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**SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL COMPETENCES OF TEACHERS –
A NEW APPROACH AND A NEW MEANING OF THE CHALLENGES
BROUGHT BY THE CONTEXT OF SCHOOL AND CLASS
RELATIONAL AND EMOTIONAL COMPETENCES**

REC – ERASMUS+ STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP, 2017-1-IT02-KA201-036763

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Abstract. Approaches of teacher competences– impact and benefits Besides knowledge and academic performances (and more than these), the emotional and social abilities are real ways of measuring success and abilities to face the challenge that life brings to teachers. According to the same approach and to the same perspective of analysis, the success of the teacher depends on his/her theoretical and didactic knowledge, on his/her pedagogical skills, but also it depends on his/her ability to work with and manage the class of students. The welfare and the success in personal and professional life of the two actors from the educational background are closely related to social and emotional factors and demands the students and the teachers to owe social and emotional competences, as well.

Key words: socio-emotional, success, education.

**COMPETENȚELE SOCIALE ȘI EMOȚIONALE ALE CADRELOR DIDACTICE
- O NOUĂ ABORDARE ȘI UN NOU SENS
ÎN PROVOCĂRILE CONTEXTULUI ȘCOLII ȘI CLASEI DE ELEVI
COMPETENȚELE SOCIALE ȘI EMOȚIONALE**

REC – PARTENERIAT STRATEGIC ERASMUS+, 2017-1-IT02-KA201-036763

Rezumat. Abordările competențelor profesorilor - impact și beneficii. Pe lângă cunoștințe și performanțe academice (și mai mult decât acestea), abilitățile emoționale și sociale sunt modalități reale de a măsura succesul și abilitățile, de a face față provocării pe care viața o aduce profesorilor. Conform aceluiași abordări și perspective de analiză, succesul profesorului depinde de cunoștințele sale teoretice și didactice, de abilitățile sale pedagogice, dar și de capacitatea sa de a lucra și de a gestiona clasa de elevi. Starea de bine și succesul în viața personală și profesională a celor doi actori din mediul educațional sunt strâns legate de factorii sociali și emoționali și le solicită elevilor și cadrelor didactice să dețină și competențe sociale și emoționale.

Cuvinte cheie: socio-emoțional, succes, educație.

A great part of the literature dealing with educational problems focuses on the role of teachers in developing students' abilities (taking in consideration or not their own level of developing these competences), in order to create programs of social and emotional learning addressed to the class of the students.

From the students' perspective, the programs of developing social and emotional competences have highlighted a wide panel of benefits, including the improvement of students' school attendance, the rise in motivation for study, the reduction in early school

leaving problems, an easier and faster inclusion of the students with special needs, the development of social cohesion, the improvement of school results. A quite considerable part of the literature goes for the importance of the quality of relations and interactions between teachers and students, from the perspective of the students' result – academic, social as well as emotional results.

Emotional and social learning refers to students as well as to adults equally, to each member of the educational community. Students from different fields of activity (psychological, sciences of education) have as common aim synthesizing and extending information about social and emotional competences of the teachers and the impact that the implementation of the SEL (social emotional learning) programs can have upon teachers, upon their personality, upon the educational practices implemented. One of the first theoretical studies which deals with SEC (social and emotional competences) and SEL is the model of pro-social class proposed by Jennings and Greenberg [1], which highlights the importance of social-emotional competences of the teachers and their welfare, in order to offer students emotional, social and academic support. According to the explanatory model, teachers' experience in implementing, their beliefs and attitude towards SEL highly influence their educational training as well as the level of their own social and emotional competences. In fact, the model highlights the relation between socio-emotional competences and welfare, with other four factors: teacher-student relation, class management, implementing SEL and class climate. Jennings and Greenberg state that teachers with a high level of emotional welfare and of development of social and emotional competences succeed to build positive relations within the class of students, to support students no matter their particularities, to create a climate of safety and respect, of mutual support, to manage more efficiently the critical situations and conflicts.

At the same time, a supportive learning background, when we constantly offer positive feed-back to students, where students are encouraged to get involved, to freely express themselves, to freely present their opinions, to accept that they are different personalities; it is a background which also supports the academic results of the students and the construction of quality impersonal relations between students and students, students and teachers. A proper climate in class and in school also supports the development of social and relational competences of the teacher and the reduction of professional stress. The pro-social class model sustains the mutual relation between social and emotional competences of the teachers and the efficiency of implementing social and emotional learning programs addressed to students. Social and emotional competences, welfare, teachers' motivation and beliefs regarding social and emotional learning programs, all of these highly influence the attitude towards and the application of social and emotional learning program, according to Jennings and Greenberg [1], but also Collie, Shapka and Perry [3].

Related to operationalization of social and emotional competences, there are several theoretical and practical approaches, but the most well-known and generally used is the model of the five competences, proposed by the CASEL group – Collaborative for Academic, Social and Educational Learning. The way it works and the impact of these competences of teachers upon students, upon the academic results, but also their social and emotional competences were also approached in the in-training course in Romania, with 113 teachers, in the project Relational and Emotional Competences REC – ERASMUS+ strategic partnership 2017-1-IT02-KA201-036763, and the impact of these training activities was measured within the research done by the partner countries.

Social and emotional competence is a large construction, usually understood as an expected result of the SEL programs. Social and emotional competent teachers will present the main competences described by CASEL: self-consciousness, self-control, social consciousness, the ability of establishing relations, the ability to take responsible decisions, also a high ability to apply their abilities for school activities.

According to Jennings and Greenberg [1, p. 495], self-consciousness, defined as the ability to understand their own feelings, aims and values, is that SEC dimension which allows teachers to build a good understanding of their strengths and weaknesses which characterize their emotional state, to have a real feeling of self-confidence, to recognize emotional patterns and to know to generate and use emotions to motivate class-learning and to build a positive, supportive climate. Besides the classroom, this ability is found in the teachers' belief and also in their positive mentality in relation to students' parents and their peers. The self-efficacy, the teachers' beliefs in their ability to bring significant positive changes in learning, is associated with a limitation of the risks of emotional exhaustion, with a higher involvement at work and with a lower tendency to drop-out of the educational system.

Social consciousness, another SEC dimension, refers to the teachers' ability to have a perspective and to empathize with students, students' families and colleagues in school. Teachers with a high level of social consciousness are aware of the way their emotional expressions affect their interactions with the others, recognize and understand the others' emotions, build strong relations of support through mutual understanding and co-operation. These teachers are sensitive to cultural diversity and appreciate different perspectives of students, parents, colleagues and are able to easily solve conflicts within the educational background. In everyday activity, this ability of teachers is manifested in their efforts to seize and empathize with the perspectives of students and parents they work with, in the compassion shared with students, parents, colleagues, in their behavior developed in the relation with different members of the educational community (support, shelter, interest in the others' problems and perspectives), in the interest to find the most appropriate resources

which can support the learning-teaching process (with evident effects when working with students with special needs)

The ability to make responsible decisions, taking in consideration the ethical standards, focusing on safety, respect for social standards and for the others, it represents another dimension of social and emotional competences requested to the teachers [4, p.1, 1, p. 495]. Teachers with a high level of responsibility of taking decisions take in consideration the way these decisions will have impact on schools, students, members of the professional community, and take the responsibility for their own decisions and actions. Teachers permanently have to make decisions, in their activity, from didactic strategies, conflict solving, designing teaching-learning-evaluation activities, to curricular strategies, rules and regulations in class. All these decisions mean constructive and respectful choices with direct influence on the teachers' own welfare and the welfare of the others, and which support the development of students' autonomy, self-determination, through involving and encouraging the students to participate in decision making.

Another dimension of SEC is represented by the self-management, the ability to control emotions, thoughts and reactions when confronted with difficult situations, emotionally speaking. According to Jennings and Greenberg [1], the teachers who get a high level in self-management are able to express emotions in healthy ways, to build positive relations with the others, face calmly and efficiently negative behaviors of students, parents and colleagues, feel comfortable and even encourage students' autonomy. These teachers show their ability to face stressful situations minimizing, for example, the frustration they feel in different situations, show their ability to choose clear and tangible aims, to keep the enthusiasm and the success in his/her work. Self-adaptability, as a specific way of self-regulation, is another ability upon which recent studies have been made [2], characteristic to the teachers who are able to adapt their thoughts, actions and emotions to the ever changing situations, and which correlate with a better welfare and with the academic results of the students. Other relevant additional fields of research relevant for self-management are coping skills, motivation and objectives setting, which proved to be very good support for teachers in the management of difficult situations at work, in reducing the burnout and boosting the welfare.

Teachers with well-developed relationship abilities are able to prevent, deal with and solve the interpersonal conflicts within the class of students, within the teachers' room, within relations with the parents and are ready to recognize the fact that they need and ask for help when it's necessary [4]. Relationship abilities implies the setting and maintaining of high-quality relations, such as clear communication, listening and cooperating with the others, negotiating conflicts properly, giving and asking for help [5, 6]. High quality relations between teachers and students are in strong connection with welfare, motivations and offering didactic help of high-quality, as well as with the motivation, commitment and

academic involvement of the students. At the same time, teachers' communication abilities are also to be observed in the relations with the colleagues and the management team, in their efforts for using collaborative teaching and high-quality informal interactions, with a great impact on the level of their welfare and motivation. Also, the welfare and the commitment of the teachers, efficient setting of the objectives are positively influenced by their availability to ask for help, to ask questions, to look for support from more experienced teachers [7].

In conclusion, nowadays we can speak about a considerable amount of research literature which analyzed all these five social and emotional competences identified by CASEL [6], all of them offering proof of their relevance for the welfare, motivation and pedagogical practices of the teachers, as well as for the improvements they brought in several areas of personal, social and academic life of the students: socio-emotional abilities of the students, attitude towards the inner-self, attitude towards school and the others around, positive social behavior, reducing behavioral problems and emotional stress.

Regarding the impact upon students, several proofs suggest that social and emotional factors have clear benefits, which reduce the barriers in accessing education and promoting the abilities that allow students to engage in diverse social and academic activities. In fact, social and emotional competence profile of the teachers, together with the inclusion of students in SEL programs (which follow students' acquisition and effective application of knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to recognize and manage emotions, to show emotions and empathy towards the others, to take responsible decisions, to develop positive relations and to manage difficult situations) lead to a development of academic, social and emotional performances of students.

These changes deal to a great extent with the motivation for learning, for the commitment to school, with the development of strong feelings of belonging to a school community, with reducing inner-self problems (such as depression and anxiety) or outer-self (aggressivity and interpersonal violence), with reducing school drop-out. If students are encouraged to express positive emotions and to engage into effective relations based on respect, even from primary school, it is more probable they will avoid depression, violence and other psychical and behavioral problems as grown-ups. The attachment and the feeling of belonging to a school community is more developed, negative behaviors are reduced, and the academic results are positively influenced. The students who have clear behavioral and social standards, which allow them to feel secure, valued, confident, will also have good school behavior and will learn easier. Socio-emotional abilities used and the supportive educational background seem to contribute to the resilience of all students, those identified both with negative and/or positive behavior.

Teachers who are calm, positive and satisfied are more capable of approaching students in a calm and sensitive way, even when these behave not so properly. And the

way teachers navigate in stressful situations every day is attentively observed by the students and taken as model, the students learning from the way their teachers manage frustration, confront with conflicts or maintain self-control in the classroom. And if teachers want to teach in a well-organized class, where creativity and autonomy are encouraged, they have to maintain a spirit of calm and respectful involvement, they have to be organized and to develop social confidence.

Through the ERASMUS+ strategic partnership `Relational and Emotional Competences` REC, through the in-training course which took place in Romania, after the presentation and the analysis of the five dimensions of social and emotional competences, all the 113 teachers involved in the training activities designed a „portray” of the teacher competent from the emotional and social point of view. The most significant characteristics of this type of teacher, taken from the analysis of his/her own educational experience and from the reflection upon the practices developed in the school he/she works and in the Romanian school, generally speaking, designs a teacher who:

- sustains the development of prosocial behaviors of students, by offering as many opportunities as possible to cooperate, to help the other, to reflect upon peers experiences and needs, to participate in mutual decisions; a teacher who understands the basic needs of the students as part of a community - the class and the school;
- does not use punishment in order to control undesirable behaviors of students, encouraging prosocial behaviors of students, establishing clear limits through assertive approaches and preventive strategies;
- acknowledge their emotions and know how to manage positive emotions, such as joy and enthusiasm to motivate students to learn;
- proves calm and efficient management in the demands imposed by standardized testing of the school results;
- is highly interested in the students' welfare and comfort at school, in promoting high-quality relations, manifesting concern, compassion, support towards students, facts that determine the increase of motivation and interest of the students in learning;
- manages efficiently the relations of collaboration with parents, sometimes too difficult or too exigent;
- is aware of the students' emotions, understands cognitive evaluations which can be associated with those emotions and the way in which emotions motivate/determine the students' behavior; creates within the class a context that generates and maintains positive emotions of the students, because the feeling of welfare, the feeling of security and valorization increase students' motivation, promote and encourage learning;
- is proactive, able to use emotional expressions and verbal support to promote enthusiasm and the joy of learning;

- understands the dynamic of conflict situations within the class and negotiate effectively and efficiently adapted solutions;
- is characterized by trust, receptivity and involvement, promotes students' social and emotional development, ensures a state of security which helps students to explore new ideas and take risks.

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