditions, customs, etc. The stereotypes as relatively crude understandings of the characteristics of the members of certain social groups, can be problematic in the everyday communication of the student with the peers and adults. First of all, the students should get to know each other under the guidance of the teacher. The development of an instructional practice which abides by this principle allows strengthening of the interethnic and cultural collaboration, nurturing of the cultural diversities, strengthening the mutual understanding, ensuring educational equality, social inclusion, individuality and cultural identity.

- About the development of empathy

The ability of empathy or compassion takes the central role in the socioemotional development of the child. Empathy is a basic precondition for mutual understanding and acceptance. It is an ability for affective communication with the others, identifying with the others and understanding their feelings. Empathy helps to overcome fear and to develop and strengthen self-confidence. Empathy by itself is not enough, it is necessary to express it directly or indirectly. The teachers will be compassionate with the students, empathic, only if they are able to put themselves in their place, to feel their experiences, feelings and position.

Empathy is an emotional ability to put oneself in the shoes of another person and see the world through his/her eyes. Empathy is a complex ability which includes two personality components: intellectual (cognitive) and affective (emotional). The intellectual component of empathy includes:

- observing the other person from their point of view;
- taking the role of another person in a certain social situation.

The affective-emotional component is reflected through:

- sensitivity to the feelings of others;
- ability to be compassionate.

These abilities include sensibility for the other people. To be sensitive to the feelings of the others does not mean to fall under the influence of other people's feelings, but to relive those feelings personally. Sensibility is an ability to interpret the other person's feelings based on the external symptoms (to discover what these symptoms mean for the other person, not for us). In order to develop sensibility for the feelings of other people, one should be open to others, have a developed positive emotional attitude for people and life in general, and be free from all negative emotions.

The teachers with a developed empathy will accept students as they are and will use adequate methods and procedures to promote further development of the students' potentials. The developed empathic ability especially comes to light in the teacher-student communication. An empathic communication means to be compassionate with the students, to adapt the communication to their understanding. Empathic communication is a higher level of active-reactive communication. This means that apart from transferring information, the communication also includes mutual influence, i.e. educational influence. This communication goes deeper in the psyche of the students. It encourages their satisfaction, encourages activity and it influences their values and attitudes. The empathic communication also implies reciprocal change in the communication roles, compassion with the person with which one communicates. This interactive relation in communication is the basis of the ideal human communication – the dialogue.

- About developing positive socioemotional attitudes

The question about having an opinion in the mutual relations is especially important for the teacher, since the quality of the attitude of the student depends on the quality of the attitude of the teacher. The attitude is a complex psychological phenomenon which influences numerous areas of the personality: the cognitive area, the emotional area and the motivational area. Nevertheless, the most important component is the emotional one, since it determines the strength, value and quality of the attitude. The emotions in the attitude are polarized, i.e. they are either positive or negative (sympathy, antipathy).

Teachers should support perseverance in the process through actions which include utmost respect of the personality of the students. This is the only way to express the emotions freely and to strengthen the students' personalities and manage the personal feelings and challenges.

The teachers must know that human relationship is based exclusively onto positive emotional attitude. Otherwise, a successful communications with the students and productive interaction are impossible. In this context, only true, noble feelings can be the basis of a positive emotional attitude as an important component in the educational work and the preparation for a quality life.

- About the positive development of the self-concept

Creating conditions for recognizing one's own identity is equally important for the development of this subdomain. The self-concept or the *Self-image* is the basis for exposing the child's individuality and identity.

Taking into consideration the importance that the self-image has on the overall behavior of the students, their motivation and adaptation in the environment, it is understandable that the school is getting multidimensional tasks. The most important one is to help the students learn their self-image and correct it. The early school age students are still not able to independently and accurately assess their capabilities. Their self-image is created on the grounds of their observations, above all the assessments and judgments of the adults, especially the teachers. This is why, the teachers should be especially careful in their assessments and opinions in order to promote confidence and optimism in all students, to stimulate them for further success and positive actions.

In the context of the previously mentioned, the instructional practices must implement programs and strategies focused on the student, as the main foundation in the educational work. It is a process in which the students will develop as individuals capable of taking care of themselves and other people, become aware of their own needs and the needs of others, and who will take responsibility for their actions.

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