TEACHERS AND SOCIAL LEARNING AS A FACTOR OF MODERN EDUCATIONAL COMPETENCIES

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Abstract. Modern educational process is becoming increasingly complex, subject of the influence of many intrapersonal and interpersonal factors. Conceptual basis of this work is Bandura's social learning theory, which stresses the importance of the so-called, social learning, or learning by model, positioned in the educational context. The aim is to present the results of modern studies that dealt with the personality of a teacher from a model of student behavior and social learning, which mediates in the process of modeling the student's behavior, as well as the performance factors of the modern educational process. The general conclusion is that the teachers' personality through a process of social learning has important influence on students' behavior and efficiency of the educational process and that the various development and educational programs aimed at the teachers' empowerment and encouraging the operation of positive social impact, can significantly contribute to the quality and improvement of the effects of the educational efforts on the school and preschool age.

Keywords: personality of a teacher, social learning, educational process, school and preschool age

Introduction

Modern educational process has very dynamic nature, caused by the functioning of a large number of individual and social factors, which are manifested through the variables of personal and socio-psychological impact. It is important to emphasize that actors who participate in the educational process are often not aware of these significant impacts. Here is primarily thought of educators, teachers and professors, who largely shape the overall psychosocial development of children during school and pre-school period, not only by means of specific educational methods, procedures and resources, but above all through their own personal and social daily interaction with the children. Precisely for this reason, the main goal of this paper is to present the importance of teachers in modeling the behavior of students, and this primarily through a process of social learning, which is a significant source of the behavior of children of school and preschool age.

Bandura's social learning theory, which describes the role of social learning, or learning by model, represents the theoretical skeleton of the work. This theory in the paper is positioned in the educational context and correlated with the findings of modern research that is aimed at testing the functioning of teachers in modeling the behavior of students, with an emphasis on social learning mechanisms that mediate in the educational process.

The practical implications of the work are reflected in the acquisition of the role of teacher and mechanisms of social learning as a factor that can significantly improve the educational process, but also impede the successful implementation of educational goals and objectives, if it takes on the negative aspect of operations. So, implementation of the findings of studies that have addressed the issue of the teachers functioning and mechanisms of social learning in the educational context, can have its significant implications in the creation and development of appropriate educational programs, which will be aimed at person-

ality development of educational workers and fostering the functioning mechanisms of social learning, which would have a positive role in improving the modern educational process and tasks set before the modern educational system.

Basic principles of social learning theory of Albert Bandura

Albert Bandura's Social learning theory is one of the most influential theories dealing with the factors of human behavior and, as such, has significant implications in the field of educational work. Pulsates that Bandura is one of the most cited authors of today, which testifies the importance and implications of his work (Bandura, 1976).

By the behavior researches formed by social influences Bandura gradually builds its theoretical system. In his famous experiments conducted during the sixties with the Bobo doll, he examined the work methods of the learning process modeled upon the adoption of aggressive behavior in childhood. It is particularly important finding which has confirmed that children, observing adult behavior model gradually start to adopt the moral orientation of the model, opposite of their own (Hrnjica, 2003).

Social learning or learning by model refers to the type of learning in which certain behaviour, adopted by emulation on an appropriate role model, whereby imitates the behavior of the model (Bandura, 1976). Learning on the model of the Bandura's theory is described by its three main aspects, which differ primarily by the level of complexity, type and degree of sustainability of adopted behaviors (Hrnjica, 2003): (1) *Learning by imitation* - is linked to the manifest of externally visible behavior and do not have to be emotional connection with imitated model, usually simpler behaviors are imitated (facial expressions, gestures, certain movements), adopted behavior that tends shorter duration; (2) *Learning by identification* - is associated with the internal characteristics of the personality, there is an affective connection with the model behavior. Behavior patterns are adopted spontaneously, without conscious intention and efforts to influence the behavior of others. Through this process of adopting the

more complex forms of behavior (speech, attitudes, behavior in certain situations and against certain people, etc.). The behavior adopted in this way is relatively permanent nature, with a tendency to generalize to a wider range of situations; (3) *Learning the social roles* - this is a more complex type of learning by model, characterized by the adoption of behaviors that bind to certain positions and roles in society, and incorporates various forms of learning (classical and instrumental conditioning, learning by the realizing, learning by imitation and identification etc.).

The theory of social learning in the educational context

When it comes to educational influences on personality development of a child and the adoption of certain patterns of behavior in the school and pre-school age, social learning theory has made an outstanding contribution. In fact, this theory suggests precisely the important mechanisms by which modeled behavior shall be adopted in childhood and may be used for the purpose of encouraging the positive and suppress the negative personality traits, attitudes and behaviors.

On the basis of socialization, which is an important process through which the individual prepares for life in the community and form as individuals, with whole coordinated personal traits and characteristics, lies the mechanism of social learning (Hrnjica, 2003). School and preschool system of institutions are very important sources of socialization through which an individual from the earliest days adopt socially-relevant behavioral patterns and is formed as a person, through the mechanisms of social learning. In this sense, these institutions have huge responsibility and obligation of transferring socially desirable characteristics and behavior patterns to the young generations.

Just as it can send a positive educational messages, the school can often represent a factor of negative behavior model, whereby primarily, is the irresponsible behavior of educational workers and peer models that represent a negative example for the children in the neighborhood. Numerous positive sides

and the possibility of social learning are given the opportunity to come to its full glory precisely in the context of the organization of education and teaching.

Studies suggest that the mere fact that children of school and pre-school age in school and preschool institutions have the opportunity to stay in peer groups (classes, groups, preschools) and to learn and grow through group work, present the opportunity to examine and improve their social and communication skills. In such an environment, children have the opportunity to receive feedback on their social behavior of educators, teachers, and peers. In addition, through appropriate educational influence by teachers and educators, children are in a position to improve their social skills and abilities, and progress towards the development of other desirable personal characteristics, moderated by the activities of teachers as part of the development and their lead in the desired direction (Hoffman, 2008).

Nevertheless, the fact as a result of contemporary studies in our country warries. It shows that social learning mechanisms are not used to a sufficient extent in terms of stimulating the development of a positive position for students in elementary school. The communication between the teacher and student is considered as one-way and poorly attended, representing a significant negative model of teacher's behavior (Bosanac, 2011). However, this relationship (ratio) is subject of change and improvement, and according to the above findings represent an important guideline for the development of appropriate training programs intended for our educators, teachers.

The authors emphasize that the existing model of communication between teachers and students can significantly be improved by the engagement of students in the classroom, working in smaller groups, using the method of dialogue, opening interesting topics for discussion in which students take an active role, and teachers take a position of positive models of behavior. Teachers should be encouraged in the direction of this action and allow their individual and professional development, which will contribute in implementing of the

principles of social learning in the most appropriate way (Bosanac, 2011; Hoffman, 2008; Jovanovic, 2011).

The personality of teachers and educational process

Personality of educators and teachers is one of the most important factor influencing the process of social learning in school and preschool age. Teacher psychology as a fairly developed area of psychology today testifies to the importance of teachers in the educational process (Digic, 2013).

Personal and social characteristics of teachers come to the fore in the process of social learning, and teachers with their individual and social competences and preferences often even unconsciously and inadvertently become an important source and behavior model fora child. This is why teachers have to be aware of their very important role, and seek positive personal characteristics and aspirations to constitute the best possible role model for students (Maric, 2013). While this may seem like a very natural and easy task, sometimes it is not easy at all, particularly when a number of stressful circumstances and situations that require intensified effort, often encountered in their workplace are taking into account (Sakac, 2012).

Socio-emotional skills and communication competencies of teachers need to be at a high level. These qualities of teachers are essential elements of successful implementation in the educational process. A teacher who has a well-developed socio-emotional and communication skills will represent an appropriate role model for children and will be able to adequately, through a process of social learning among the youngest, encourage the development of precisely these characteristics that most come to the fore in the educational process.

Teacher is largely responsible for fostering a positive climate in the classroom community and supporting an atmosphere of trust and acceptance, which through social learning becomes permanent tendency among all the other members of the department. If a teacher has the appropriate personality traits

that build such an atmosphere, it is easy to consolidate similar patterns of behavior in children. Thus further reinforces positive climate in class, which in further contributes to children's well-being and building positive human qualities in the youngest (Page & Page, 2010).

A positive way of thinking and the behavior that is in accordance with generally accepted principles and norms of the society, teacher gradually and relatively easy build in children, only if its capacity and personal characteristics are constantly improving and adapting to the current demands of society. Positive attitude, openness to support and proactively confronting the difficulties, children adopted in the easiest way if there exist such behavior among people in their environment (Rijavec & Miljkovic, 2010).

The role of teachers was important throughout history and there is no tendency of losing its importance, however, the structure of requirements has a changing nature and the teacher should adapt to the demands of time in which the educational process is taking place. It can be said that the universal human principles and values such as hard work, diligence, moral virtues and qualities of independent, mature person, ready to help others, independently of time perspective should be nurtured both at themselves and at children they educate. It should also bear in mind that such children are far more features built on the basis of how adults behave in their environment, rather than on the basis of what they are saying, and not accompanied by the model, which was confirmed by Bandura's experiments. (Bandura & Walters, 1963).

The teacher must show by example that he/she respects the dignity of each student, so that they can learn to respect teachers and other adults in their environment. Also, from their personal example teachers have large influence on the development of mutual respect among students, which is the basis of any healthy interpersonal relationship that should be pursued. Tolerance is built precisely through social contacts, and it is one of the most important virtues of children, which is largely compromised today, but on teachers lies a very responsible task of encouraging them. In addition, it is very important to develope

a good relationship between the teacher's colleagues to exchange experiences and opinions, which represents a significant incentive for improving practice (Hoffman, 2008).

Children should be allowed the freedom of decision making and action, but that does not mean that teachers should be passive and a silent observers of events but an active model that encourages autonomy in children, but also the child support. Teachers creativity greatly raises the creative potential of the child, especially through the community activities directed by the teacher, and realized by children in groups. And here also, the social learning is crucial. At the same time, the individuality of each individual comes to the fore, building a mosaic of ideas. The teacher's role is to facilitate the expression of talent, but also to understand the differences as strengths and virtues, not as a contradiction and conflict of different ideas (Page & Page, 2010).

Thus, the teacher is not merely a presenter of information and content (as is commonly misunderstood), but is primarily an individual, personality, with its complex set of traits - strengths and weaknesses, which come to the fore in all forms of educational work. With own personal endeavor and sustained efforts, every teacher must encourage itself primarily with the development of desirable individual characteristics, by personal example to encourage the development in children, i.e. students. The teacher directs, supports, evaluates and adapts to each child's capabilities, which are very complex tasks and require a remarkable personal abilities and individual capacities.

Social learning aimed at personal development of a child

From the point of encouraging the development of appropriate personal characteristics of students, the authors give the following practical guidelines for teachers (Hoffman, 2008): (i) Learning should be organized to be directed towards improving the personal and social skills of children; (ii) Focus teachers position towards the support and protection of all students; (iii) All children

must be placed in a position to experience success - time to build their confidence and indirectly strengthen the interpersonal skills of every child; (iv) Through the process of teaching, students should be provided with adequate social experiences and incentives, which is best achieved through the group and project teaching; (v) Feedback informations in a group and reflection of experiences are the basis of establishing trust, cooperation and tolerance in the community.

Due to the primary orientation, the authors distinguish two types of teachers (Jovanovic, 2011): (1) teachers are mainly directed towards the realization of educational tasks and achieving academic success of students; (2) teachers are primarily oriented towards fostering good psychosocial climate and fostering quality relationships in the group.

Jovanovic (2011) points out that studies show that students just encourage the quality of relationships between teachers and students, as the main motive for greater commitment to achieving academic success. The author points out that good psychosocial climate in school contributes to pro-social development of young people, in which the key role plays teachers personality, his attitude towards students, as well as praise for providing support to others, which encourages the development of empathy in children.

The modern concept of classroom management combines the work methods of teachers with competencies and strategies implemented in order to improve the successful implementation of educational objectives (Digic, 2013). Digic (2013) states that research results show that the following characteristics are referred to as personality traits in evaluating the performance of teachers: (a) Personality properties of teacher (intellectual, emotional and other individual characteristics); (b) Personal behavior and attitude toward students; (c) Work methods in the teaching process (expertise, professional competence, the preferred personal style of work); (d) The specific characteristics of teachers (attitudes, values); (e) Social role and social status of teachers (reflected through

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participation in extracurricular activities with students); (f) The visual appearance of teachers (constitution, manner (way) of dressing, tone of voice, etc.).

That list of features is closely associated with social learning. Most of these characteristics refer to characteristics that are a starting point in the process of identifying, learning behavior specific for a particular role and in adopting different patterns of behavior that manifests the selected role model in general. From these internal personality factors of teacher often will depend on concrete strategies based on the principles of social doctrine, which applies in dealing with the aim of encouraging the development of the child's personality.

Pedagogical and psychological implications

Pedagogical and psychological implications of studies that have investigated the role of social learning and personality of teachers in the realization of educational tasks are reflected in significant practical guidelines for work in kindergartens and schools. Creating a favorable educational climate is cited as one of the main factors of successful realization of the educational process, whereby in efforts to develop adequate climate in the classroom community where the key role has social learning processes and personality characteristics of teachers (Digic, 2013; Jovanovic, 2011).

Great importance is the education of junior school children and preschoolers, which is based on the principles of social learning, contributes to the development of cooperation, by fostering mutual cooperation and assistance (Jovanovic, 2011; Page & Page, 2010). In addition, education of teacher, personal and professional development of adult actors in the educational system should be understood as a continuous process, based on the principles of lifelong learning and improvement (Maric, 2012).

The teacher is an active participant in the educational process and an important behavior model in childhood. Teacher should encourage students' ac-

tivity as much as possible, especially if taking into account the fact that the desired behaviors are easier to adopt at a younger age, and that learning of socially desirable behaviors is more efficient and with longer lasting effects, if students have an appropriate model, and to encourage them to imitate the given behavior model (altruistic behavior, tolerance, hard work, conscientiously performing of tasks, etc.).

Studies suggest that the desirable traits of teachers are: hospitality, warmth, friendliness, sense of justice, democracy and tolerance, consistency, cooperation, innovation and openness, empathy and understanding for students, interest in students, a tendency towards encouraging students' activities and a tendency towards permanent improvement (Digic, 2013). All these qualities of teachers are necessary to systematically encourage and enable them to reach their full expression in the framework of the educational process.

With the help of appropriate developmental and educational programs implemented continuously it is possible to stimulate the mechanisms of the social learning in the classroom community and contribute to teachers' success and psychological development of students in the desired direction. Prosocial behavior of students may be especially encouraged and nurtured with these programs including a variety of cooperative tasks and activities, the development of positive discipline, modeling, adoption and practice of pro-social values, fostering empathy, understanding and tolerance (Jovanovic, 2011).

Concluding remarks

Based on the findings of the past, contemporary studies and practical guidelines found in the literature, it can be concluded that Bandura's social learning theory finds its major application in educational terms. The personality of teachers and social learning processes that are largely represented in teaching have a very important pedagogical and psychological implications in the entire field of educational activities.

Appropriate educational programs can serve as important factors of personality development of teachers and enable the implementation of appropriate strategies with the aim of activating and stimulating the functioning of various mechanisms of social learning that continues to contribute to the psychosocial development of students in the desired direction. The power of social learning must not be underestimated in the teaching process, primarily because that way a number of desired, and undesired behavior in childhood could be adopted. For this reason, it is essential that teachers and educators are constantly aware of their important position and role in the overall development of the school and pre-school child, and of continuously personal and professional efforts to enable the adoption of pro-social behaviors in young generation.

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