

Integrating Affective Dimension to Educational Training

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May 16, 2013

The affective dimension is present in all human relationships. In the education domain, it has been understated in favor of cognition and rationality. However, actors acknowledge more and more the presence of emotions into the pedagogical environment and into the relations established within. How can they be better taken into account within day-to-day work with children and students? As teachers and instructors, how can we go beyond our own limits and better deal with particular situations to which one is confronted to when working in the training and education environment? How can teachers and instructors be better prepared to face the challenges they will inevitably meet in their functions? These are the questions that were examined in the research we hereby present.

The research problem, the conceptual framework instigating our reflection, the experimental designs implemented as well as the research methodology will first briefly be described. The outcomes resulting from the data analysis and the main conclusions of the research will then be explained.

1. The Problem

As researchers at the college level, our research plan is characterized by the desire to continually better prepare the future childhood educators that we train. From 1992 to 1995, a first research project in education allowed us to introduce teaching strategies focused on a reflexive practice fostering the professional competency development of our students¹. Subsequently, we focused our interest on what was happening in educational environments since we had noticed that certain teaching provided within the educators' training program was, in reality, seldom implemented in the practices, in particular with regard to psychomotricity. A second research project, subsidized by the program Parea of Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec (MEQ), allowed us to reinvest the reflexive practice as main training strategy with, this time, working educators. In doing so, they were offered planned support to introduce a regular psychomotricity practice with the children². This research project enabled us to discover that accepting the emotional expression of a child is a challenge for educational personnel and that we had to face a similar challenge pertaining to the support of adults seeking to change their professional practices. This difficulty is equally observed in educational environments and is the

¹ Gravel, Parent et Tremblay 1995

² Gravel et Tremblay 2004

subject of more and more research projects³. As a matter of fact, insecurity, doubts, and self-questioning are part of the process. This is the reason why we have decided to explore in greater depth the pedagogical relation situated within the global approach of the individual, where the affective dimension is considered as a lever to update professional and personal potential.

From the beginning, we made the hypothesis that all educational staff could benefit from considering the affective dimension within their respective work and this, regardless of the clientele or level of intervention. The research project that we hereby present has given us the opportunity to reflect more profoundly on the question of affective dimension within the pedagogical relation and overall, to the conditions to implement it in training programs and thus, leading teachers and childhood educators to take better account of it. In order to do so, we have elaborated and experienced a training program aimed at educational staff working in various types of educational environments.

One of the first challenges currently faced by educators and teachers is linked to the fact that educational environments welcome more and more diversified clienteles, mainly because of relative changes within families, of economic conditions, and of increasing immigration⁴. This is accompanied by new social issues, creating situations, at times, very charged emotionally.

Another challenge for educators and teachers concerns their own story, their own emotional life which, both consciously or unconsciously, interferes and influences pedagogical relations. These challenges are greater by the fact that the educator or teacher is often taken by surprise and must take action at once, which impels incertitude. Intervening in an appropriate way then demands mobilization of cognitive and emotional resources from the individual and demands of the person the knowledge to differentiate and identify emotions at play, in order to better accept and deal with them. Moreover, we are aware that the emotional charge present in certain situations may hinder rational thinking⁵. Thus, the emotional difficulties experienced may instigate an inefficient protection and adaptation system in the individual, which creates inappropriate answers to the situations⁶. For individuals to modify their reactions, they must strengthen their confidence in their sense of feeling and judgement on which their growth and personal development stand⁷. This aspect of the work requires an important energy expenditure on the educators and teachers' part and may thus explain the high burnout rates observed in the teaching staff⁸. The work context also seems to be a contributing factor complicating pedagogical relations; the space, resource, and time constraints, the pursued objectives, and the preponderance subject-based contents cause educators and teachers to hesitate in intervening

³ Lafortune et Robertson 2005; Lafortune, Saint-Pierre et Martin 2005; Pinker 2005; Gläser-Zikuda et Mayring 2004

⁴ Saint-Pierre 2007; Statistique Canada 2002

⁵ Blin, Morcillo et Martin 2004

⁶ Neufeld 2004

⁷ Lafortune et Morneau 2002

⁸ CSQ, 2004; Dionne-Proulx et Alain 2000

when emotions present may entail them into situations that they cannot control due to time and means limitations⁹.

Furthermore, different studies show deficiencies in educators and teachers training to prepare them to intervene on the affective dimension of pedagogical relations¹⁰ and with clientele from diverse backgrounds¹¹. While observing established competency profiles of teaching staffs in Quebec¹², we notice that the competencies involving views on the affective dimension in pedagogical relations take minimal space and are at times only mentioned¹³. Regarding childhood educators, they receive a three-year college training, where six competencies on 23 closely concern affective dimension¹⁴. However, this program is aimed at beginners allowing them to acquire minimal competencies in each of the fields. At any rate, the training of teachers and educators should include, in the curriculum, awareness and reflection on the omnipresence of emotions within the pedagogical act and work on oneself in coherence¹⁵.

2. The Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework in which we situate ourselves has a particularity to integrate reference issues of different knowledge fields. As we define ourselves firstly as practitioners of education and of training and that the domain in which we operate, child care education, leads us to draw in different disciplines, we have selected multireferentiality developed by Ardoino¹⁶ as thinking approach to define our conceptual framework. The complexity of the issue we are concerned with, namely affective dimension in pedagogical relations, brings us to seek comprehension elements as much in neurosciences as in education and human sciences. Moreover, intellectuals have for a long time tried to separate reason and passion. The scientific method has developed around the idea of showing objectivity in the study of phenomena examined; affectivity and subjectivity were, up to recently, banned from scientific environment¹⁷. However, the last decades have brought a wave of reflections that has highlighted the limits of such thinking. The knowledge obtained through neurosciences, ethical thinking, and ecological approaches have particularly brought the idea of pseudo-objectivity, which should be examined more closely and defined instead of avoiding the unavoidable within human thinking construction¹⁸.

Thus, neurosciences contribute in increasing our comprehension of the human brain's functioning and shed light on many themes to be considered in all careers interested in the

⁹ Saint-Pierre 2007; Chbat 2004

¹⁰ Sutton et coll. 2009; Lafortune, Saint-Pierre et Martin 2005

¹¹ CSE 2006

¹² MEQ 2001

¹³ Gohier, Jutras et Desautels 2007

¹⁴ MELS 2000

¹⁵ Blin, Morcillo et Martin 2004

¹⁶ Ardoino 1993; Ardoino 1986

¹⁷ Damasio 2006

¹⁸ Meyor 2011; Monzée 2009; Paillé 2006; Richir 2011 ; Bernex 1996

human development, in learning, particularly those in the education domain¹⁹. Janet Dubinsky, an American neuroscience specialist, explains how teachers aware of the neurologic functioning of learners are able to change their practice²⁰. Among the themes that should be known from teachers, Dubinsky retains neuroplasticity, the maturation of the nervous system, the sensitive periods of development, the emotions and their effect on memorization and reflection capacities, and finally, the modulation of the nervous system's adaptation capacity²¹.

Psychology, although it is a relatively recent science, provides multiple insights on the psychic functioning of individuals. For the purposes of this research, we have retained the conceptual framework elaborated by Colette Portelance and presented in the book "Relation d'aide et amour de soi"²². During her career as a psychologist and a psychotherapist, Portelance developed a "non-directive, creative approach" (ANDC) of helping relationship which is inspired from the works of Carl Rogers on non-directivity and those lead by Georgui Lozanov on suggestology²³. Portelance's work falls within objectives of our research on education. Firstly, she acknowledges the importance of the helping role of educator and agrees that "the learning process of a child or student does not depend on pure cognitive and rational factors, but overall on emotional factors"²⁴. She also demonstrates the necessity, for educational environments, to acknowledge that the educator is first of all "a specialist of the being and of human relations" and that this should orient all education personnel training projects²⁵. Lastly, she proposes an explanation to psychic functioning rigorously based on available studies within a holistic approach.

The research on emotional intelligence and on the emotional competency development has also contributed to our reflection²⁶. These are relatively new concepts in the history of psychology. They refer to the "capacity to identify, to understand, to express, and to use emotions and those of others"²⁷.

In the science of education domain, it is now recognized that, in the careers in education, relationships become predominant: relations with learners but also with colleagues, parents, and other specialists²⁸. For childhood educators, the relational dimension takes a capital place because of the clientele's characteristics which are completely dependent of adults and endures a critical period of affective development²⁹. At the college level, many research projects undertaken on educational relationships acknowledge the affective circuit as a contributive factor, not to say constitutive of educational relationships³⁰. The Supreme Education Council

¹⁹ Ginger 2010

²⁰ Dubinsky 2010

²¹ Dubinsky 2010

²² Portelance 2005

²³ Portelance 2005

²⁴ Portelance 2005, p. 399

²⁵ Portelance 2005, p. 404

²⁶ Saarni, 1999; Goleman 1997

²⁷ Mikolajczak 2009, p. 3

²⁸ Chassé 2006; Desaulniers et coll. 2005; Chbat 2004; Gendron 2003; Rohart 2001

²⁹ Pierrehumbert 2003; Lieberman 1997; Golse 1985

³⁰ Sylvain 2004; Baïetto et coll. 1998

also proposes that the role of teachers not be limited to the cognitive dimension of learning, but also includes its affective dimension³¹.

The authority relationship existing between the learner and the educator introduces the necessity to develop a relational ethic that will prevent falling in relational systems where the most vulnerable individuals could be threatened in their development and their integrity. The teaching desire also means wanting to influence and to transmit a precious part of oneself to others, which is in itself a way to answer to a narcissistic need³². This situation may lead to distortions in the relationships by unconscious projections made onto others and requesting that educators get involved in a critical reflection approach on their work. This foreshadows “a form of authenticity facilitating relations with others, in self-respect and of others. Ethic of the link equally supposes that a relation initiated with a student be not only cognitive, but similarly affective, the teachers showing availability that falls within sensibility in relations with others and more broadly in their relation with knowledge³³.”

“Caring”, or ethic of solicitude, is an innovating framework that was progressively implemented in careers where relationships are prevalent and where there is a certain dependence of individuals in regard to others. This situation can be experienced in careers where primary-care is provided but also in education. “Caring” was introduced in the education domain by the American Nel Noddings. “Ethic of solicitude notably enables one to extend the moral domain, to honor the moral contribution of affectivity, to disinvest the self from one’s moral ideal of independence, and to better “anchor” the reasoning to particular requirements of a given situation. In fact, moral life does not limit to the idea to reason through a problem, but concerns each relationship I have to others. Furthermore, this philosophy is rooted into affectivity and strongly claims the ethical value of emotions considering that these are accomplished moral actions within a spontaneous affective impulse revealing in the best way how the moral act should be practiced³⁴.”

In careers of relations, there is an affective transfer from the individual “taken over” to the individual in authority. This transfer, this unconscious “holding”, is a characteristic of all careers of relations. It triggers, in turn, a reaction on the contributor’s part called counter-transfer and that, if not consciously processed, may settle into an unhealthy relational system between the two individuals³⁵. Teachers and educators are not therapists. They do not have “tending to others” as an objective, but the relations they establish carry within themselves an immense restorative and developmental potential³⁶. To avoid falling into a conceivably unhealthy, psychologising relation, the precaution principle imposes itself and the ethic of solicitude proposes a scope of reflection which leads to avoiding falling into such relations³⁷.

Ethical dialogues, through personal and group interviews, are the gateway to develop one’s “ability to feel”, “on the determination to respond to expressed needs, as well as on the

³¹ Conseil supérieur de l’Éducation 2006

³² Robbes 2006; Cevey 2005

³³ Gohier 2009, p. 25

³⁴ Gendron 2003, p. 16

³⁵ Bernard 2005; Portelance 2005

³⁶ Youell 2009

³⁷ Gohier 2009; Gohier et Jutras 2009

development of self-knowledge as an instrument to help actualization of an ability of receptivity of others³⁸”. Reasoning and judgement do not represent the nerve center of life any longer. With this in mind, “moral education is based more on the capacity to live together in a positive way, even with misunderstandings, rather than on the capacity to construct an appropriate argumentation to the norms of “well thinking³⁹”.

The interviews, based on the ethic of solicitude, propose that participants become available to what others feel. This requires of the individual an “interpersonal attention” which calls for the capacity to go beyond one’s own preoccupations and temporarily postpone one’s analytic thinking mode. It is a question of “feeling with”, which consequently allows giving affective feedback to the other. The possible pitfall is then to project oneself onto the other in order to try to understand what one’s interlocutor expresses, while knowing that one’s own view on matters is different and refrain from transposing oneself in the situation the other is confronted to⁴⁰.

3. Experimentation Framework

The experimentation framework of the research has been to elaborate, to experiment, and to evaluate a training program focused on reflexive practice to help educators to better take in account, in the action, their emotional life experience and that of their clientele. In order to do so, we have established four communities of practice. The first was constituted of nine professors from the college level including the three researchers. In fact, research on oneself is an original and innovative way to evolve professionally since it allows these researchers to concretely live what they propose⁴¹. The three remaining communities were comprised of six to eight educators from CPEs (Early Childhood Centers) and school care centers from the Saguenay Lac-Saint-Jean region. The current research on the communities of practice experimented in educational environments has demonstrated positive impact of social interactions in the learning and the development of professional competencies⁴². Furthermore, this formula offered a favorable exchange context with peers⁴³. However, we chose to offer support based on psychic functioning as described by Colette Portelance⁴⁴. Priority was accorded to the following elements: the brain functioning, the emotions, the psychic needs, the defence mechanisms, the relational systems, and the process of change. The protection strategies implemented following awareness achieved by individuals emerge from this process.

Firstly, the experimented training program included a two-day training session. The training program activities’ goals were to create a group atmosphere fostering exchanges, clarifying orientations of the communities of practice and of the research context, and establishing a common framework. Subsequently, four three-hour meetings, focusing on reflexive practice, were given to each groups; a fifth one focusing on the evaluation group-training approach was

³⁸ Gendron 2003, p.271

³⁹ Gendron 2003, p.271

⁴⁰ Gendron 2003, p. 272.

⁴¹ Channouf 2004; Perrenoud 2001

⁴² Levine 2010; Hord 2009; Laferrière 2005; Donnay 2001; Zay, 1999; Larose et Lenoir 1995

⁴³ Levine 2010; Hord 2009; Grégoire et Laferrière 1998

⁴⁴ Portelance 1998

organized. The meetings were apportioned through the school year, allowing thus alternation of practice and reflection. To prepare for these meetings, each individual was invited to write about a complex situation within one's practice which aroused an emotional or affective impact in the relationship with a child or student. The meetings were led by the person responsible of the community of practice: an external facilitator, for the teachers and one of the three researchers for the communities of educators. The meetings were ritualized to ensure the progress and respect the following structure: welcoming and introduction activity, centring activity, presentation and scheduling of issues, exchange on each of the issues, individual reflection time on results, and feedback.

Following the meetings, the participants were invited to write a report containing their reflections. To facilitate the writing process, templates were suggested to the participants. Finally, two forms of post-meeting monitoring tools were experienced: a blog to pursue discussions and clinical supervision. The blog is an interesting option since it eases the sharing of information, comments, and reflections which are made accessible to all members of the communities of practice⁴⁵. Moreover, clinical supervision's objectives were to respond to the individual help needs which could arouse sporadically due to the demands of self-analysis within a community of practice. Therefore, if exchanges did not provide answers to an individual's needs or if repercussions became difficult to manage, this individual could count on the support of a professional who could offer help or could refer if necessary.

4. Methodology

The research project uses a qualitative methodology⁴⁶. This research project was made from four communities of practice, for a total of 30 subjects. Three of these communities of practice were constituted of 21 educators who reflected on the affective aspect of relationships having children under their supervision. The fourth community was constituted of nine professors, members of the teaching staff of the program "Techniques humaine et biologique of Cegep de Jonquiere", and included the three researchers. These professors reflected on the affective dimension of the pedagogical relation established with students from both the regular and the continuing education. For a qualitative research as this, the "sample" type is pertinent since it gives access to detailed information on the situation studied⁴⁷.

4.1. Data Collection

Research data collection is taken from interviews and meetings verbatim, written documents from participants, and a questionnaire completed by participants as final evaluation of this experiment. The data was collected on a 10-month period with the following tools: the initial questionnaire, the initial and final semi-structures interviews, the stipulated recalls, the transcriptions from of exchanges which took place during community of practice meetings, the written descriptions of problem situations experiences by the subjects on the relational plan in their practice, the summaries written by participants following the meetings, the comments

⁴⁵ Vandal 2009; Lavoie, Laferrière et Fortier 2004

⁴⁶ Pourtois et coll. 2006; Deslauriers 2005; Pires 1997

⁴⁷ Deslauriers et Kerisit 1997; Gravel et Tremblay 2004

added by the participants on the blog, the evaluation of project questionnaires, and the transcriptions of exchanges which took place during the final evaluation meeting.

4.2. Data Analysis and Processing

The research data codification was performed by the three researchers. The fact of being three permitted us to process an imposing database. The first step consisted of consulting the database to extract themes relevant to our objectives. These have been defined in order to standardize comprehension and subsequently, were used to encode aggregate data. In total, 106 themes were identified and were regrouped into 15 major code categories.

The focus of this research project was to understand how the affective aspect is taken in account within pedagogical relations. Pertaining to data analysis and interpretation, the way in which the affective dimension was present into pedagogical relations was firstly verified. Then, we examined if our training program had had an effect on the development of emotional and professional competencies of the participants. In order to do so, three renowned frameworks were applied: that of Caroline Saarni⁴⁸ for emotional competencies, the one defined by the group Performa pertaining to professional competencies of professors at college level⁴⁹, and the third framework elaborated by the MEQ⁵⁰ relating to childhood educator competencies. To analyse the impact of the program on professional competencies of teaching staff, we also used the competency framework we had elaborated in 2004 since it specified the competencies defined by the MEQ.⁵¹ Finally the pertinence of each training activity and the interest of the form of support offered to the participants were evaluated from the different data collected.

4.3. Research Ethics

In order to guaranty ethical conduct of research, a protocol of collaboration with the participants and the environments involved were elaborated and respected. Consent forms were used in the practice environments to obtain authorizations from clientele involved in the research: students and parents of children. In addition, because of the nature of the research, a psychological support was implemented, via individual clinical supervision, which participants could consult confidentially when needs occurred. Lastly, since the three researchers were participants in the professors' community of research, measures were employed to insure ethical accuracy of the process avoiding conflicts of interest. An external research assistant was called upon to collect data regarding this community and thus, access to this data was denied to the three researchers until the process was entirely completed.

5. Results

In the light of our data research, we can affirm that affectivity is present in day-to-day pedagogical relationships. From the experience, it appears that teachers and childhood educators have a definite need to reflect on this aspect of their work and this, no matter their level of intervention and their experience. As a matter of fact, educators of all three

⁴⁸ Saarni 1999

⁴⁹ Archambault et coll. 1999

⁵⁰ Gouvernement du Québec 2012

⁵¹ Gravel et Tremblay 2004

communities of practice have testified on situations where they felt moved or affected by what was happening with one child or another under their responsibility. Furthermore, even if there was only one community of practice constituted of professors from the college, the database allowed us to find a great number on testimonials of similar consistence from the professors. It equally appears that, in all environments, the teachers and educators did not or barely had the opportunity to express their concerns on this aspect of their work and even less the occasion to be heard. The communities of practice thus became pertinent venues to express their affective experience at work by proposing a structure creating a secure environment for exchanges. The communities of practice have helped the participants to better understand what was happening on the affective aspect and to better deal with this particular feature of relations in their manner to intervene.

What I retain from this meeting is the people's great open-mindedness. Everyone listens to others while showing mutual respect to everyone. In the interest to improve our practices, since we all have a common goal, the children's happiness. Our problems become "solvable" with each and everyone's ideas. ED18BI2160210

We had, as basic premise, the idea that talking about affective life was demanding since it required a great openness towards work on oneself. Moreover, we thought that engaging in a community of practice with such an objective could not be done without intrinsic motivation and that a free consent from the participants was essential. A voluntary participation from the community members was subsequently required. Consequently, it is suggested to maintain this choice since we could count on a significant investment from the majority of the participants in the research project and they have confirmed this as a necessary condition to work on oneself. In addition, the fact of forming communities of practice constituted of a maximum of ten educators from different educational environments was conclusive; it facilitated sharing in an atmosphere of mutual trust. We also believe it is easier to talk about experienced issues from the affective dimension angle with people working in the same educational domain but not necessarily in the same work environment. In fact, many of the addressed problems were part of a team work context at times involving peers. It might then be more difficult to "tell oneself" freely and listen what is said without falling into defense mechanisms.

Furthermore, we began with the hypothesis that support pertaining to the personnel's reflection was a fundamental condition to all pedagogical change. In this regard, participants were invited to reflect on their practice using the reference framework on helping relationship as defined by Colette Portelance⁵² as it identifies explicitly the main mechanisms at play to explain the psychic functioning of human beings in relation with others. By integrating this dimension to the reflection, we were able to help participants to have a different perspective on situations perceived as difficult for them and consider in their reflection on their own experience as much as that of the person with whom they have established a relation. The accompaniment offered to participants in this research context seems pertinent since all participants, to varying extents, have succeeded to realize that a part of the solution came from

⁵² Portelance 2005

working on oneself. Several of them admitted having found a new avenue to professional development.

5.1. The Experimented Training Program

5.1.1. The Basic Training

The goal of the training program was to help the participants to better intercede with children and students by bringing them to reflect on the affective aspect of the pedagogical relation establishing with each of them and their group. The two-day basic training that we attended has served the intended purposes which were to allow participants to develop a sense of belonging and of trust essential to sharing, and to take ownership of the proposed reference framework to reflect on the affective aspect of their work. In addition, these two days have proven to be useful to facilitate exchanges on an ethical point of view since they have established the rules delimitating the exchanges to insure respect of integrity for each and everyone. Moreover, a greater understanding of the process and good relational skills within the group resulted from participating to these activities.

5.1.2. The Reflective Practice

The basis of the training program that was conducted was reflective practice, which again has proved pertinent in the professional evolution of the participants. All of them have provided issues encountered at work; these issues have provided substance during the discussions. During each meeting, participants were reassured by observing that they were not the only ones experiencing difficult emotions at work and gradually, they acquired a better understanding of the emotional issues underlying pedagogical relationships and they improved their self-confidence. We can also record that the community of practice is a mutual aid environment; all the participants were involved by giving their point of view on the issues submitted, relying upon their inner feeling and on their understanding of psychic functioning. Accordingly, the discussions focused primarily on the affective aspect in relations with children or students. The participants became more and more successful at identifying the trigger points, the emotional reactions, the needs and defensive mechanisms underlying the interaction of a given situation. The exchanges with colleagues and supervisors helped them to raise their awareness by focusing on work on oneself. This program has also helped generating changes by developing protection strategies and a better comprehension of relational professional distances which they must maintain. Many participants mentioned that they felt a certain appeasement from their emotional tensions following the meetings, at times just by the fact they had been listened to emotionally.

The main difficulty that we had to face relied on the time available for the meetings; many issues could not be discussed as such because of limited time. However, several similarities allowed making useful links to improvement of pedagogical relationships no matter the issue. In between meetings, the subjects pursued their reflection by writing in a journal or on the blog. Pertaining to this aspect, we believe that it is pertinent to provide means to support in-depth reflection but, as it was observed in our earlier studies, writing is a complex process for many, including teachers. Even though a simple writing template was provided, the majority of participants found it arduous, and very few judged that the after-meeting required written

reports were useful. Concerning the blog was implemented by all communities but a lack of technological interest or time constraints were the reasons for participants not to engage in the process. The research ends with a question pertaining writing which remains a difficult task for workers who find it burdensome. In continuing education, meetings should last longer in order to include writing time.

5.1.3. The Ethical Framework

The implemented program provided participants with an opportunity to express themselves in a climate of trust and respect. The facilitators applied the rules that each community of practice had committed to. This seemed essential to lead individuals in this kind of reflection where each introduces oneself authentically and exposes one's vulnerable aspects to others. In this context, the fact of demanding from participants that they share their comments with the facilitator instead of the individual who presented the situation remains a winning combination to protect individuals. This type of procedure was very appreciated by the participants who mentioned that this way to proceed had helped them to better accept the affective feedbacks from their peers.

5.1.4. The Clinical Supervision

In other respects, it is sometimes difficult to remain focused uniquely on work, the emotional reactions at work sometimes being influenced by personal life. It is possible that certain participants may need more help than what is available within the context of the community of practice. For this reason, the services of two professionals were provided, one helping relation therapist for the childhood educators, and one psychologist for the professors. Even though none of the participants have used the service, they nonetheless mentioned having felt reassured by it. In our case, we believe in maintaining the access to such services for situations exceeding what a community of practice may offer and to allow individuals to go further into their process when necessary.

5.1.5. The Support

Supporting the reflection process on the affective aspect in pedagogical relationship requires planned conditions and preparation since pitfalls are possible. The first condition is identified in the literature and concerns the facilitator's status. In no case may this person be in an authority position over the participants and must come external to the group. This is what was done and the experience confirms that it is the right path to follow. However, we had chosen to participate in the teachers' community of practice as participants having the same status as the others. In spite of this fact, our researcher status was tested by some of us impeding at times on the freedom of expression of others. This represented an additional challenge for the facilitator of our community of practice. This simple experience confirms the importance, for the facilitators, to have a status to fulfil their role without interference. To do research on oneself is a positive avenue to contemplate but then, all participants should have a co-researcher status. Concerning accompaniment, we noted the importance of framing the exchanges to maintain participants on the emotional processes. This requires good listening on the facilitator's part who should not hesitate to reframe the exchanges to maintain the reflection on the affective aspect of the analysed situation or to verify compliance with the established operating rules.

Moreover, we think that a training approach for the facilitators is essential in order to offer quality support to the community of practice. In our view, to acquire this expertise demands taking the time to reflect on our mode of accompaniment to develop the required competencies. It can also be added that, to offer accompaniment with the objective of taking the affective dimension into pedagogical relationship in better consideration, there are two types of required competencies: those concerning pedagogy and those in helping relation. In fact, pedagogical competencies provide support for the learning process of individuals and allow advances in knowledge, namely those of psychic functioning, into their professional experience. The helping relation competencies allow better acceptance of expressions of emotional experience in the meetings and overall, better support the individuals in the clarification of their experience by using the group's strengths to help them. This combination of competencies proves to be a winning one granting professionals of different horizons development of specific competencies pertaining to this type of accompaniment.

5.1.6. Competencies Developed During the Program

To evaluate the pertinence of the experienced training program, we chose to verify how the participants progressed pertaining to emotional and professional competencies. The following paragraph describes what was found on each of these aspects.

For the present purposes, the reference framework elaborated by Carolyn Saarni was chosen to analyse collected data and observe how participants' progression in the program. Saarni⁵³ defines eight elements to emotional competency as being: awareness of one's own emotional state and affectivity, the ability to understand and identify others' emotions, the ability to use emotion associated vocabulary, the capacity to empathize, the ability to acknowledge that an emotional state does not necessarily correspond to what is expressed, the capacity to deal with states of aversion or distress by using self-regulation strategies, the awareness that the nature of relationships depends on emotions, the capacity to accept one's emotional experiences and develop a feeling of self-efficiency. Thus, it is important to mention that no preliminary training was given to participants relating to these competencies and no analysis of experienced professional situations concerning them was demanded. We decided to emphasize the comprehension of certain concepts linked to psychic functioning by fostering, during meetings, participants' free expression on concrete situations, experienced within practices and perceived as entailing an emotional aspect affecting the pedagogical relation. This is particularly interesting in giving sense to work on the self since the reflection stems from participants' professional experience, which is a significant element of their motivation during the training. However, the adopted reference framework allowed us, as researchers, to observe the progress made. Firstly, we can say that the experimented training program gave participants the opportunity to develop an awareness concerning their affectivity and psychic functioning. As a matter of fact, every one of them could identify emotions and feelings present within them that influence pedagogical relationships. The triggering elements of their emotional reactions were relatively easy to find, reflection enabled them to recognize their defence mechanisms and to identify their psychic needs. Thus, several verbalizations show that their comprehension of psychic functioning of children and students has improved. Discussions with peers was

⁵³ Saarni 1999

recognized by participants as a particularly effective way to help them reflect on difficulties, since it allows them to release tensions by the mere fact of being heard but also by the fact that they discovered protection and intervention strategies taking in account emotional stakes underlying these situations.

However, although the vocabulary linked to affective language has improved through the process, many reported having difficulty to find the right terms to express what is happening within them. We must come to the conclusion that it is not easy, even as adults, to find the appropriate terms to express what is emotionally experienced. Often, a lack in vocabulary or a comment composed of a multitude of expressions aiming at emotions or also at times, at prejudice and false interpretations. The facilitator plays an important role in helping to precise what is felt and put words on the experience.

Many reflections centred on empathy, this attitude helping to understand the other and that has great importance in careers strongly involving relations to others. Participants often analysed themselves on this aspect and identified situations where emotional encroachment impedes on acceptance of others. Frequently, the simple fact of standing back allowed them to overcome the situation and to consider it under a new perspective. The meetings in community of practice then become a mechanism fostering adoption of this protection strategy. Several other protection strategies have been developed by participants, helped better intervention in relations and thus, making participants feel comfortable at work.

The impact of the training program on the professional competencies of teachers and educators was also studied, our main goal being to improve professional practice. To do so, we focused on competencies most directly solicited in direct relationships with children and students.

The teachers' reflection centred on their difficulty to deal with the group while taking into account the characteristics and individual differences of students. They were interested by situations where it was hard for them to establish relationships that would sustain students' motivation and that would foster their learning. The emotional stakes linked to learning evaluation and other activities providing students a fair retroaction on their progress have been the object of several reflections. Finally, the question of time emerged as being influent on their emotional state and on that of their students.

Regarding educators, they seek complicity and an attachment bond in their pedagogical relationships to foster trust necessary to the children's development. Their holistic development is the basis of several professional competencies that educators must demonstrate. It is what provides strong positive emotions for them, what responds to acknowledgement needs and valorization upon which stands all professional engagement. However, the relational distance to maintain in order to remain into a professional relationship is a challenge that was often discussed and the training activities were useful to foster reflection on the subject. Another competency, in which the affective feature is present, centres on children since it implies that adults assume their authority. In addition, the situations where this competency is required have been the object of many discussions. Although educators are aware of the importance of a coherent environment in which children can develop, the fear of losing the quality in the relation in situations where they must confront the child is a continual concern for them and solicits them emotionally. The opportunity to share their experience on this aspect has helped

them to better play the role inherent to their functions. Lastly, several emotions are linked to competencies involved in work aspect which consist in supporting children in their development. To see a child evolve represents a strong motivation for educators; by contrast, children with particular needs, those who fail to adopt good behaviors or those who are bereaved or neglected, are examples of situations that educators have expressed as being sometimes difficult to experience on an emotional view. Each time, the exchanges allowed the individual to progress in comprehension of the situation, in various degrees that is, to work on the self and thus, consider the relationship with a different strategy.

Furthermore, educators are exposed to situations where relationship to parents and work colleagues affect the quality of their relation with a child. These situations were mainly due to differences in values and educational methods, to the lack of availability of partners, to demands and unexpected behaviors. The fear of conflicts and of being judged impedes on communication and makes the empathy relation more difficult. The training activities provided the support educators needed to reflect on these situations. Several of them admitted finding the elements enabling them to take a necessary step back to maintain a healthy relation.

6. Conclusion

Therefore, we retain that the training program allowed all participants' competencies to progress on emotional level as much as on the professional level in as many different ways as there were individuals. The high level of satisfaction expressed by participants in the final evaluations confirm the interest of the program to better take in account the affective dimension in pedagogical relationships.

At the beginning, I wasn't sure about what I was getting into but I am glad I participated. It was enriching and rewarding for me. I would certainly do it again. Emotions, that's what is most important and most difficult to understand and deal with. EVA260510

As we complete this project, we are convinced that the reflexive approach on affective dimension within pedagogical relations is now an unavoidable avenue in the initial and continuous training of educational participants. The training program that was experimented provides this perspective and is easy to implement since the only costs are those associated to the release of personnel and to remuneration of facilitators. The development programs provided in colleges, schools, and childcare centers could be given with this aim. However, to obtain the intended outcomes, the program will have to be implemented by coaches competent in both pedagogy and helping relation, which is, for the time being, a challenge. Matching professors and educators as we did may help developing of a network of people able to assume such support. Moreover, in colleges, we recommend that a community of practice be implemented in different departments and that the schedule of professors, interested in participating to the program, be adapted to facilitate their involvement. The same goes for educators; it is easier for them to exchange with people coming from different work places and it is facilitating for the concerned environments to release only one or two people at the time to participate in such a training program.

In the light of this experience, new and interesting avenues of research are contemplated. Still today, many questions on the development of emotional competencies have remained unanswered. How do they develop within an educational environment? How are they taken into consideration in professional training? How is learning progression generated? For instance, pertaining to the vocabulary used, what can be expected from a child? From a college-level student? From an adult? From the initial training point of view, questions emerge, pertaining to student involvement in a process which is in principle on a volunteer basis. Ethical dilemmas appear if we juxtapose the question of learning evaluation in that type of process, where the individual must be able to trust and where external judgement becomes a major impediment to progress.

There is enough to work on for many research teams for many years to come. As for us, we end a five-year cycle of research. It was long and demanding but also very gratifying. Research for us is an incomparable lever for professional development and collaborative research opens to a partnership offering the possibility to improve both practice and training. We hope funding programs making it possible will be maintained and, over and above, will develop.

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