

SELF-KNOWLEDGE, PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AS A UNIT AND IN LOGICAL CONTINUITY

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ABSTRACT

While browsing through recent papers and studies I noticed an increase in the number of articles emphasizing the convergence of personal and professional development. The present paper is focused on a specific facet of this issue, the above mentioned relationship for education specialists. Personal and professional development are two complex and interconnected processes that support and augment each other and that merge in a dynamic, fluid way throughout the career path, into a third process—the professional individuation.

On a different level, one does not need psychology studies to see that many children enter youth already perturbed, unhappy, with irrational fears and unresolved problems with themselves. Later in life, as adults, they grow into hostile, defensive victims, much of these issues stemming from conflicts with their deep inner self, conflicts that emerged in childhood. As such, it is not bold or hazardous to state that self-understanding as a product of self-knowledge should be one of the focus points of the education programs children are subjected to, from kindergarten on.

The place of self-knowledge in psychological life is much too overlooked in manuals and treaties. Self-knowledge means, on the one hand, being aware of, expressing and accepting one's thoughts, feelings, attitudes and values and, on the other hand, accessing the inner freedom of deciding what kind of person one wants to become. The present paper supports that, should we be able to nurture the feeling of personal value, self-competency and social competency in our children, the professional competencies will have a much more solid foundation to develop on.

KEYWORDS: *personal development, professional development, professional individuation*

1. PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

The development of the human personality is a continuous, dialectical process starting with self-knowledge, open towards efficient relationships with the world at large. In J. Nuttin's vision, personality is a "*bipolar structure: SELF – WORLD*", an ensemble structured around inter-relational potentials with oneself and the world (Zlate, 2000, p. 304). The typical scheme of these potentials remains relatively identical to itself, facilitating self-knowledge. The content, in exchange, is really malleable and is at the base of personality's

profound changes, which is a good argument, this time for personal development. From this point of view, self-knowledge would mean reaching a superior level of awareness (reflexive awareness of the personal significance of the inner and outer world). Personal development would mean the ability to actively build up that significance, in agreement with the deep inner Self, the self-education towards optimal functioning and self-actualization. In education, this translates into acknowledging the human being as an active, self-affirming entity, with vast latent potential which must be materialized. Of course, that should happen not only in the propaganda but also in the down-to-earth realms of the finalities, curricula, philosophy and methodology used in education. As for the practice in education, there seem to be an excessive preoccupation, if not an exclusive idea, about teaching a multitude of information more or less usable in everyday life. The human behavior, the human motives and the inner life are mostly ignored. Surprisingly, research shows that children are interested in finding more about themselves and the others even if such interest is not cultivated. The need to understand oneself, to accept oneself and be understood by others is there. The immediate conclusion is that consistent, coherent educational programs are needed to fulfill the psychological needs of children and teenagers.

On the other hand, one needs not be a psychologist to see that many children enter the teenage period disturbed, unhappy, with irrational fears and unresolved issues with themselves. Later, as adults, they suffer through their own hostility, defensiveness, self-victimization, mainly from conflicts with their profound self, conflicts from childhood. Seeing all this, it sounds less and less risky to say that self-understanding, as a product of self-knowledge, should be part of the educational program from kindergarten onward (Jersild, apud Hamachek, 1965, p. 530).

Coming back to the essence of the human being, one's unique and individual self, as well the attempt to decipher it, remind of the greeting on the entrance of the Delphi temple, holy "center of the world" at one time: *Know thyself!* The greeting would later be taken by "*the wisest of men*", Socrates, who would turn it into a behavior model and educational method. That method would grow to become the inspiration for a whole era of education and pedagogy. The Latin word "*educare*" means "to distill" (Wenger, 2001, p.168). The ancient people thought wisdom comes from inside, and the educator's task is to distill the student's perceptions and subtle visions of the world. The technique used is investigative, making the student self-examine, defend and describe perceptions and ideas held. Modern pedagogy acknowledges that this procedure has strong, long-lasting impact on the students, but failed so far to come up with concrete ways to implement it in a 25 – 30 students classroom.

We appreciate that the moment we gave up the Socratic Method, his philosophy and funding principles, we stopped educating and started teaching. The classic-by-now teaching methods that replaced Socrates' fail to reveal the

"*natural wisdom inherent*" of every child, because their focus is the teacher – magister – and the subjects to be taught. The consequences might not have been immediately visible, but today, with the children sincerely and fully hating school and departing it post-haste for lack of belonging or use, the things come to light. School no longer fulfills a basic need – self-expression. It should reconsider its own scopes and methods and maybe it should one again greet children with the old "Know thyself!".

Thus, starting with Socrates, self-knowledge tends to be a science about man, but also a didactic of personality, a paidea (W. Jaeger, apud. Enăchescu, 1997, p.18). For Plato, self-knowledge is an act of reflection, of self-reflecting itself. Answering the question "*Who am I?*" means exploring one's own identity, discovering one's personal "Me". Socrates shows that interrogation appears as a privilege reserved to mankind only, even a debt of the human being. Since self-knowledge is about the self that acts as personal identification and characterization, it follows with necessity that the object of self-knowledge is the Self. Zapan's studies, the method of objective appreciation (1937), proved the educability of self-knowledge and objective self-appreciation. Self-knowledge condenses thus in three dimensions: "*self-perception / self-concept; self-image and self-assessment / self-esteem and – linked to it – self-efficiency*". (Șchiopu, 1997, p. 641).

The place of self-knowledge in the psychological life is a subject way too overlooked in the psychology treaties and manuals. It is stated that psychological life is not an inborn characteristic, but a potential that actualizes in different ways in different environments. Less stated is the fact that among the first products and manifestations is the self-image and the world-attributed self-image. And the self-image is the result of self-knowledge, of the insight that allows a distinction to be made between self and non-self or others' selves, it is a mitigating factor of external and internal forces.

Self-knowledge, for short, means: getting awareness, expressing, accepting one's thoughts, feelings, attitudes, values on the one hand and on the other hand conquering the freedom to decide the type of human being one wants to be. It also means taking responsibility for what one is and for materializing the potential for personal development. All in all, self-knowledge and self-development make up an unit in logical continuity. The efficiency of self-knowledge receives substance in the process of development, in making the fund of potentials come true, in the decision of improving the life and work style, in improving relationships and, last but not least by any means, in de-centering from oneself and opening to others. Realistic self-definition and objective self-assessment are the foundation of personal psychological balance, of the psychological homeostasis and self-regulation in self-development.

P. H. Winne states that self-regulation implies, beyond meta-cognitive knowledge and habits, also personal efficiency and motivational processes

(apud. Zlate, 2001, p. 135). Starting with Bandura's studies (1986) and his own research, D. H. Schunk describes self-regulation as involving self-observation and self-reactance. The first means voluntarily focused attention on one's behavior, on its determinants and effects. Self-involvement includes comparing the actual level of performance with a single goal, to assess progress. Self-reactance means assessing one's own performance as "acceptable" or "unsatisfactory". Per the quoted author, all these are involved in the perception of one's own efficiency. They are effective self-management skills of the development process. For the teacher, this means locating the emergence surface of the scholar success with the ZPD, allowing for self-actualization and self-improvement.

Self-knowledge has many uses: in learning, in self-education but also in social relationships, friendships, work, even if it is a subjective process, oblivious even to the subject. Once brought to light, it allows for restructurings and conceptualizations, thus having more profound significance for the human being. The changes come from living the experience of self-knowledge, through which the implicit meaning of events come into conscience, are felt strongly and modified accordingly, many times without the subject knowing or wanting that. Self-knowledge can turn to behavioral patterns, expressing itself in the attitude of self-control and self-direction. Supported adequately by the self-realization motivation, it turns to instrument of orientation and action in life, foundation of self-modeling.

Personal development as a conscientious goal supposes a reflective conscience of what one is, wants to be and can be. It supposes the creative visualization of "*future self*", premeditating behavior and adequate self-programming and self-leading. This is possible because reflective conscience expands from present to future potential. The light of conscience supports the shift from the plan of action to the verbal-logic plan, allowing for the verbalization of ideas, projects, feelings and makes them available in the latter plan. The formation of self-conscience ends at about 14 or 15 years of age, specialists contend. In conclusion, the development of the personality means self-knowledge, the feeling of self-efficiency, intrinsic motivation for results and aspirations in line with the skills of the Self. "*We therefore have to explore incessantly, and at the end of the exploration we will reach the point of start and will know that place for the first time*" (T.S. Elliot, apud. Covey, 1998, p.32).

2. CONVERGENCE OF PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In the latest papers I remarked an increase in the number of those stressing the convergence of personal and professional development. The present paper focuses on a certain field of this issue, the relationship between professional and personal development in the psychology professionals. Elton-

Wilson (1994, p.72) states that the personal development of the practicing psychologist is focused on what he calls action needs": techniques and competencies, theories and explicative models, research skills, qualifications and trainings. On the other hand, personal development is focused on "being needs", such as authenticity, interpersonal engagement, intimacy, self-assessment.

Wilkins (1997) gives a simple and inclusive definition of the bond between the two, with reference to a counselor: while professional development is about acquiring "competencies and knowledge", personal development includes all the rest of being a practicing person". McLeod (1996, p.47) proposes a two-part taxonomy of a counselor's competencies: technical and generic. The former is about specific competencies, the latter is about "personal qualities and attributes". And the list of such authors can go on. What is clear in all these conceptual distinctions is that the two associated concepts and processes are not mutually exclusive, but rather interdependent. Sporadically, the literature of the last years reveals that the quality of the relationship with the client is dependent upon the relationship between the two types of development and that their cumulative effects reflect upon the efficiency of the counseling or therapy process (Bayne et al., 1994; Horton & Varma, 1997; Sharrock, 2000, apud Donati, p. 476).

In a 1996 research by Skovholt and Ronnestad 100 American counselors and therapists were interviewed, from beginners to persons with 20+ years of experience. The researchers appreciate that, based on extensive interviewing, they identified evidence for a fundamental development process they called "professional individuation"(apud. Donati, p.477). The concept is proposed in order to explain the complex interdependence between professional and personal development along the whole career. That relationship can be illustrated as a "development spectrum".

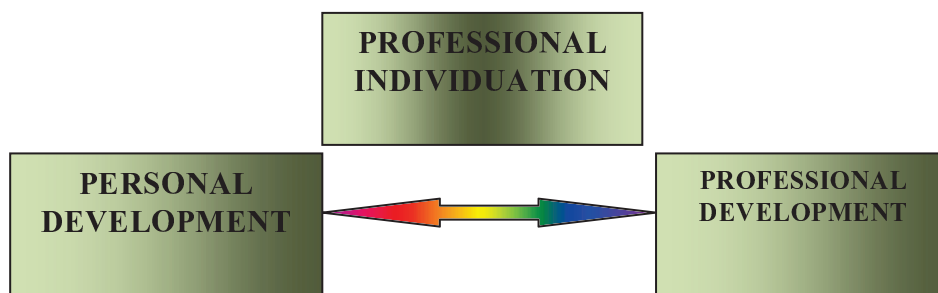


Fig. 1. Spectrum of elements involved in a psychologist's development Adapted after P. Wilkins (1997, p.5)

Researchers suggest that the way these two processes are interconnected and coherently integrated in a scope depends on the level the specialist's career is at. For example, a person at the beginning, the processes are so linked as to be virtually undistinguishable from each other. At the beginning of the career, the interventions are based mainly on the psychologist's common sense and life experience and less on theories and competencies. In this period it is difficult to see the impact of "Self as referential" in the relationship with the client. As one accumulates experience and engages in self-reflective activities, for example personal therapy, one becomes more and more aware of the impact of one's own personality and unresolved issues on the client. Now, the interface between personal and professional becomes more obvious and, according to Skovholt and Ronnestad, many such specialists experience mistrust in what they do. But by accumulating experience and continuous formation they come up to a fluid and harmonious synthesis of "personal and professional Selves", reflecting in a more personalized, flexible and creative practice. That explains that, in the later stages of the career, this distinction becomes less clear, the seasoned professional integrating the two intuitively and channeling them towards well-formed goals of the therapy or counseling processes.

In the process of professional individuation we can speak of a roadmap from unconscious incompetence to conscious incompetence to conscious competence and finally to unconscious competence. The last item is, in our opinion, the expression of professional mastery, where science and art, vocation and experience merge to the benefit of both the specialist and the client. As a consequence, personal and professional development are two complex, interconnected processes that augment each other and, along a whole career, fluidly merge into a third one called professional individuation.

What we certainly know is that a teacher communicates not only by what they say or do, but also by what they are. The quality of the personal and professional identity, thus, the consistency and balance leave a print on the children. More, a child's self-image depends greatly on the way the child thinks us, specialists, really feel about him. And as children need assistance in forming an encouraging image of self and life, it is necessary for us, in the first place, to have such an image. Should we be able to grow the feeling of personal worth in children, of self-competency, the accumulation of professional competencies will have a solid foundation. For this to happen, the activities facilitating self-expression, understanding, self-acceptance and development of life skills must find their place in our meeting with children, starting at their first years.

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