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The Preparation of Future Teachers to the Planning of Psychologically Safe Learning Environment

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Abstract: The article shows that the full development of an individual is connected with the satisfaction of the safety need. Psychological safety is a specific emotional state of the participants of the learning process characterized by the sense of wellbeing, security, confidence and the lack of anxiety, fear, frustration. Studying psychological and pedagogical disciplines enables the students to develop diagnostic, communicative, conflictological, prognostic, project competencies which they need for the planning of safe classroom environment. The article describes the mechanism of the development of the professional and personal qualities of future teachers (empathy, reflection, tolerance, responsibility, creativeness) which are of great importance for pupil's psychological comfort.

Key words: psychological safety, learning environment, security, competencies, tolerance, emotional stability.

The analysis of the research in the sphere of humanistic psychology shows that the full development of the human personality is connected with the fulfillment of safety need. Only in this case child's personal resources will be directed to his own development but not to the protection against possible threats. It is appropriate to consider psychological safety as a certain emotional background, as pupil's experience of the feelings of calm and confidence which arise

from the interaction with the teacher. The issue of psychological safety of school environment is connected with personal development of a child, with the state of his physical and psychological health, with the prevention of child suicides. Psychologically safe classroom where a child feels protected puts him in an optimistic mood, inspires the confidence in his strength and capabilities.

Psychological safety is a specific emotional state of an individual which is connected with the feeling of wellbeing, security, comfort, with the absence of anxiety, fear, emotional strain, frustration.

The indicators of a psychologically safe school environment are the following:

- the absence of fear for teachers;
- children's readiness to ask the teacher questions, to defend their opinion, to express their position openly;
- pupil's criticality, creativity and independence;
- a positive mood in the classroom;
- a high level of pupil's satisfaction with the school environment;
- a low level of situational anxiety.

One of the most significant factors in creating of psychological safety is the nature of interpersonal relationships between the participants of learning process as well as teacher's professional value orientations. It's apparent that teacher's personality is a key figure in creating of children's psychological security.

To what extend is a graduating student of a pedagogical university ready for the planning of psychologically safe learning environment? The answer to this question is connected not only with cognitive and technological components but, first of all, with axiological and personal aspects of teacher's competency.

Studying psychological and pedagogical disciplines enables the students to form both core and special competences. Core competencies include:

- communicative competencies (or the competencies of social interaction), i.e. the ability to communicate orally and in writing, teamwork skills, interoperability;
- ICT competencies, i.e. the ability to find and analyze the information from different sources, computer skills, the ability to skillfully use e-learning tools and integrate them into learning environment;
- organizational and management competencies, i.e. the ability to make a responsible choice, to reflect, to be critical and self-critical, initiative;
- gnostic competencies, i.e. the ability to use the methods of analysis, synthesis, comparison, juxtaposition, generalization, to see and define problems.

Psychological (special) competencies needed for the successful planning of psychologically safe learning environment include:

- diagnostic competencies, i.e. the ability to choose and adapt diagnostic tools, to *conduct* diagnostic testing and interpret its results correctly;
- preventive competencies, i.e. the readiness to prevent possible complications for pupils' mental health;
- project competencies, i.e. the ability to develop and carry out different kinds of projects adapting learning content to age, individual and personal peculiarities of pupils, the readiness to create the atmosphere favourable for the learning process;
- research competencies, i.e. the ability to conduct psychological and pedagogical investigations in different contexts;
- conflictological competencies, i.e. the ability to prevent conflicts between the participants of the learning process, to transform destructive conflicts into constructive ones, to choose the most effective ways of their resolution;
- prognostic competencies, i.e. the ability to foresee the outcomes of the learning process for each child, to forecast the ways of responding of children and their parents in different educational situations;
- competencies of psychological correction, i.e. the readiness to correct the defects of mental and personal development through the planned work aimed at the attainment of standard indicators.

We consider humanistic approach to personality, flexibility, reflection, pedagogical optimism, emotional stability, self-regulation to be the essential characteristics of a teacher which enable the effective planning of psychologically safe learning environment. The teacher equipped with psychological competencies bears the responsibility for children's wellbeing at school, for the prevention of their personal distortions, for their health maintenance, for realization of their potential abilities.

The most significant quality of a teacher which ensures pupils' psychological comfort is teacher's tolerance. Various conflicts occurring in the learning process are often connected with the teacher's intolerance to children's behaviour, actions, emotional reactions. It's obvious that empathy as the ability to response another person's emotional experience properly is extremely important for psychological security of a child. Teacher's empathy helps to support a child, to stimulate his self-confidence, to fully use psychotherapeutic potential of interaction.

At the same time, the negative qualities of a teacher like psychological pressure, tension, aggression, authoritarianism, irritability, rigidity destroy the psychological environment in the classroom.

An optimal choice for a teacher is the democratic personal style of professional activity because it supports child's confidence and criticality, reduce the level of his anxiety. Authoritarian and liberal styles of professional pedagogical activity should be considered to be unfavourable. Other factors which exert negative influence on pupils' psychological safety are the variability of teacher's demands, his diffidence, tough role behaviour, unwarranted categoricity and unambiguity. Taking into account the significance of diagnostic competencies for the preparation of future teachers to the planning of psychologically safe learning environment we developed the sets of assignments for field practice including the tasks on self-diagnostics, mutual diagnostics, interpretation of its results.

To assess the level of psychological safety of classroom environment during the field practice the students used the following methods: Leary Interpersonal Behavior Test, Phillips School Anxiety Test, the questionnaire "Psychological safety of school environment" for teenagers.

The variety of assignments on psychological disciplines played a special role in the preparation of graduating students to the planning of safe learning environment. It trained students to act in a situation of uncertainty and to estimate their potential properly.

The inclusion of role plays, imitation, development games in the learning process promoted students' tolerance and flexibility. Play technologies correspond to the special nature of student age, students' aspiration for independence, creativity, initiative, criticality, autonomy. Play modelling was diversely used while the students were studying the following courses: General Psychology, Social Psychology, Educational Psychology, Conflictology, Psychology of Special Needs.

These technologies helped students assess their communication with children who needed individual support (anxious, unsociable, aggressive children, pupils making slow progress or pupils with special educational needs). The analysis of professional situations, group discussions, role plays enabled students to think over their own undesirable actions as well as to evaluate the impact of their negative emotional states and provocative reactions on children. Special attention was paid to communicative situations when the students worked on the techniques of "active listening" and "I-messages". During the seminars on Conflictology the students were asked to recall and replay their own school conflicts, the problems they have in learning and in the communication with peers and adults. Friendly

atmosphere in the lessons, the conditions of security, confidence and acceptance of each person, the use of game symbols and attributes, training techniques contributed to the development of project, communicative, conflictological, prognostic competencies of future teachers.

The students learned from their own experience that a play situation helps positively evaluate child's behaviour, ensure the situation of success for pupils, give them psychological support. Play technologies in the preparation of future teachers enable to develop personal and professional qualities required for teachers: reflection, tolerance, empathy, responsibility, humanistic orientation.

Conflict modelling promoted future teachers' readiness to prevent violence in the classroom, to transform destructive conflicts into constructive ones. A play is an essential tool for the development of the most important teachers' abilities: self-regulation, volitional control and management of their own mental state, restraint and emotional stability – the competencies which enable the successful planning of psychologically safe learning environment.

The experience acquired by the students during the study of psychological disciplines is transferred to their quasi-professional activity in the framework of field practice. This experience helped students learn the behavioural models reducing the psychological distance between teacher and pupil, choose the appropriate behavioural reaction that is essential for the development of psychologically safe learning environment. Initial findings provide a reasonable basis to assert that the preparation of graduating students for the planning of psychologically safe learning environment is the step toward "dignity culture", toward the school which respects the rights of every child as well as creates the conditions for the maintenance of childrens' physical and psychological health and their successful personal development.

Literature:

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