

EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

Teachers' notions about their communicative competencies

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This article describes the results of four empirical research studies of teachers' notions about effective conduct in various pedagogical situations and about communicative competencies, which can help in resolving difficult pedagogical problems. The findings indicate that teachers' ideas concerning their professional conduct and communicative competencies are rather positive. The majority of teachers identify their conduct in difficult pedagogical situations with that of an "ideal" teacher. At the same time, the results received when the semantic differential was used revealed the ambiguous character of teachers' assessments of their own communicative competencies. Psychological training focused on deepening teachers' notions about communicative culture was carried out. As a result of the training, teachers' notions about their own communicative competencies changed.

Keywords: communicative competencies, communicative behavior, teachers' notions, psychological training for teachers

Introduction

In the everyday professional life of a teacher, quite often various conflict situations arise; these circumstances demand competent analysis and adequate solution (Leontiev, 1996; Rydanova, 1998; Zhuravlev, 1995). Foreign researchers consider the problem of communication between teachers and pupils in the context of ensuring teacher support to pupils in the educational process (Frisby & Martin, 2010; Short, 2013; Wentzel, Battle, Russell, & Looney, 2010), of creating a favorable climate in the classroom community (Cefai & Cavioni, 2014; Patrick, Ryan, & Kaplan, 2007), and of resolving emerging conflicts (Afnan-Rizzuto, 2011; Wang et. al., 2014). In regard to the efficiency of teachers' pedagogical work, their communicative competencies substantially influences their ability to choose the most effective line of

conduct in a difficult pedagogical situation (Aukhadeeva, 2006; Grekhnev, 1990). The ideas that teachers have developed regarding the lines of conduct that testify to professionalism and the communicative competencies that are required can have a great impact on teachers' behavior in pedagogical conflict situations (Glotova, 2002; Wilhelm & Glotova, 2012). Therefore, the study of teachers' ideas about effective conduct in various pedagogical situations and also about those communicative competencies that can help to resolve difficult pedagogical problems seems to be topical.

Method

Study 1

Participants

The project studied 196 schoolteachers divided into six age groups from "30 or younger" to "51 and older."

Method

The teachers were asked to name possible conduct responses in 10 difficult pedagogical situations as viewed from two positions: that of a "real" teacher and that of an "ideal" teacher. After that each of the teachers indicated those patterns of conduct that he/she used in each of the suggested situations. Descriptions of the situations are given below in the results and discussion section; situations 1–4 were taken from professional literature on psychology (Rean & Kolominskij, 1999).

Procedure

The teachers were asked to express their opinion about each of the situations in a free format; thus the quantity of opinions was not limited. In order to minimize the effect of the social desirability of answers, to reduce uneasiness, and to increase interest in the research poll, opinions were expressed on condition of anonymity; the teachers were asked to specify only their ages and how long they had been working as teachers. Teachers' answers were processed by a content-analysis method that allowed the unification of all sets of answers in generalized categories.

After the respondents described the conduct of "ideal" and "real" teachers in 10 pedagogical situations, they were asked to say how they would personally behave in each of these situations — that is, with which of the hypothetical "teacher models" they identified themselves. In each of the 10 pedagogical situations the number of the teachers who declared their personal conduct responses in a particular situation was taken as 100%. The significance of distinctions between percentages of the teachers who chose a specific conduct response was estimated by criterion φ^* (Fischer's angular transformation criterion).

Results and discussion

The respondents' answers were divided into 109 categories (taking into account repetition, which occurred in respect to the typical behavior of teachers in essentially different situations). In each of the 10 situations the number of conduct re-

sponses, which were processed by content analysis, varied from 8 to 16. For 60 categories by criterion φ^* significant differences were observed between the percentage of respondents who referred these categories mainly to the “ideal” teacher and to the “real” teacher (50 differences: $p \leq 0.01$; 10 differences: $p \leq 0.05$). The substantial analysis of 109 conduct responses showed that teachers’ ideas about the “ideal” teacher were much more positive than those about the “real” teacher. The teachers assumed that the “ideal” teacher resolves conflicts in ways favorable both for the teacher and for the pupils.

In each of the 10 situations the percentage of teachers identifying themselves with the “ideal” teacher was significantly higher (by criterion φ^*) than the percentage of those who identified themselves with the “real” teacher. Scores of criterion φ^* (φ^* crit. = 2.31, $p \leq 0.01$) for each of the 10 situations were as follows:

Situation 1: In writing a chemical formula the teacher makes a mistake. A pupil points out this error to the teacher. The teacher is worried about how the pupils’ opinion of him/her may change (φ^* emp. = 8.599).

Situation 2: A pupil asks the teacher a difficult question. The answer is outside the competence of the teacher, who is, therefore, unable to give a correct answer (φ^* emp. = 9.814).

Situation 3: A 9th-grade class visit to the theater is planned. But a jam has formed in the doorway. Tired after a long day of work, the form master loses his control and snaps: “Are you all crazy?! What theater, for God’s sake! Return back and put your diaries on the table!!!” What is to be done in this situation? (φ^* emp. = 6.540).

Situation 4: The bell has finished ringing. The corridor is empty. But one pupil is left behind, slightly out of breath. He looks back and slips into a classroom. Behind him two more pupils rush to a class. And this is not the first time this has happened (φ^* emp. = 3.934).

Situation 5: The teacher summons a pupil to the blackboard. The pupil is unable to answer the teacher’s question. A companion of his tries to prompt to him. How will the teacher react to this situation and treat the prompter? (φ^* emp. = 6.410).

Situation 6: In a history lesson for 5th graders, the teacher lectures. One of the pupils, who is fond of history and reads a lot of extracurricular literature, says: “I don’t agree with you. In what book did you find that?” (φ^* emp. = 9.188).

Situation 7: A teacher is writing on a blackboard. The silence is broken by the sound of a book falling. The teacher speaks to the pupil who dropped it: “If this happens again, you will have to leave the classroom.” Having assessed the situation, another pupil purposely throws a book (φ^* emp. = 9.160).

Situation 8: During a mathematics lesson, the teacher tries to write a formula on the blackboard, but the chalk does not write. He guesses that someone had soiled the board (φ^* emp. = 8.485).

Situation 9: The teacher begins a lesson, but when she turns to the blackboard, a noise is heard in the class. As soon as the teacher turns to face the class, all become silent. This sequence repeats several times (φ^* emp. = 6.599).

Situation 10: A question that the teacher addresses to the class is answered by one of pupils with a caustic joke. The class bursts out laughing. The label of “clown” has stuck firmly to this pupil among the teachers (φ^* emp. = 6.647).

Thus, even on the condition of anonymity of answers, the majority of teachers identified their conduct in difficult pedagogical situations as being that of an “ideal” teacher.

There were distinctions in the percentage of identifications of one's own conduct with the conduct of an “ideal” teacher for teachers with different lengths of experience in teaching. Average intervals of experience formed the following groups: the first group — an average interval of 5–7 years, the second group — 10–15 years, the third group — 20–25 years, the fourth group — 30 years. The number of instances of self-identification with the “ideal” teacher, totaling more than 70%, showed a tendency to increase from the first to the fourth group. On the whole, the percentage of instances of identifying one's own conduct with that of the “ideal” teacher in all 10 difficult teaching situations in the fourth group (the one having the most experience) was significantly higher than in the first group ($\varphi^*_{emp.} = 8.116, p \leq 0.01$), the second group ($\varphi^*_{emp.} = 8.208, p \leq 0.01$), and the third group ($\varphi^*_{emp.} = 6.767, p \leq 0.01$); the differences among the last three groups weren't significant.

In addition to teaching experience, age dynamics (six age groups) were considered in comparisons by teachers of their conduct with that of “ideal” (or “real”) teachers in the same 10 pedagogical situations. Summing up the results of all 10 situations, we see that the six age groups analyzed were rather accurately rearranged into three couples sharing similar features of identification with the conduct of an “ideal” teacher. Respectively, instances of identification with the conduct of the “real” teacher were characterized by the opposite dynamics.

The *first couple* included groups 3 (ages 36–40) and 6 (51 and older). Teachers from these groups significantly showed the highest percentage of identification of their conduct with that of the “ideal” teacher. Significant differences in the percentage of identifications between groups 3 and 6 were absent.

The *second couple* included groups 2 (ages 31–35) and 4 (ages 41–45). Teachers from these groups significantly showed the lowest percentage of identification of their conduct with that of the “ideal” teacher. No significant differences between groups 2 and 4 in the percentage of identifications were observed.

The *third couple* included groups 1 (30 or younger) and 5 (ages 46–50); they showed an intermediate percentage of identification of their conduct with that of the “ideal” teacher, somewhere between the first and the second couples. The total percentage of identifications in the third couple was significantly higher than in the second couple but was significantly lower than in the first couple. No significant differences between groups 1 and 5 in the percentage of identifications were observed.

It should be noted that these couples were divided by intervals ranging from 10 to 16 years and that significant differences regarding specific situations occurred in these couples.

Study 2

Participants

The study comprised two groups of schoolteachers: the first group had 65 participants; the second, 169.

Method

Derived from group discussions, a list of professionally important communicative competencies was used to assess the teachers.

Procedure

Sixty-five teachers divided into three groups ($n_1 = 41$; $n_2 = 12$; $n_3 = 12$) took part in discussions about the competencies necessary to enable teachers to communicate effectively with their students.

In each of the three groups lists of communicative competencies—partially coincident, partially differing—were made. On the basis of the generalization of the received results a list containing 21 competencies was created. (The complete list can be found below in Table 2.) Then, 169 teachers were asked to assess their own abilities on each of these competencies, using a scale of 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest).

Results and discussion

The resulting average scores varied from 7.39 points (“concentration on something positive in a pupil”) to 8.70 (“ability to listen”). Thus, the teachers on the whole had a rather high opinion of their own communicative competencies. This finding can be compared with the tendency displayed by the majority of teachers to identify their conduct with that of the “ideal” teacher, as was revealed in Study 1.

The correlation analysis (according to Spearman) that was carried out for the teachers assessment of themselves on the 21 communicative competencies showed that out of 210 possible correlations 204 were positive, statistically significant at level $p \leq 0.05$, and among them 188 were significant at level $p \leq 0.001$. Five communicative competencies — “ability to listen”, “flexibility of conduct”, “ability to diagnose a group of pupils”, “ability to relieve emotional tension,” “ability to motivate pupils and get them interested” — were connected with all the other 20 communicative competencies with highly significant positive correlations ($p \leq 0.001$).

Table 1. Factor analysis of teachers’ notions about their communicative competencies ($n=169$)

No.	Competencies	Factors	
		I F	II F
1	Empathy	0.76	0.01
2	Ability to exchange views	0.78	0.19
3	Self-regulation	0.18	0.72
9	Ability to manage a discussion	0.79	0.17
10	Ability to use means of communication	0.70	0.37
13	Emotionality	0.70	0.12
14	Ability to rally a group of pupils	0.78	0.22
20	Self-improvement	0.20	0.73
21	Reflection	-0.01	0.77
% of total dispersion		29.0	23.0

A factor analysis (with Varimax rotation) of the teachers' ideas about their professionally important communicative competencies was also carried out. After rotation using the criterion of an assessment of the explained dispersion percentage, two factors were identified (Table 1).

The *first factor*, on the basis of loads on a factor ≥ 0.70 , can be designated as "ideas about an effective teacher" in which competencies connected with teachers' professional skills (Competencies 2, 9, 10, 14), and their positive emotional dispositions regarding pedagogical communication (Competencies 1 and 13) are integrated.

The *second factor*, also on the basis of loads on a factor ≥ 0.70 , can be designated as "ideas about mechanisms of pedagogical efficiency" (Competencies 3, 20, 21).

Study 3

Participants

A total of 169 schoolteachers, who had participated in Study 2, took part in this study.

Method

The semantic differential (SD) (Petrenko, 2005) with a unipolar scale was used. The list of 21 communicative competencies made on the basis of group discussions was used as a list of descriptors of the SD. "Me as teacher," "novice teacher," "skilled teacher," "incapable teacher," and "effective teacher" were offered as objects of the SD that teachers were required to assess on the basis of these descriptors.

Procedure

To reveal the teachers' views of their own communicative competencies, they were asked to assess five objects of the SD on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest). Average scores of the assessments of the five objects were compared for each of the 21 communicative competencies by Student's *t*-criterion (t crit. = 3.29, $p \leq 0.001$; t crit. = 2.58, $p \leq 0.01$; t crit. = 1.96, $p \leq 0.05$).

Results and discussion

Out of 84 possible differences of average scores, 76 were significant (70 at $p \leq 0.001$; 2 at $p \leq 0.01$; 4 at $p \leq 0.05$). For all the 21 competencies, the teachers' assessments of themselves ("me as teacher") were significantly higher ($p < 0.001$) than for "novice teacher" and, especially, than for "incapable teacher." As for the differences between "skilled teacher" and "effective teacher," the situation was as follows: for 15 out of the 21 competencies respondents showed significantly lower scores (10 at $p \leq 0.001$; 2 at $p \leq 0.01$; 3 at $p \leq 0.05$) for the assessment of themselves ("me as teacher") than for the assessment of "skilled teacher"; in other words, they considered that these 15 qualities were not at a sufficient level in their own case. For six competencies ("empathy," "ability to listen," "ability to understand the opinion of another person, to put oneself in his/her place," "emotionality," "concentration on something positive in a pupil," "self-improvement") no significant differences in average scores between the assessment object "me as teacher" and the assessment object "skilled

teacher” were observed. (Moreover, in the case of the competencies “emotionality” and “self-improvement,” their assessments of themselves were even higher than for “skilled teacher,” although this excess of average score was not statistically significant.)

Even more obvious differences were revealed when teachers compared themselves with “effective teacher”: significant differences of average scores in favor of “effective teacher” were recorded for 19 competencies out of 21 (18 at $p \leq 0.001$; 1 at $p \leq 0.05$). Significant differences were not found for only 2 competencies — “empathy” and “emotionality” (thus, the average scores were also higher for “effective teacher”).

Table 2. Correlations between the object “me as teacher” and other objects of the semantic differential for separate communicative competencies; $n=169$)

No.	Me as teacher	Objects			
		Novice teacher	Skilled teacher	Incapable teacher	Effective teacher
1	Empathy	0.30***	0.54***	0.07	0.33***
2	Ability to exchange views	0.33***	0.49***	-0.07	0.32***
3	Self- regulation	0.06	0.33***	-0.01	0.30***
4	Adequate conduct in a conflict situation	0.11	0.36***	-0.19*	0.23**
5	Ability to listen	0.13	0.30***	0.02	0.30***
6	Flexibility of conduct	0.20**	0.23**	0.10	0.21**
7	Ability to modulate one’s own emotions	-0.09	0.17*	0.11	0.24**
8	Ability to understand the opinion of another person, to put oneself in his/her place	0.15*	0.35***	-0.04	0.34***
9	Ability to manage a discussion	0.12	0.28***	-0.06	0.28***
10	Ability to use means of communication	0.15	0.22**	-0.17*	0.04
11	Patience	0.04	0.43***	0.03	0.11
12	Ability to diagnose a group of pupils	0.21**	0.09	0.23**	0.07
13	Emotionality	0.04	0.42***	-0.14	0.26***
14	Ability to rally a group of pupils	0.26***	0.36***	0.03	0.10
15	Concentration on something positive in a pupil	-0.03	0.51***	-0.27***	0.50***
16	Ability to relieve emotional tension	0.02	0.28***	0.11	0.13
17	Ability to motivate pupils and get them interested	0.06	0.29***	-0.04	0.23**
18	Ability to set objectives and achieve them	0.06	0.12	-0.02	0.18*
19	Ability to analyze	0.01	0.04	-0.09	0.07
20	Self-improvement	0.31***	0.33***	0.12	0.21**
21	Reflection	0.23**	0.24**	0.08	0.02

Note. *** r crit. = 0.25, $p \leq 0.001$; ** r crit. = 0.20, $p \leq 0.01$; * r crit. = 0.15, $p \leq 0.05$.

Next, the correlations (according to Spearman) between the results for 21 competencies and for five objects of the SD were studied (Table 2). The greatest number of statistically significant positive correlations on separate competencies was between the objects "me as teacher" and "skilled teacher" (18 correlations out of the 21 possible: 14 at $p \leq 0.001$; 3 at $p \leq 0.01$; 1 at $p \leq 0.05$). For the following communicative competencies no significant correlations were observed (that is, the teachers' assessments of themselves were other than "skilled teacher"): "ability to analyze," "ability to diagnose a group of pupils," and "ability to set objectives and achieve them."

Positive correlations between the objects "me as teacher" and "effective teacher" were revealed for 14 competencies out of the 21; between the objects "me as teacher" and "novice teacher" 8 positive correlations were found; and, finally, between the objects "me as teacher" and "incapable teacher" only 4 significant correlations were revealed, 3 of which were negative. Thus, when assessing separate competencies the teachers were more inclined to assess themselves as "skilled" and "effective" teachers than as "novice" or "incapable" teachers.

After the correlations among the results for separate competencies were determined, correlation coefficients among the five objects as a whole were found. This correlation analysis showed that the assessment of "me as teacher" turns out to be closest to the assessment of "novice teacher" ($r_s = 0.43$, $p \leq 0.05$). Statistically significant correlations of the object "me as teacher" with the other objects of the SD were not observed. The objects "skilled teacher" and "effective teacher" had a strong positive correlation ($r_s = 0.88$, $p \leq 0.001$).

Thus, a quite peculiar situation emerges. On the one hand, respondents' assessments of themselves in all competencies of the SD were significantly higher than their assessments of "novice teacher," and in most cases their assessments of themselves were significantly lower than of "skilled teacher" and "effective teacher." Thus, points that they gave to themselves on separate competencies correlate highly positively with points that they gave to "effective" and, especially, to "skilled" teachers. On the other hand, when the correlation analysis was carried out not for separate competencies but for the five objects of the SD, described on the whole by means of the entire set of competencies, respondents' assessments of "me as teacher" were most closely connected with their assessments of "novice teacher."

Study 4

Participants

Participants were one of the groups of schoolteachers ($n = 12$) who took part in the group discussion in Study 2.

Method

The method used was research psychological training.

Procedure

The purpose was to study the dynamics of teachers' subjective representations of their own communicative competencies during training. A training group was

formed based on two important principles: (1) awareness of the participants in training of its subject and (2) voluntary participation. Because this group identified only 12 competencies necessary for an effective teacher at the stage of group discussion, assessments were carried out during the training according to these 12 competencies (9 competencies — 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 12, 15, 16, 19 — were the same as in Table 2, 3 competencies — “ability to diagnose a pupil,” “general communicative competence,” and “professional communicative competence” — were used only in this group). The training took place during the winter school vacations over three days; this amount of time allowed the participants to be fully immersed in the training activities. The total number of training-program hours was 24. Video filming was conducted during the training. The program of training included both general information about communication culture and exercises that addressed all communicative competencies and competencies related to professional pedagogical communication.

During the research training three assessments were made: assessment A—teachers’ assessments of their own 12 competencies at the beginning of the training; assessment B — correction of the results of assessment A on completion of the training; assessment C — assessments of the 12 competencies at the end of the training. In addition, at the beginning of the training the participants were asked to take Guilford-O’Sullivan’s social intelligence test (Mihajlova (Aleshina), 1996).

Results and discussion

At assessment B (correction of the results of assessment A after the training) all average scores decreased. In the results of assessment B significant differences from the results of assessment A were observed (by Wilcoxon’s criterion) in 9 competencies out of the 12 ($p \leq 0.01$); in two cases noticeable tendencies were noted (for “ability to listen,” $p = 0.068$, and “ability to understand the opinion of another person, to put oneself in his/her place,” $p = 0.068$). Only for “concentration on something positive in a pupil” were no significant differences between assessments A and B observed, although in this case assessment B produced a slightly lower result than assessment A.

The greatest changes were observed in such competencies as “ability to analyze” ($p = 0.008$), “adequate conduct in a conflict situation” ($p = 0.012$), and “general communicative competence” ($p = 0.012$). It can be assumed that the changes observed in the competencies “ability to analyze” and “adequate conduct in a conflict situation” were due to the chosen form of training; this training provided the development of reflexive skills—namely, discussion of each exercise after its accomplishment. Changes in “general communicative competence” could have been caused by the use during training of a large number of practical communicative exercises. As is evident, one of the results of research training was that the teachers updated their assessments of themselves as communicators.

With regard to the results received on assessments B and C, significant differences were observed for all 12 competencies. First, significant differences were found in these 6 competencies: “ability to analyze,” “ability to diagnose a pupil,” “ability to diagnose a group of pupils,” “ability to relieve emotional tension,” “general communicative competence,” and “professional communicative competence”

(in all 6 cases, differences between assessments B and C were significant, $p=0.002$). Second, differences were significant ($p=0.003$) for “adequate conduct in a conflict situation” and “self-regulation”; differences were significant ($p=0.012$) for “ability to understand the opinion of another person, to put oneself in his/her place,” “concentration on something positive in a pupil,” and “ability to exchange views.” Third, for “ability to listen,” differences between assessments B and C were also significant ($p=0.028$) because, at the beginning of training, teachers had obviously overestimated their own level on each of the communicative competencies. This result corresponds to the results of Study 1, where the majority of teachers were inclined to identify their own behavior in difficult pedagogical situations with that of an “ideal” teacher.

Significant differences between assessments A (where self-assessments were overestimated) and C were received in the case of five competencies (“self-regulation” ($p=0.012$), “ability to diagnose a group of pupils” ($p=0.012$), “ability to diagnose a pupil” ($p=0.028$), “ability to relieve emotional tension” ($p=0.028$), “concentration on something positive in a pupil” ($p=0.043$)). In six competencies in assessment C the increase was observed, although it was not significant. For “ability to listen,” the results of assessments A and C were completely identical.

The results show that after the training the teachers became more critical of their own communicative competencies but were sure that the training had had a considerable positive impact on them.

The following correlations (according to Spearman) were observed between the results of assessments A, B, C and the results of Guilford-O’Sullivan’s social intelligence test:

Subtest 1, “stories with completions,” assessing the implications of the factor of cognition on one’s conduct (the ability to foresee the consequences of conduct in a certain situation, to foretell what will happen further on), had in assessment A one positive correlation, which was with the teachers’ assessment of the competence “concentration on something positive in a pupil” ($r_s=0.69, p\leq 0.01$).

Subtest 2, “groups of an expression,” assessing the factor of cognition of behavioral classes (logical generalization ability—that is, the ability to find the general essential signs in various nonverbal reactions of a person), didn’t have significant correlations.

Subtest 3, “verbal expression,” assessing the factor of cognition of behavioral transformations (the ability to understand changes in similar verbal reactions of a person depending on the context and the situation) in each of assessments A, B, C, produced one significant negative correlation: in assessment A, for “ability to diagnosis a group of pupils” ($r_s=-0.59, p<0.05$); in assessment B, for “ability to diagnose a group of pupils” ($r_s=-0.60, p<0.05$); in assessment C, for “ability to relieve emotional tension” ($r_s=-0.59, p<0.05$). In addition, in assessment A two more expressed tendencies of negative correlations were noted — for “ability to diagnose a pupil” ($r_s=-0.56, p>0.05$) and for “ability to relieve emotional tension” ($r_s=-0.56, p>0.05$)

Subtest 4, “stories with additions,” assessing the factor of cognition of behavioral systems (the ability to understand the logic of developments in situations of interaction, to assess people’s behavior in such situations), produced significant negative correlations in each of the three assessments: in assessment A, for “ad-

equate conduct in a conflict situation” ($r_s = -0.73, p \leq 0.01$); in assessment B, for “adequate conduct in a conflict situation” ($r_s = -0.74, p \leq 0.01$), “ability to diagnose a group of pupils” ($r_s = -0.64, p \leq 0.05$), and “ability to relieve emotional tension” ($r_s = -0.57, p \leq 0.05$); in assessment C, for “adequate conduct in a conflict situation” ($r_s = -0.62, p \leq 0.05$).

In a composite assessment, the only tendency to negative correlation was in assessment B, for the “ability to relieve emotional tension” ($r_s = -0.50, p > 0.05$).

Thus, the greatest total number of correlations in all assessments was revealed in Subtest 3 (“verbal expression”) and in Subtest 4 (“stories with additions”), and all correlations were negative. Therefore, teachers having higher points according to these tests were inclined to be more critical than those with lower points in assessing their own communicative competencies.

Conclusions

Teacher’s conduct in difficult pedagogical situations has a great influence on the emotional and psychological conditions of pupils and on the psychological climate in a classroom community. A teacher’s conduct should ensure a positive climate in a classroom, where pupils can feel safe and can receive the support that allows them to be included in the everyday life of the class (Cefai & Cavioni, 2014). Wang and colleagues (2014) found that a teacher’s support has a positive effect on pupils’ feelings of happiness and satisfaction with communication as well as on the settlement of their conflicts with classmates. Studies have also shown the importance of a close, supportive teacher-pupil relationship, which provides low levels of conflict and at the same time considerably increases the social, emotional, and behavioral development of pupils and, to a lesser extent, their educational achievements (Short, 2013). The influence of teachers’ support on pupils’ motivation, on their interest in and pursuit of social objectives (Wentzel et al., 2010), and on emotional and cognitive aspects of learning (Frisby & Martin, 2010) has also been noted.

Our research shows that teachers have clear ideas about communicative competencies and the standards of conduct necessary for effective pedagogical practice. These ideas emerged in respondents’ descriptions of the conduct of an “ideal” teacher in difficult pedagogical situations. The conduct described by teachers was aimed at supporting pupils, creating a favorable climate in a classroom community, and providing constructive conflict settlement. At the same time they believed that many teachers (as a rule, not including themselves) actually behave in a different way. This belief emerged in respondents’ descriptions of the conduct of a “real” (ordinary, typical) teacher, which were characterized largely as destructive.

The tendency shown by the majority of teachers, even in an anonymous poll, to conform to a professional ideal probably helps them to cope with the requirements of the profession and to maintain those emotional overloads with which everyday pedagogical activity is fraught. The same tendency of orientation to the professional ideal was manifested in teachers’ assessments of their own communicative competencies, which on average were quite high. At the same time, the results of this research allow us to presume the existence of deeply hidden, almost unconscious uncertainty regarding their own professionalism; such uncertainty can become a source of constant internal tension, as was revealed in the results of the implemen-

tation of the SD method, which exposed a significant correlation of the object “me as teacher” with the object “novice teacher.”

The psychological training, which was dedicated to teachers' communicative culture, gave them the chance to demonstrate their high professionalism and reduced internal tension; these results were revealed after the training, when the teachers re-estimated downward their own communicative competencies as set by them at the beginning of the training. Moreover, participation in the psychological training allowed the teachers to learn additional communicative skills that helped to increase their self-confidence and to strengthen their inner selves.

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