

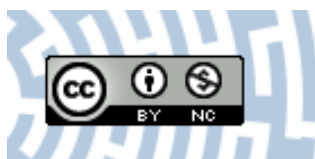


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## Creative and Emotional Competence of Contemporary Teachers

### Abstract

In the article the authors present the theoretical and practical outline of creative and emotional competence as a main need of teachers.

The theoretical part of the article considers the latest research into creativity and emotional intelligence. The authors pay special attention to the importance of these abilities in contemporary school.

The diagnostic part concentrates on a results of the questionnaire study, led on the sample of 140 teachers of primary and secondary schools.

**Key words:** *Professional competence, creativity, emotional intelligence, open-minded teachers.*

### Introduction

*“The driving force underlying progress in the 21st century will be emotional intelligence and connected with it practical and creative intelligence” (cf. Cooper, Sawaf, 2000, p. 27).*

Various rapid cultural social and educational changes defy teachers with new and advanced tasks. A lot of concepts and visions of being contemporary teachers appear. But the main focus is that creativity, open-mindedness, and communication are indispensable to face social expectations and challenges of the post-industrial world. It seems that never before the teachers been put up to so many different

duties. The exponential increase in the pace of change makes creative, innovative thinking ever more relevant to the needs of students, teachers, industry and society. Creativity is arguably central to design and technology but unfortunately this is not always apparent in teachers' attitude or practice.

The abundance of pedagogical theories emphasise the crucial role of creativity and intelligent stress management. In education the mentioned factors are treated not only as potentials but also as necessity and priority in teachers' education. It implies modifications in the curriculum of teacher training.

### **What do we know about competence?**

Professional degrees are only the starting point on the way towards professional competence. A teacher should be in a process of continuous professional development in order to provide a quality education for students. Creativity and emotional intelligence are important as teaching is considered to be a highly complex activity, which in addition takes place in ever-changing circumstances. Teachers should be aware that "changes are constant" and therefore should improve their practice.

The term "competence" is differently defined in the literature of this subject. In our article we assume that competence consists of knowledge, abilities, skills and professional experience (Koć-Seniuch 2000). Competence determines teachers' professional activity and influences their practice. Reflection, creativity and cooperation comprise the competent behaviour (Koć-Seniuch, 2000). In many concepts special attention is paid to two cores of competence:

1. superior – connected with personality, for example interpretation, communication, creativity, emotions, morale and interpersonal skills,
2. minor – technological abilities: practical skills, methods, forms of work (Kowalczyk, 2001, Kwaśnica, 1993).

More than ever before researchers focus on creativity and emotional intelligence, meant as emotional maturity in relationships between teachers and pupils. Creative, emotional and intellectual engagement enhances pedagogical situations, helping to prepare for evaluating, decision making and responsibility (Kwiatkowska, 2003).

According to Goleman there are two levels of professional competence: **threshold competence** such as knowledge and special skills and **distinctive** ones: motivation, engagement, social and emotional abilities. The first one is basic to find a job, the other helps to maintain it and be successful. Owing to creative communicative and emotional skills we work better and feel better. Research data (Goleman, 1997) indicate that the way we deal with our emotions and those of others differentiates

accomplishments. Very good workers recruit among those with high emotional intelligence. **We make an assumption that both creativity and emotional competence significantly influence teachers' success.**

### **Why is it worth being a creative teacher?**

Because of many macro and micro changes, fixed schemes and methods are doomed to failure in nowadays schools. As they are worthless and unreliable teachers are obliged to look for new ways of pedagogical performance. "...contemporary teachers more often appear to be not only participants but mainly creators of the cultural and educational environment" (Koc-Seniuch, 2003, s. 95).

It is quite easy to pin down what is meant by creativity although it is a complex term. The point of the text is not to describe the concepts of creativity. Although it is useful to state that creativity is defined in 4 aspects (model of 4 Ps): process, product, person, and press (Nęcka, 2003). The label "creative" is usually reserved for activity or work which satisfies some criteria: perceived "newness", originality and effectiveness - it must "work". Quite often creativity is recognized as divergent thinking. In the text we accept creativity in its broadest meaning as a creative attitude which encompasses intellectual, social, and emotional features and motivation (Popek, 2001).

Creativity becomes an indispensable need and permanent constituent of being a teacher. Thanks to it teachers are able to overcome mental and organizational obstacles, enrich their personalities and relationships. Moreover, creative teachers fight against routine, deal with problems and are more flexible. Scientific findings show that a creative person has the ability to face conflicts, problems and tension which are very common in schools today. Not to mention the capacity to be puzzled (Rhodes, 1987). The teachers' obligation is to help children to perform to the best of their abilities. Only a creative teacher can achieve it.

Creativity is important for teachers and for their interactions with pupils. At the individual level, creativity is relevant to solving real life problems. In addition, a creative teacher helps to build more interactive educational situations along with fortifying creative thinking. With reference to Cropley's research (1994) we can indicate three aspects of teachers' behaviour that can influence creativity in the classroom. The first aspect is connected with the teacher as a role model - their behaviour can shape the pupils' behaviour. The next is the classroom atmosphere which is determined by the teacher. Pro-creative atmosphere means no criticism, no stiff rules, no hurry. Creativity flourishes in the atmosphere of acceptance, security, setting up problems and challenges. It implicates a teacher who is an

open-minded, an active listener and ready to help. It is connected with the third aspect which refers to the teachers' efforts that reward and foster pupils' creativity through instructional activities. These three aspects reflect personality, intellect, creativity and working methods.

Unfortunately, educators sometimes teach pupils about creative and eminent people, but ignore teaching that fosters creative thinking in their classrooms (Cropley, 1994; Sternberg, 1999). Teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and classroom practices are deemed to be of crucial influence in the development of pupils' creativity (Nęcka, 2001). Hence, only creative teachers enhance creativity: they precisely diagnose abilities, appreciate creative behaviour and stimulate it.

However, what teachers know about the characteristics of creative students and what they do to foster students' creativity have been found controversial (Bieluga, 2003). Several researchers in the field of creativity (Gardner, 2002; Sternberg, 1998) discuss how important behaviour is associated with it. Teachers have been found to have insufficient knowledge about gifted pupils.

### **What is emotional intelligence?**

“Emotional intelligence is a master aptitude, a capacity that profoundly affects all other abilities, either facilitating or interfering with them” (Goleman, 1997, p. 80).

We have been used to believing that IQ is the best measure of human potential. In the past 15 years, however, researchers have found that this is not necessarily. So actually emotional intelligence might be more a important predictor of success (Goleman, 1997; Salovey, Sluyter, 1999).

In order for human beings to grow, evolve and face challenges new forms of literacy are required to deal with different problems and situations. Today the need for “emotional literacy” is ever increasing, and it is one of the best investments that we can make for our children and ourselves.

Emotions are an integral part of human nature. Through them we respond to life in many different ways, i.e. with anger, happiness, fear, love or loneliness. Emotions influence our thoughts and actions, they inspire our needs, they affect our bodies and have an impact on our relationships (Ekman, Davidson, 1999; Obuchowski, 2004). That is the main reason why taking advantage of and managing them is crucial.

In the early 1990s, Mayer and Salovey introduced the term “emotional intelligence” in the *Journal of Personality Assessment* (1990). Then in 1995 the psychologist Goleman started to popularize this term in his books.

The term encompasses the following five characteristics and abilities:

1. self-awareness (emotional literacy) - it is an ability to recognize, understand, appropriately express emotions and distinguish among them;
2. managing emotions- handling feelings so they are relevant to the current situation and you react appropriately;
3. self-motivation- “gathering up” your feelings and directing yourself towards a goal, despite self-doubt and impulsiveness ;
4. empathy- recognizing feelings in others and tuning into their verbal and nonverbal cues;
5. handling relationships –managing interpersonal interaction, conflict resolution, and negotiations (Salovey, Mayer, 1990).

Many authors (Constantine, 2001; Mayer, Salovey, 1999) presume (but not all agree) (Nęcka, 2003, Sternberg, 1998) that emotional intelligence includes also a wide range of personal and social components, such as interpersonal skills, stress-management, optimism, assertivity, interpersonal skill, etc. In this context we can compare emotional intelligence with multiple intelligence by Gardner (2002).

Emerging research (Goleman, 1997, Cooper, Sawaf, 2000) suggests that a person with high EQ is someone who finds solutions to problems and social conflicts more quickly than others. Managing of emotions enables directing towards goals, especially these involving creativity (Isen, Daubman, Nowicki, 1987; Obuchowski, 2004). Emotional intelligence motivates us to pursue our potential and purposes, it activates our innermost values and aspirations (Salovey, Sluyter, 1999). Therefore, over the past several years, EQ has become widely accepted as a symbol of success and fulfilment.

### **Why is emotional competence important for a teacher?**

It seems that emotional intelligence is a master competence for educators. To face the contemporary world they need to attach as much importance to teaching the essential skills following from emotional intelligence as schools do to more traditional abilities (for example IQ). It becomes possible due to abilities connected with EQ.

An emotionally intelligent teacher creates an “emotionally safe” classroom where more learning can take place. In other words, an EQ environment can be built: an emotionally engaging community giving opportunities to practice. Thus, it allows pupils to grow as individuals while sustaining a close relationship with one another.

Emotional literacy can support personal growth of the teacher and pupils. It can prevent from burn-out. An teacher who understands the importance of emotions can put a better foundation for happy and integrated lives of children. We must not forget that parents play the most important role in developing emotional intelligence, none the less the teacher has a capacity to stimulate it in the classroom.

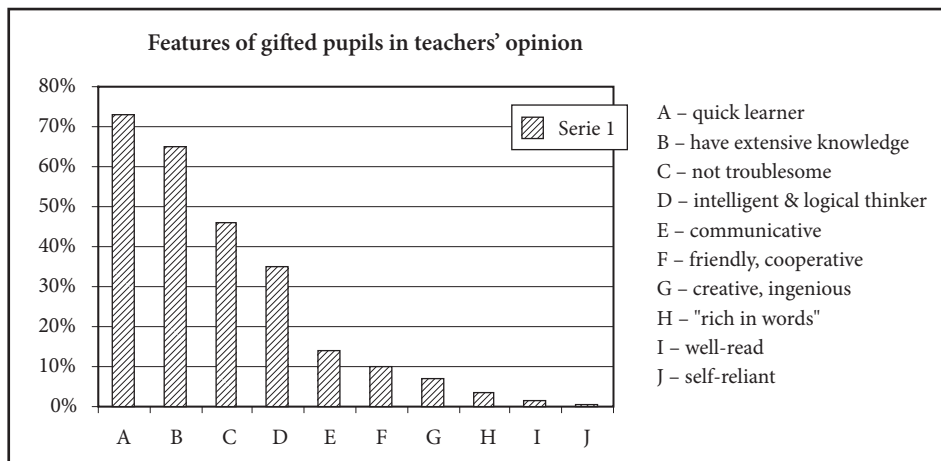
It appears that emotionally intelligent teachers can be more aware of themselves, especially their competence and the interpersonal situation they work in. They can more easily recognize emotions, hence needs, problems and pupils' expectations. **We assume that emotional intelligence enhances teachers' abilities, skills and effectiveness.** The teacher can be recognized as more friendly and sincere.

### How do the teachers perceive gifted pupils?

To check how teachers tend to define gifted pupils the authors questioned 140 working teachers of primary and secondary schools. Below the results of the short survey are presented. The teachers were questioned about their perception of gifted pupils. In the survey, the test of unfinished sentences was used. Respondents were to answer the question: Who is, according to you, a gifted pupil? Describe their features in short.

Having analysed the gathered data, we present the most interesting results, below in the scheme.

Scheme 1.



It seems that although the knowledge about abilities is in progress, teachers still pay more attention to conventional notions of intelligence, mainly IQ, and they consider it to be the main factor of achievements. We have teachers tend to focus chiefly on students' academic characteristics as indicators of abilities. In the reported results the teachers have been found to undervalue creativity and abilities connected with emotional intelligence. What is significant is that the majority of responses displayed that creative and emotionally intelligent behaviours tends to be unappealing to teachers, thus, they presume a gifted child to be mainly intelligent in the traditional way. The image of a gifted pupil is dominated by such features as: good memory, extensive but theoretical knowledge, hard work, logical thinking and reasoning. Yet, in the characteristics the respondents rarely asserted traits of creativity and emotional wisdom, e.g. imagination, original solutions, invention, wide interests, open-mindedness, empathy, communicative skills, emotional regulation, and motivation. This claim is very important as in our opinion the views on gifted pupils must be if not changed, then for sure expanded by creative and emotional aspects.

### **What are our suggestions for teachers' education?**

Gaining competence is not easy, it requires time, initiative, creativity and self-motivation. Professional growth consists of variety of activities in which teachers are engaged for achieving professional competence. Competence seems to depend on individual work experiences, abilities, skills and knowledge. Both professional training and experience contribute to professional development. Through reflection, real growth and excellence are possible.

In theoretical studies essential attention is paid to training and stimulating different kinds of competence indispensable for good teachers. It seems that these foundations are only in theory. Asserted conclusions display that teachers' competence is limited. On one hand, the surveyed teachers omitted important pupils' abilities, on the other, they didn't point them out as crucial for being a teacher, either. If they do not indicate creativity and emotional abilities what about stimulating them?

Competence increases effectiveness and professional self-approval. Lack of them make us act less reflectively and flexibly. Therefore in teachers' education we should attach special importance to personality and competence, such as creativity and emotional understanding in order to train wise, sensitive, innovative and capable teachers.

It is enough to familiarize teachers-to-be with knowledge about creativity and emotional intelligence. In our opinion creativity and the training of creative prob-



lem solving should be the core curriculum in teachers' education together with stimulating emotional intelligence.

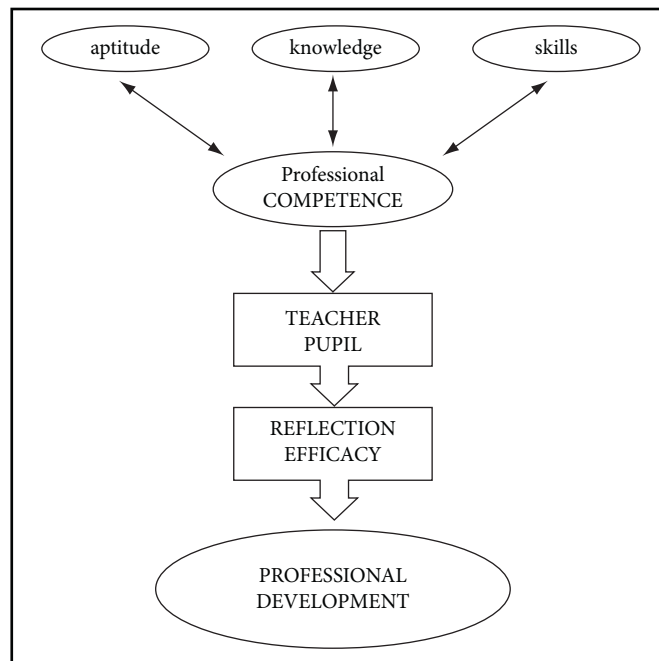
## **Summary**

Theory has already integrated human abilities, it is high time to apply the theory to practice. It is plausible only thanks to open-minded teachers. Open-minded in the most complex meaning: intellect, emotions and motivation must be involved in the educational process.

To sum up, the authors suggest the necessity to pay special attention to the personality of candidates for teachers and developing it, mainly by training (e.g., stress reduction, emotional, interpersonal competence, positive thinking).

Scheme 2 reflects the authors' assumptions presented in the article. In the scheme we tried to present the possible application of the theory about teachers' competence to educational practice. Moreover, we attempted to highlight the link between abilities, competence and professional growth.

**Scheme 2: Teacher competence in professional development**



It turns out that developing creative and emotional competence becomes the major task and challenge in teachers' education. If the 21st century is the century of competent people, teachers must be first of all the competent reflective professionals.

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