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The Effect of Teacher Competencies on the Optimization of School Climate and on the Learning Process*

Summary

The paper deals with the main aspects of teacher competencies with theoretical specification of the essence of competencies and extension of the requirements for the teaching profession. The teacher is considered an expert on instructional and teaching processes under the conditions of Act No. 138/2019 Coll. on teaching staff and professional personnel in the environment aimed at creating an optimal school climate.

Keywords: teacher, competencies, school climate, learning, climate, inclusion, teaching process.

Introduction

In the 19th century, the pedagogical work of a good teacher was perceived holistically as an effective activity that resulted into a measurable “learnability” of pupils. A substantial part of the pedagogical work was associated with a strict discipline, but at the same time it was compared with art, an activity between art

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and science, with art, it also referred to the “science of education” as Samuel Ormis (Srogoň, 1976) put it. Gradually, the efforts to capture all aspects of pedagogical activity and to describe the pedagogical work in more detail appeared in contemporary documents. Since the beginning of the first preparations, the content of teacher training has sought to respond to the current requirements of school practice in the context of the socio-centric goals of formal education system. At the same time, more recent conditions in Slovakia presented a continuation of traditions and despite certain decentralization and several attempts for the reform (Švec, 2015), it is the representatives of Slovak education policy who are primarily responsible for the setting of performance standards (Cabanová, 2015, Kubalíková-Kacian, 2016). The current institution of school has lost its monopoly on education; however, by changing social conditions and other significant trends in society, such as weakening the position of the institution of family, the institution of school has taken on new tasks previously performed by the family, which have an impact on the work and tasks related to the efficiency of the work (Kasíková, 1997).

1. Competence as a professional ability

As the teaching profession evolved, the graduate profile of the teacher training studies gradually depended on an increasingly detailed prescription of the dimensions of the professional and personal aspects of his/her personality. Since the end of the 20th century, in the trend of specification of optimal performance of teachers, the experts defined the entire set of professional abilities, also referred to as *competencies*. This set was supposed to cover important aspects of teacher’s pedagogical work. Given their scope and mutual prediction, they could be described as *the taxonomy of the teacher’s professional abilities* (Průcha, 2002, p. 105). A substantial part of the competencies should be acquired by a teacher in the course of university studies; on the basis of this observation we discuss about the whole set of starting competencies, which is in the first phase largely dominated by theoretical knowledge (Průcha, 2002). The relationship between competence and accountability. The expression *competence* refers to a composite personality trait and is related to the legitimacy and ability to perform a profession and there exist up to ten approaches to perceiving the essence of competence (Š. Švec, Terminological Board of the Ministry of Education, Švec, 2015).

From the educational perspective, these are in particular: 1. the competence as a qualification, 2. the competence as an authority (Gavora, Mareš, 1996, Obdržálek, Horvátová, 2004, Š. Švec, 2015, Petlák, 2016). E.C. Short (in Krajňáková, 2010) defines competence as the mastery of the situation in a changing environment; it is the ability to react to the environment and to change it.

In general, ‘competence’ is a type of professional aptitude, authorizing an individual for the process of *preparation* (Slavík, Siňor, 1993) and to the *realization* of work performance at the required level (Švec, 2015, Průcha, 1997) in professional development during the biodromal career of the teacher – professional; we refer to “... the whole set of professional abilities and dispositions that a teacher should be equipped in order to effectively carry out his/her profession” (Průcha, Walterová, Mareš, 2009, pp. 103–104, Švec, 2015, Petlák, 2016). The term “competence” has been one of the most frequently discussed terms in Slovak pedagogical propedeutics, pedeutology, general didactics and in the field didactics in the last two decades. As many authors point out (e.g. Mužík 2004, p. 48), the term was coined by Siegrist and Belz (2001).

Other authors, such as e.g. Krajňáková (2010) consider the earlier works of American authors dealing with management, such as Woodruff (1990), Spencer (1990), Armstrong (1999), who, similarly to Siegrist and Belz (2001), understood this term more generally than it was defined by other researchers who are currently working on the professional skills of a teacher. The common denominator for earlier studies was the effectiveness/ inefficiency of the human factor. According to Siegrist and Belz (2001), ‘competence’ refers to the general ability of a personality that transcends the boundaries of a profession and which plays an important role in finding a position on the labor market. The mentioned authors noted (2001, p. 17) that “key competencies are acquired through different types of education, such as school and business education or continuing professional training”. In a broader sense, “competencies” can be graphically depicted (Siegrist and Belz 2001) in the form of a three-dimensional model modified by Mužík (2004):

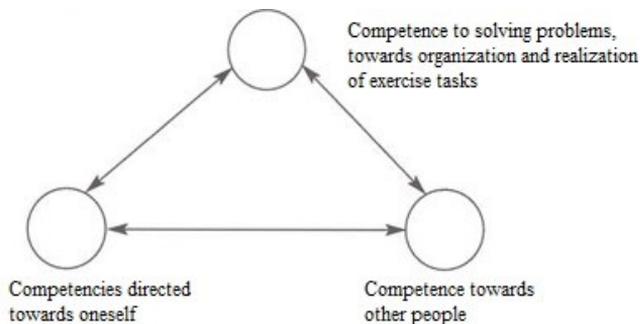


Figure 1

A three-dimensional model of competencies

Source: Belz, H., Siegrist, M. (2001). *Klíčové kompetence a jejich rozvíjení: Východiska, metody, cvičení a hry*. 2. vydanie. Praha: Portál; Mužík, J. (2004). *Androdidaktika*. Praha: ASPI Publishing.

According to Belz and Siegrist (2001) and other authors e.g. Mužík (2004), the key competencies can be divided in terms of the focus into three main areas:

1. *Competencies directed towards oneself*. This area includes the ability to apply self-reflection techniques (metacognition), learning and mental work techniques (e.g., the attitude towards learning, evaluating and communicating information), independence (self-regulation) and responsibility (personal responsibility and co-responsibility in dealing with work tasks) and overload-resistance (mental hygiene, stress reduction strategies, mental and physical resistance).
2. *Competence to solving problems, towards organization and realization of exercise tasks* (planning and organizing work, continuous monitoring of work results and their evaluation). It largely reflects inner beliefs and it is an expression of a set of expectations and life philosophy of a teacher.
3. *Competence towards other people* – this primarily covers openness and clarity of communication as well as the degree of cooperation (teacher behavior towards other teachers and school staff, classroom management style, the degree of directive policy and autonomy).

Professional competencies are a prerequisite for gaining professionalism.

From the perspective of contemporary experts in the field, the professional competencies are understood more narrowly, they are directly related to professional competencies of the teaching profession. Their diapason, with a view to expanding the work of the teacher, not only as a learning organizer, but also at the time of contemporary multicultural reality, as a *cultural scientist*, who, at the time of aggression in schools, also acts as a *preventivist, counselor and mediator* and to some extent as a *therapist and information collector* (Huber 1993 in Baďuriková, Bazáliková, Timková, Kompolt, 2001).

The acquisition of “expertise” is a complex process of professional creation that is closely related to the initial phase, i.e. to mastering *the starting competencies* (Průcha, 1997), which are associated with self-direction and self-education and need to be expanded, deepened and improved in practical work on the path to professionalism. Typologically, they are classified as the so-called *developmental competencies* (Průcha, 1997). Since entering the practice (with initial support and supervision by an experienced mentoring teacher), the teacher acquires practical pedagogical experience and within the framework of his/ her professional skills he/ she updates the advanced knowledge in the adaptive education, etc. The pressure on the processes of self-education also creates 1st and 2nd qualification examination.

On the basis of these reasons, the development of teacher competence is seen as a necessity at present. The concept of *competence* is closely linked to *accountability* in education, which expresses the *ability and duty* (Průcha, Walterová, Mareš, 1998, p. 19), addressable *responsibility* (Š. Švec, 1995, Gavora, Mareš, 1996, Průcha, Walterová, Mareš, 1998) for the quality of the provided services, especially for pedagogical performance, which is realized to an optimal extent and quality. The core is the addressable, accountable responsibility of the teacher

(towards the founders of a school, the school board, parents) for what the pupils are taught (Švec, *ibid.*).

Organizations established by the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic are also jointly responsible for teacher development.

These organizations play a part in the fulfillment of tasks in the area of professional development of pedagogical and professional employees (Act on Pedagogical and Professional Employees of 10 May 2019, No. 138/2019 Coll., Section 2d). The trend of addressable responsibility exerts a great pressure on the development of measurable performance indicators (National Institute for Certified Educational Measurements, 2019), on the overall normativeness of teaching work, with a tendency to measuring pedagogical performance and specifically delimit the optimal level and to determine the range of key competencies (Macháčik, 2004, Macháčik-Polonský, 2005, Petlák, 2016). In the professional public in Slovakia, there are advocates as well as opponents of this relatively significant trend. A large group of educators in practice is seen as a negative factor, as it is perceived as a form of restriction of autonomy and interference with the freedom of work of teachers (from the SAU statement). The advocates of more precise prescription of the set of competencies of teachers are influenced by the school-political circles to seek and define the essential and decisive qualities of the performance of the teaching profession in favor of more effective performance in school practice and its legislative anchoring in strategic school-policy documents (www.minedu.sk). In their approach, they represent a rudimentary basis, which conditions the success of a teacher in both educational and professional growth and in continuous improvement of performance (Průcha, 1997, 2002, Turek, 2004, Petlák, 2016).

The expertise as a system of acquired professional competencies. Following the work of Chalupný, J. Koťa (1994) distinguishes three trends in the development of the teaching profession: *professional, generalizing and partial* (in Baďuriková, Bazáliková, Timková, Kompolt, 2001, p. 104). In scientific literature, various approaches in classifying teachers' competencies can be observed. Ch. Kyriacou (1996, p. 23, see also Kyriacou 2012) divides the areas of professional competencies of the teacher and defines competencies according to the focus of a particular pedagogical activity involved in a successful teaching process, respectively. The starting point is the achievement of didactic goals and criterion of necessary pedagogical skills is related to efficiency. *These are professional competencies in the area of planning and teaching preparation; in the realization and management of the teaching unit, in the area of classroom climate, discipline, assessment of pupils' achievement and reflection of their own work and teacher self-reflection.* E. Petlák and I. Hupková (2004, p. 100) draw attention to the classification of competencies according to the Czech expert J. Vašutová, who, in the process of their postulation, directly follows the report of the European Commis-

sion Education for the 21st century and on this basis, Vašutová divides professional competencies into the following groups: *vocational-subject, didactic and psychological-didactic, general-educational, diagnostic and interventional, social, psychological-social and communicative, managerial and normative, professional and personal-cultivating*. Researchers L. Sokolová and M. Lemešová (2014), reflecting contemporary trends, identified separate professional competencies for their needs of research: *subject, pedagogical, didactic, diagnostic, organizational, professionally cultivating, interpersonal, intrapersonal and social-inclusive competencies*.

From the above mentioned, it is evident that the authors dealing with the problem determine the *whole groups* (systems) of professional competencies. Their acquisition, preservation and further improvement are considered to be a continuous process throughout a lifelong professional specialization. The expertise is acquired on the basis of learning and learning processes, not only at school, but also at work, in the family, in cultural and social life, and therefore, *their structure changes throughout life* (Průcha, 2002, Mužík, 2004, Turek, 2004, Petlák, 2016). At the beginning, there is an inner conviction of the beginning teacher about taking a professional career with the intention of becoming a good teacher, while the orientation of pedagogical work changes in the context of the cycle of professional development (Sokolová, Lemešová, 2014). The acquisition of key competencies is not only a matter of the individual's personal effort, but it also requires a *favorable social ecological environment* (V. Švec, 2011, Š. Švec, 2015).

At the Faculty of Humanities (until 2010 of the Faculty of Sciences) of the University of Žilina in 2005, experts D. Polonský and D. Macháčík, on the basis of a theoretical analysis of relevant research, eclectically allocated *basic groups of the key competencies* that are a precondition for effective pedagogical work of teachers. According to the above-mentioned authors, the rudimentary core lies in the *expertise* that is the first prerequisite for professional growth. Since its acquisition, the emergence and development of other competencies take place. Without expertise, the follow-up could not be further developed. The authors refer to competencies expressing expertise as *professional subject competencies* (Polonský, Macháčík, 2005) or *subject competencies* only (Sokolová, Lemešová, 2014). These basal competencies are closely related to cognitive processes, to complex knowledge of the field (both in historical context and to the extent of current scientific knowledge), and to the expertise of the specialist teacher profession.

Didactic competencies of a teacher. The group of key competencies related to other persons, according to Siegrist and Belz (2001, 2008), include *didactic competencies*. These are competencies that are related to the *content and process* aspects of teaching (Petty, 1996, Petlák, 2016). The continuous knowledge of the teacher (expertise) is essential for the following step: presenting knowledge in the form of purposeful and comprehensible curriculum (with regard to the age of pupils and current knowledge), for an easier understanding presented to pupils in

the structure of key and related concepts (Pasch, Garden, Langerová et al., 1998). From a didactic perspective, teachers' explanation consists of a sequence of thought steps presented in a logical sequence (Skalková, 1999). The steps are gradually mediated by the teacher so that the pupils can understand, share, receive and adopt the explanation. (Skalková, 1999, Petlák, 2016).

In the teaching process, the teacher presents pupils continually updated curriculum, implemented with the latest content of culture (the content of education which is presented in selected textbooks) related to the given subject in an appropriate form and scope (Petty, 1996, Skalková, 1999). This part of competencies can be successfully carried out only by thorough knowledge of the requirements for the scope and depth of knowledge within the given qualification framework (Švec, 2015). The teacher is expected to adhere to the performance and content standards defined by the following basic school documents: curriculum, curricula and thematic plans for a given subject (Polonský, Macháčík, 2005, Turek, 1995, Petlák, 2016).

From a didactic perspective, in the theoretical and practical component of teaching, in addition to cognitive mastering of the subject matter (Pasch, Garden, Langerová et al., 1998), particular emphasis is placed on the procedural aspect of teaching: *the application of activating methods, techniques and effective learning strategies* which are the core of didactic abilities and form the core of the teacher's own mastery (Fontana, 2003, Petlák, 2016). New learning pathways are particularly important for further learning processes (Turek, 1995). It is a whole set of professional methods and procedures that facilitate learning processes for learners (Polonský, Macháčík, 2005, Turek, 2004). It is at the level of mastering the didactic competencies of the teacher that there is pedagogical mastery, the ability to flexibly respond to educational situations and to modify the means of education (methods, strategies and procedures) according to several variables, to select optimal didactic tools in the decision making process according to the specific characteristics of the target group (Polonský, Macháčík 2005, Turek, 1995, Petlák, 2016). The aim is an active involvement of pupils in the process of acquiring long-lasting knowledge while optimally guiding educational processes by methods suitable for pupils (Petlák, 2016) who are in the position of learning subjects.

Although the didactic aspects focus on cognitive learning, the current trend is related to the emotionalization of teaching: linking the cognitive domain (learning processes) and the socio-affective (emotional features), since pupils do not forget studying material that they learn with pleasure (Zelina, 1994, Švec, 2011). It is a didactic competence, which significantly contributes to stimulating conditions of effective education. In more detail, it is also related to acquiring skills as a part of professional competencies, in particular:

- defining a hierarchy of learning process objectives with the main focus on harmonizing the development goals of the cognitive and non-cognitive do-

- main of a pupil's personality through the tasks focused on different levels of thought operations (on the basis of the taxonomies for respective taxonomy),
- effective work with the curriculum: the selection and identification of the core curriculum with its didactic transformation and schematic application into practical life (Pasch, Garden, Langerová, et al., 1998, Petlák, 2016),
 - identification of the main elements of the educational process (Petty, 1996, Pasch, Garden, Langerová et al., 1998, Švec 2015),
 - understanding the evolution of group interactions and interactions within the group and inducing conditions for optimal cooperative learning (Kasíková, 1997),
 - preference for an active learning in the form of orientation-search learning (Linhart in Švec, 2015),
 - an optimal application of teaching resources depending on the specific conditions of education (Grecmanová, 2008, Petlák, 2016),
 - preferential use of the demonstration methods, visual and natural elements, and interactive teaching aids (Skalková, 1999),
 - active acquisition of knowledge through active learning methods, such as games, simulation and role-playing (Petty, 1996, pp. 188–202),
 - systematic consolidation of the curriculum in favor of permanent remembering,
 - acquiring the ability to effectively apply progressive organizational forms with the focus on support and creation of space for interesting activities with an emphasis on deepening interest in the field (Švec, 2015). The teacher is expected to apply a creative and innovative approach in the educational process (Valent, 2017, Petlák, 2016). Due to the interest of the subject, the teacher should innovate the subject, while it is important to know rigorously the methodology of the subject:
 - a) to monitor current professional and scientific work related to his/ her field,
 - b) know the interests and individual needs of their pupils,
 - c) know the local (regional) conditions (Cabanová, 2006),
 - d) be persistent in the efforts to arouse the interest of pupils (Petty, 1996).

The teacher can implement the up-to-date innovations through curriculum innovation within the school curriculum by designing a curriculum (the content of education) that “... *represents the construction of objectives, content, resources, ways of organizing the teaching process*” (Průcha, Walterová, Mareš, 1998, 194). In this regard, the target-program learning project is: “an organized educational and training plan, the fulfillment of which leads to various levels of education and to various educational qualifications, the curriculum of the school course, the content of education (at school, course, subject), the experiential content of learning which is organized in a school or in some other learning environment and

which expresses general objectives or the area of theoretical reflection about the essential principles” (Švec, 1995, pp. 183–184, Švec, 2011).

The third group of competencies, directly affecting the quality of didactic activity also includes *managerial competencies*, which can be assigned to *didactic and pedagogical competencies*, respectively. They consist of components of cognition (the outcomes of objective diagnostics), planning and organization (Vodáček, Vodáčková, 2004), teacher’s work and school class management. Based on a theoretical analysis of approaches to school classroom management, authors based in Brno – Lukas, Lojdová (2018) structured the perspective of process perception into three areas (dichotomies): the first is related to the basic approaches to classroom management, which they describe as *behavioral or humanistic*. The second dichotomy, according to the authors, is a two-dimensional class management, which are *behavioral management* and the *instructional management*. The third dichotomy is a specific classroom management practices that are analyzed through *proactive and reactive teacher approaches* (Lukas, Lojdová, 2018).

When managing a school class, the teacher must take into account the whole set of variables that he or she has to take into account during the teaching process in order to achieve the optimum result. Their sophisticated management (guiding) of the lesson is based on the expert insight (situational understanding) of learning processes and continuous evaluation of partial results or of possible corrections.

It also includes the ability to develop a real time-topic oriented plan of educational process, creation of individual plans of strategies for the support and development of the pupil’s personality and of a real prognosis of development of pupil’s personality (action research), decision making, implementation and the control of implementation (Obdržálek, Horvátová, 2004, Polonský, Macháčík, 2005, Sokolová, Lemešová, 2014). At the end of this phase, there are diagnostic and evaluation activities (mastering the methods and techniques of diagnosis and the objective assessment of pupil’s performance), personal and intrapersonal (constructive and open communication and democratic management of a team of workers (Hupková, Petlák, 2004) and project work.

Communication competencies are mainly related to pedagogical communication with pupils in the classroom (applying the principles of open communication between teacher and pupils), as well as the communication with closer and wider social environment (with parents, benefactors, etc.). They primarily reflect the ability of the teacher to choose appropriate language means in real conditions of a communicative situation – in the unity of verbal and non-verbal, direct and indirect communication (Polonský, Macháčík, 2005), while keeping the rules of effective pedagogical communication (subject to the type of a communicative act).

The basis is willingness towards communication, conciseness, clarity, directness of communication, openness of communication and active listening (Mareš,

Křivohlavý, 1990). There are adequate argumentation skills, persuasiveness, adequacy of language and means of expression, especially gestures, which are significant as well (see Kominarec, Štuřáková, Ferencová, Zahatňanská, 2015).

The group of competencies which are related to *one another* and at the same time significantly influence didactic competencies include *the competencies of a comprehensive view of the educational process and of the actual activity, which is based on a critical and objective self-reflection*. It represents the formation of a professional identity that is associated with the reflection of oneself – it helps to realize the aspects of one's personality and to compare them with the perception of the ideal "professional self". It includes self-knowledge and building a professional identity (Hupková, Petlák, 2004, Sokolová, Lemešová, 2014). This part of the expertise consists in a regular analysis of one's behavior (ex post facto). It lies in the ability and skills of the teacher to thoroughly analyze the educational process in all its phases and to find their own proportion in the positive and negative results which are achieved. The starting point is to master basic procedures, methods and techniques of scientific work and their application in critical self-reflection, in comparison of educational activities with other teachers, researchers, and also in effective application of methods of management of educational activities (including own) in all phases and cycles, in terms of both qualitative and quantitative indicators. It is basically a cumulative ability of teachers to comprehensively analyze and compare the level of educational process – including aspects of humanization, and on the basis of this, to synthesize the knowledge and draw appropriate conclusions (Macháček, Polonský, 2005, Hupková, Petlák, 2004).

As a mature person, in addition to the process of self-improvement, the teacher must resist unexpected problems of his/her profession. The high level of stress related to the profession requires learning how to deal with being overloaded and to manage stress relief (Goleman, 1997). At the same time, this long-term process involves considerably higher level of health care in understanding the strengthening of physical and mental fitness, but also in the cultivation of an active approach to life in general (Drotárová, 1997).

Competencies of creative and critical problem solving. These competencies are associated with the abilities of creative (innovative, original, inventive, unconventional, flexible, unconventional) and impartial (without prejudice, of an objective nature) thinking. The teacher must specifically promote *inventive mechanisms and self-sensitivity and creativity* (Drotárová, 1997, p. 15).

On the one hand, this requires a high level of preparedness of teachers with inherent practical experience and skills, on the other hand, favorable social conditions and a lively social environment are required as well. For this reason, self-reflection of the teacher is important (Hupková, Petlák, 2004).

The competencies associated with working with modern information and communication technologies are among latest competencies that are based on the

literacy definitions in 21st century. It requires the ability to work with a personal computer (at the ECDL level) and with the Internet. The teacher is expected to be able to keep electronic records and use methodically oriented databases. At the same time, it simplifies the use of information resources and information in the process of preparation and implementation of the teaching process. Furthermore, it also simplifies evaluation, planning, communication and assignment of tasks and performing numerical and symbolic operations (Polonský, Macháček, 2005). Paradoxically, this is the area where a teacher (given the average age of teachers in Slovakia) has to be educated to keep up with pupils. At the same time, the use of new technologies in teaching can make teaching more interesting and provide pupils with another interesting way of learning. Given the speed of innovation in the field of information technology, education is a continuous process, coupled with an increase in educational requirements and intellectualization of life, particularly in the area of citizens' digital literacy (Turek, 2002).

The teacher has the status of a public official and his/her private life is subject to social control. On the basis of this reason, the authors D. Polonský and D. Macháček (2005) also distinguish *civic competencies*. The teacher has a high moral credit in the eyes of the public, and at the same time s/he is acting towards parents and the public with opinion-forming. There is a harmony between the private and professional life of the teacher, consisting of co-responsibility for public affairs and active participation in society, involvement in school, in the municipality, at the place of permanent residence, etc. (Cabanová, 2006). In the spirit of democratic principles, in relation to pupils, the teacher is a representative not only of the school but of the whole society. With their profession, the teacher represents humanistic attitude in relation to other people (representation of a demanding character, but also respect towards pupils, students and environment as such). There is a recognition and promotion of democratic principles (e.g., creating conditions for an open discussion, while respecting the level of learners); the main principle lies in upholding and defending human ethical values in at all costs. This aspect is based on knowing and fulfilling the citizen's fundamental rights and obligations; compliance with applicable laws, standards, codes and rules (Mazůrek, 2016).

Motivational competence in education and in coaching has a close connection with managerial and leadership competence and is essential for an effective management of various phases of the learning process (with the use of effective communication). Motivational competence overlaps all competencies and significantly determines the level of activity and activation (Zelina, 1994). They are formed at two basic levels (Macháček, Polonský, 2005) – *internal (endogenous)*, where the basic motivational forces (motivators) represent the needs of teachers and the degree of motivation reflects to certain degree the level of their saturation; *external (exogenous)*, where the role of motivators are responsibilities, powers, responsibilities for fulfilling the goals and tasks of the workplace, such as positive

(in the form of rewards) or negative (various forms of punishments) and they are differently focused motivational incentives (Macháčik, Polonský, 2005).

In the process of systematization of approaches to professional competencies, the entire scope of the teacher's professional competencies for each author has been analyzed. According to J. Vašutová (2002, pp. 136–137), the basis of *pedagogical competence* consists of knowledge, skills and attitudes in the area of interpersonal strategies (relationships and interactions), pupil learning strategies (e.g., cognitive styles, motivation, learning resources and barriers, learning success), pupils' personalities and their professional socialization (personality skills, experiential learning, social learning, individual interests and needs, age and intellectual peculiarities of pupils), knowledge about management of pupils' learning activities (the organization of learning conditions for learning support, management of learning activities, control and documentation), on the transformation of new scientific knowledge into the curriculum (the creation and updating of the curriculum) and on the design of curricula (courses) of teaching.

At the same time, these (pedagogical) competencies include the use of heuristic, exploratory, activating methods of learning in teaching and the application of information technology (through computer-aided teaching). This also includes student assessment strategies (examinations, testing, feedback, formative and summative assessment, student self-assessment, student self-reflection tools) and teaching assessment strategies (assessment tools and teaching effectiveness), pedagogical creativity in the process of creation of study texts and teaching and self-assessment materials and self-reflection of teachers (self-education, self-development). In this regard, pedagogical competence is a superior term, which includes individual components – specialized competencies of the teacher, which other authors have singled out separately.

In the terminology of management theory, the professional competencies of teachers can be seen as the so-called *sequential competencies* (they are classified as activities related to management and leadership), which overlap with other so-called *continuous competencies* of the teacher, contained in each individual sequential competence (Polonský, Macháčik, 2005, Obdržálek, Horvátová, 2004). All the aforementioned sets of competencies require from the teacher also the ability of *harmonization of all the elements of the teacher education system* (Macháčik, Polonský, 2005, Petlák, 2016).

2. The teacher and their contribution to the creation of a tolerant climate

Generally, the school climate is a “socio-psychological variable that expresses the quality of interpersonal relationships and social processes that function in a school as perceived, experienced and evaluated by teachers, pupils, and school

staff. A part of the school climate is related to, e.g. the climate of the teaching staff, the climate of school classes, the overall environment of the school, etc.” (Průcha, Walterová, Mareš, 1998, p. 107, Grecmanová, 2008). An optimal school climate is one of the main conditions for an effective learning process. A teacher based at a Slovak school has been confronted with challenges and limitations for a long time. In the period up to 1989, *the favorable climate and the “spirit of the school”* were distorted (Švec, 2011) as there were the following features of the educational system:

- a) *too much authoritarianism from superiors and a lack of autonomy of subordinates, resulting in a low degree of responsibility for themselves, including teacher-pupil organizational relationships;*
- b) there prevailed one-way form of communication between teacher – pupils. This form of communication was of a transmissive nature, it was directed from the teacher towards the pupil; pupils did not have enough opportunities for the self-realization” (Švec, 2011, pp. 32–33).
- c) *the preference of collective learning* did not allow a greater use of the individual approach, and of cooperative and peer learning.

After 1989, the Slovak society significantly diversified, which was reflected in the school environment. The reasons for the increase in *diversity*, as understood by Brukker and Opatíková (2006, p. 98) as a *variety* or *heterogeneity* have several causes in today’s social life:

- a) an increased migration of natives and of foreigners, linked to the openness of the European labor market. Both processes (migration and immigration) are primarily reflected in the life of Slovak model of school. Other impacts are of secondary importance; they are associated with gradual process of weakening or with temporary and permanent changes in the structure and functions of the Slovak family (e.g. parents work abroad and children live in the household of grandparents after their parents leave for work). Teachers encounter new forms of behavior of immigrant children in school classes, especially in the area of culture (there are various factors such as language, religion, values, ethnicity).
- b) Decentralization and the overall liberalization of school regulations (regulations) have brought about free space; the increase in freedom in schools was also reflected in the increase of the manifestations of youth subcultures.
- c) Socio-economic differences have also brought about an increase in manifestations of material and spiritual poverty in the school environment. There has been an increase in the number of children from socially dependent families (e.g., pupils without tools, adequate clothing, healthy diet, pupils without snacks, without one warm meal a day), pupils whose family does not provide adequate means to acquire school-based competencies (e.g. school courses, school in nature, etc.). Teachers observe an increase in the number of pupils

whose parents do not pay enough attention to educational and emotional aspects.

- d) Strengthening the influence of individualistic Western culture which supports individuality of the pupil's personality in an overexposed way (there is an increasing egocentrism and focusing on one's own needs and interests as well as decreasing social competencies of pupils, etc.).
- e) Extending the exercise of pupil's rights (without recognizing the need for a balance between freedom and responsibility, freedom is used unilaterally and spontaneously).
- f) Increase in the number of pupils with specific needs. This aspect is related to the shifting of civilization diseases (diabetes, obesity, etc.) to childhood age, weakening of the physical condition of the young generation, the increase of health problems and learning disabilities.
- g) Increased manifestations of non-cooperative and aggressive behavior.

In the long term, each of the above-mentioned manifestations affects the school and class climate and educational processes, either directly or indirectly by creating a specific subculture (affecting the effectiveness of education). The increase in the variety creates an increased demand for teachers for both the content and the process, and poses new challenges.

Current education responds to the diversity of educational reality and it needs to shape the intercultural competencies of the teacher in such a way that he/she is able to change pupils' attitudes in favor of respecting otherness from tolerance to admission (by creating an inclusive educational environment). At present, the main reasons for promoting multicultural education at school (Mistrik et al., 2008, p. 13) are mainly the following ones:

- to learn to accept otherness,
- to promote respect for minorities by the majority;
- to contribute to the peaceful inclusion of minorities,
- to find ways of understanding and cooperation through cultural contacts,
- to create ideological, geographical and politically correct openness of Slovak society.

A particularly important element is the introduction of a tolerant climate, in which the differences are accepted and the conditions for satisfying and inspiring pupils' learning are created (Košťrnová, 2015).

Teacher's authority – a determinative element of the class climate. Much depends on the personality of the teacher. The teacher is seen as one of the most important factors involved in creating classroom climate. Their pedagogical approach sets the limits of pupils' behavior, he/she has a regulating function because he/she has the authority (etym. "authority" comes from Latin expression *Auger* which means to grow, strengthen, support, encourage).

The teacher's opinions, attitudes, decisions are accepted, respected and followed or taken up by the pupils (they identify themselves with appropriate gui-

dance). The position of the teacher represents a formal authority for the pupils, with organizational and management competence. The teacher is in the position of the person in charge of decision-making and can possibly enforce obedience (Keller, 1997). At the same time, the teacher should have a *natural* authority, or an *informal one*, based on a professional persuasiveness. Pupils appreciate extensive knowledge and respectfully look at those teachers who are good experts and underestimate teachers whose knowledge is weak (in this way, teachers lose authority most quickly). A great emphasis is being placed on the correct methodological approach to the lesson and the interest and clarity of interpretation. The teacher guides the pupils in their activities and therefore he/ she should be well-informed, with a lot of interest and knowledge. A new school teacher needs to know history and culture, the traditions of a village or a town where the school is located. There should be an integration partly also in the form of the *anticipatory socialization* which is a process of learning and acquiring values, norms and behavioral patterns of the social group and of the people of the area in which the teacher intends to operate.

It is not sufficient enough if the teacher only has a good command of the science she/he teaches and its link to other sciences, life and practice. The personality of the teacher should be based on a decent behavior, a “fair” conduct, fair evaluation, personal “charisma”, but also on other features, such as passion; pupils also highly appreciate teachers’ sense of humor, etc. The features of teachers influence pupils’ relationship to learning, the degree of their learning effort, interest in the curriculum, joy and emotional satisfaction from the results achieved.

Despite the above mentioned facts, some pupils have difficulties respecting authority. Several authors point to a close relationship between family and school: if a pupil has father at home, whom he/she respects as an authority, he/she naturally respects the authority of the teacher at school. Recognizing the authority of the father, accepting and respecting his morality is the first step towards accepting the authority of the teacher at school (Lorenz, 1990) and towards respecting the representatives of society as such in adulthood, since *morality is a continuation of the attitude to matters* (Giussani, 1996). At present, the democratization of school conditions is discussed as a markedly positive trend; however, weakening the authority of a teacher, even expressing himself/ herself in the sense of the unnecessary need of teacher authority, is harmful, as the division of power causes helplessness (Pernerová, 2000).

In addition to didactic competencies, the basis for creating optimal conditions for learning processes is represented by *social-inclusive competencies* (Sokolová, Lemešová, 2015), based on the creation of free conditions.

The justification of focusing on a group of competencies focused on the relationships with others. Basic personality features of the teacher, which arise from his/her competencies in education, according to the Slovak authors Kariková, Oravcová (2003), Kosová (2000) and based on the work of C. Rogers (1969) and

the pioneer of humanistic education in Slovakia, Professor Štefan Svec, 1993, 2011) are represented by:

1. Teacher's authenticity – teacher is a real, open, honest and has an unstated expression. He/she confesses self-esteem to children (pedagogical optimism).
2. Congruence of the teacher – is the match of his/her inner experience – of emotions, motives, opinions, attitudes – with their external manifestations.
3. Acceptance of the child by the teacher – respects the other with its peculiarities and differences, shows respect and respect.
4. Empathy – has understanding for pupils, can empathize and understand difficulties and peculiarities of children.
5. Tolerance – the ability to accept other opinions, to show leniency towards the actions of children.
6. Partnership between the teacher and educator – it is manifested in indicating that the child is also a significant being, encouraging him to overcome failures and to act independently and responsibly.
7. Teacher's love for children – forms the basis of the teacher's professional orientation. Without a positive emotional relationship, it is impossible to efficiently achieve not only the educational but also the personal goals of both the educator and educator.

The term “style of education” refers to the way in which the educator manages the educational process, what requirements he/ she has on pupils and what space he/ she gives them for independence and self-development” (Kosová, 2000, p. 96). In terms of teacher and pupil's participation in managing pupil education, the following styles of education are most often discussed (Kosová, 2000):

Directive style - the learning process is guided by orders and prohibitions. The pupil here is an object rather than an entity, everything is decided by the teacher. However, this style also finds its application, especially when it is necessary to improve discipline, performance of pupils or, at times of chaos, a threat to child safety.

Democratic style – respects children's personality. Not only the teacher but also the pupil is involved in the process management. This style is characterized by a mutual cooperation.

Liberal style – the teacher relies on the independence of children, giving them a lot of space for self-realization and free choice. Style can be applied when children are independent and disciplined (Kosová, 2000).

Barriers in creating a climate that is optimal for learning processes can be caused by:

- a) pre-established organizational rules of the institution (school rules), often as a result of management's efforts to comply with regulations and with school rules, as well as too strict (rigid) class rules set by a class teacher or other teachers. The opposite extreme is an overly relaxed atmosphere or benevolence;

- b) *internal barriers* based on the teacher's personality (subjective barriers to cognition of a pupil's personality: permanent personality traits, transient personality traits, prejudices, false goodness effect, etc.). The teacher systematically works with his/her motives in order to improve his/her insufficiency.

Teachers' standards determine the scope of the competencies which are currently required. The extent of teachers' work should always be based on the relevant teaching standards (Turek, 2004). In pedagogical practice, as can be observed above, standards do not cover all the required competencies of the teacher. Based on the definition of professional competencies, professional standards have been formulated in many countries as quality standards for the teaching profession (Valent, 2017). In the first decade of the 21st century, discussions on the possibilities of creating a *European teacher standard* were also opened in the integration processes (Valent, 2017, in Spilková, Tomková et al., 2010, pp. 25–26). The above key competencies of teachers also find their application in the definition of teacher standards, which have been precisely defined and subdivided into seven categories I. Turek (a standard can be understood as a measure of the limit at which performance can be still considered acceptable. Standard, in this case a tutorial standard thus represents a minimal level of knowledge, skills, habits, abilities and personal qualities that a teacher must present in order to be successful in the educational process. The teacher training system is also improved through *the introduction of a new career education system*. It is a *regular and systematic* (corresponding to the social position which is adopted) training of teachers in intervals associated with their attestation (Macháček, Polonský, 2005).

Conclusion

In the last two decades, teacher competencies have become an important object of the research conducted by university experts, especially at the faculties of teacher training. Several scientific and research institutions organized international scientific conferences on the issue of competencies. They were held at the faculties of Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica (2006), in Prešov at the University in Prešov and at FPHV in Košice. The Faculty of Sciences of the University of Žilina (2004) organized a conference "Teacher Competencies in the Information Society". There are many stimulating studies and publications to define the key competencies of teachers (Turek, 2002, Turek, 2004, Zelina 2004, Mužík, 2004, Kominarec, Krajčová, 2007, 2015, Cabanová, 2006, Macháček 2004, Grecmanová, 2008, Švec, 2011, Kosová, 2000, 2012, Petlák, 2016 and others). The acquisition of teacher professionalism is achieved by mastering a set of competencies. The system of teacher competencies is constantly focused on practical implementation of scientific research activities, implementation of action research. It would be optimal if this newly formulated career system was

continuously supplemented by a new system of *rewarding of teachers*, which would also take into account and stimulate further education and self-education of teachers.

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Act on Educational and Professional Employees and on Amendments and Supplements to Certain Acts No. 138/2019 Coll. § 2d of May 10, 2019.

Wpływ kompetencji nauczycieli na optymalizację klimatu w szkole i na proces uczenia się

Streszczenie

Artykuł podejmuje problematykę kluczowych aspektów dotyczących kompetencji nauczycieli wraz z teoretyczną specyfikacją istoty tych kompetencji oraz rozszerzenia wymagań dotyczących zawodu nauczyciela. Nauczyciel jest uważany za eksperta w zakresie instruowania i procesu kształcenia zgodnie z ustawą nr 138/2019 Rady Narodowej Słowacji o kadrze nauczycielskiej i profesjonalnym personelu w środowisku nakierowanym na tworzenie optymalnego klimatu szkolnego.

Słowa kluczowe: nauczyciel, kompetencje, klimat szkolny, uczenie się, inkluzja, proces nauczania.