

18th PCSF 2018
Professional Culture of the Specialist of the Future

**MULTICULTURAL CLASSROOM: AN ASPECT OF A FOREIGN
LANGUAGE TEACHER PROFESSIONAL CULTURE FORMING**

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the problem of a foreign language teacher professional culture, its development and forming. The author focuses on the multicultural classroom as an opportunity for developing of professional competences through interacting with international students. While encountering with different cultures the teacher not only acquires the skills of working in a new environment but also opens new sides of his own personality. The purpose of the article is to define universal core qualities of a teacher personality which will be drivers for his professional development. In the article there are the results of the survey carried out in Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University. The survey encompassed both Russian and foreign students with the aim to evolve the qualities of a perfect teacher from the side of different cultural perceptions. The author also puts emphasis on the teacher's cultural affiliation as the way of his multicultural competence development and professional culture as a whole.

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Keywords: Chinese students, English language teaching, foreign students, Russian students, teacher professional culture, teacher qualities.



1. Introduction

The development of the modern world and technologies in different spheres of life, informatization of society dictate their own rules including the area of education (Alexankov, Trostinskaya & Pokrovskaya, 2018; Aladyshkin, Kulik, Michurin, & Anosova, 2017). A teacher can not be the same as fifty years ago. It is necessary to make progress, become better, keep up to date, be competitive (Almazova, Eremin & Rubtsova, 2016). The personality of a teacher, his professional culture need the constant growth and development, he has to be able to adapt his abilities, skills to nowadays market needs (Razinkina, Pankova, Trostinskaya, Pozdeeva, Evseeva, & Tanova, 2018). The main function of a teacher is to give knowledge but without a charismatic personality and professional culture it is impossible to teach an interesting class, give reasons for study. As for foreign language teachers, they, except knowledge of the language, represent the culture of the country. In this case a foreign language lesson is becoming the place of intercultural communication where every word hides not only its semantic meaning but behind it you can find the understanding of the world formed by the national consciousness (Shipunova, Berezovskaya, Gashkova, & Ivanova, 2017). In other words, the development of the world, globalization processes influence the teaching methodology as well. Nowadays foreign languages, especially, English are needed functionally. English has become the language with a global status. We use it as a tool in a real communication with people from different countries (Ter-Minasova, 2004). But for foreign language teachers such processes, their advantages and disadvantages are two sides of the same coin. On the one hand, the diversity of the world needs a new type of a personality based on the culture of tolerance where flexibility is a special feature of a character (Zhabina, 2011). On the other hand, they lead to situations of uncertainty, tension; they create negative interethnic and intercultural stereotypes as well as conflicts of different types. The search of national, ethnic and personal identity with the language as the basis is becoming more and more relevant under such circumstances (Chesnokova & Moskvitcheva, 2017). Teachers take a special place in these processes meeting and working with different people from different countries, they must be brave to save their own identity: personal, national, cultural and at the same time be tolerant, respect other cultures, break stereotypes.

2. Problem Statement

Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University is the leading university of Russia. It is a recognized national and international research centre. The University opens its doors to students from the whole world. Nowadays there are more than 6000 international students coming from more than 100 countries. Students from Europe, America, Asia, Middle East take part in a wide range of educational programs with absolutely diverse fields of study from engineering, economics to humanities. The University provides programs in both English and Russian (Educational Programs for International Students. Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University, 2018). According to the program type and its curriculum international students study Russian or English as a foreign language. In the latter case teachers of English deal with multicultural classrooms, they work with students from different countries and culture representatives and such a situation raises some crucial questions. Is it possible to use one and the same model of behavior with all students? What are their expectations and attention to the learning process? Do teachers represent the country of the language they are teaching or their native country or

just their personality? It is well known that culture is the main factor defining the rules of communication and interaction (Hinner, 2017). A good example is the research of Swart, Hall, Duncan, and Chia (2009). The authors state that there are differences between US and Asian students in their academic self regulation. They found explanations of country differences in the students' national origin and peculiarities, belonging to different cultures. This situation is a challenge for both students and teachers as there is a risk of intercultural clashes where culture is one of the reasons of misunderstandings and variances. Firstly, it influences our perception of the world around us, the meaning we attach to what we perceive, and it teaches us how to respond to these perceptions. Then, while growing up in a particular cultural environment, we learn to associate particular meaning for particular contexts. That can explain different levels of importance of one and the same objects for different people. When one interacts with people from other cultures, this person can be threatened because of some unpredictable reactions or behavior as different cultures use different signs of verbal and nonverbal communication that makes it less predictable (Hinner, 2017). In this context, there is one more problem we should mention. The cultural affiliation can not explain all misunderstandings and conflicts as the way we communicate is also influenced by our individual characteristics. The main idea in a multicultural classroom is to create a safe space where students feel that the instructor supports them, to create the atmosphere of benevolence, enthusiasm and optimism when students believe in their abilities and are more likely to participate in discussion (Danilova, Somkin, & Meshkov, 2016). Only such atmosphere and teacher's attention will help to safe students' motivation to learning and their satisfaction with educational process and its quality (Razinkina, Pankova, Trostinskaya, Pozdeeva, Evseeva, & Tanova, 2018). Teaching is just a set of methods, ways to give knowledge in the process of study. Only personality of a teacher, his professionalism help to support motivation and teach a class on a highly emotional level (Danilova, Somkin, & Meshkov, 2016) where professional and personal sides of the process are bound (Korhagen, 2017). In the recent study by Göncz (2017) we can find an overview of a number of research investigating different aspects of the teaching profession and teachers personalities. The author notes they are done in different fields, for example, in pedagogy, deontology whereas in the psychological sciences, there are no such specific research which is surprising as the teacher personality is the most important and changeable constituent in the educational process.

Our study concerns a multicultural classroom as an aspect of the professional culture forming which consists of a number of distinguishing features and competencies that characterize a skilled professional. On the other hand, it involves more than behavioral and personal features and concerns questions about identity (Molander & Hamza, 2018). Thus, a multicultural classroom makes teachers think about their personality, professional culture and about further development of their professional competencies.

3. Research Questions

As ALsubaie stated: "The teacher is a strong factor in the educational process" (ALsubaie, 2015, p.88) and the more positive is his professional identity the more effective is this process as the former defines teacher's well-being and functioning in the classroom (Van der Want, Schellings & Mommers, 2018). Nevertheless, supporting a positive professional identity can become a question for many teachers

because of the dependence on their students' learning outcomes. Teachers start losing their professional self-reliance due to the constant examination of their professionalism (Van der Want, Schellings & Mommers, 2018). It is obvious that these negative experiences can lead to some career crisis (Louws, Meirink, Veen & Driel, 2018), the result of which is a low self-esteem. The risk of such a situation is more frequent while working in a multicultural classroom with a diversity of students. In this case as Louws, Meirink, Veen, & Driel (2018) note it is important to find teachers' core qualities that can become personal drivers of their professional development. They may be considered as the basis of the competencies transformation and the driving force of an efficient teacher learning (Korhagen, 2017).

In keeping with these objectives, two main questions guide this study:

- Are there national differences in students' perception of a teacher and in their expectations?
- What kind of core qualities of a teacher are important for his professional culture development?

4. Purpose of the Study

Changes in a modern system of education put the necessity of constant qualification development and professionalism of a teacher on the first place (Danilova, Somkin, & Meshkov, 2016). This process is a constant work towards the connection between specified, personal characteristics, opinions, actions and the environment (Korhagen, 2017). In other words, a professional personality is the composition of competences. It is a person with a high level of ethic who constantly works at himself (Sorokoumova, 2018). Moreover, as pointed out above the more positive emotions will be evolved the more effective a teacher will be (Korhagen, 2017). In this context it is important to discover discrepancies between students with different origin and their perception of a teacher personality. It helps to understand what personality a teacher should or should not be working with students whose cultural identity is not the same as teachers'.

Hence, the main purpose of this study is to find to what extent international students' cultural affiliations influence a teacher personality and his professional culture.

5. Research Methods

One of the research methods is a survey of students. The advantage of this method is its opportunity to collect the first material and opinions of students towards the learning process, their likes and dislikes. The disadvantage is some generalization of answers therefore some subjectivity of the results. All in all the students' answers help the researchers to realize the studied situation and build their future strategy of work.

5.1. Participants

A total 83 first-year bachelor students of Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University participated in the survey. Respondents were the students of Civil Engineering and Regional Studies departments of the University. To find out discrepancies between students' answers we divided participants into two groups of Russian and foreign students. Therefore, 51 Russian students and 32 foreign students including 1 student from Indonesia, 1 student from Equatorial Guinea and 30 students

from China took part in the survey. Our participants' ages ranged: Russian students from 17 to 18, foreign students from 19 to 22.

5.2. Data collection

The survey was being carried out from April to May, 2018. Students were given questionnaires with open answers. In the end of the English class they were asked to respond to two questions about the personality of a perfect teacher and complete the questionnaires (with a pencil and a paper) where they had to write three important professional and three important personal qualities and, if any, three not so important but desirable professional and personal qualities. The questionnaire was adapted to students: the questions were translated both into English and Chinese as foreign students were mostly represented by Chinese students. The survey was voluntarily and anonymous.

6. Findings

6.1. Russian Students Results

According to the answers of Russian students a perfect teacher must be a professional of his business, a highly qualified specialist with work experience. One of the most important qualities – punctuality. This person should have good knowledge in his subject, be able to explain in a good and interesting way. Moreover, he must be strict and unbiased. On the other hand, must be communicative, easy-going, with a good sense of humor, broad-minded, sophisticated, be ready to give advice and share his experience. Students also noted such qualities as charisma, creativity, up-to-dateness. They also marked appearance: beauty and neatness. Consequently, for students from Russia a perfect teacher is a person who loves and knows his subject, disciplined and responsible. Furthermore, fair, honest and optimistic. They realize a teacher as a senior friend but who keeps his borders, with an attractive appearance.

The results of the survey are shown below in tables 01 and 02; all answers were divided into groups according to their meanings and percentage. They are fixed verbatim.

6.2. Foreign Students Results

For a group of foreign students a perfect teacher is a person who is professional, highly qualified, possessing deep academic knowledge, with good pronunciation and speaking skills. The way of good handwriting on the board is also important for students. This is a teacher who loves his business, responsible, qualified, is able to explain in a simple and easy way, the person who is well-organised and who owns skills of a good manager. Moreover, the person who knows how to communicate with people, observant, use individual approach to students, patient with students, understanding, fair, friendly, loves and respects students as his own children, responsible and generous. Appearance is also noted by students: beauty and attractiveness. Consequently, for foreign students a teacher plays a role of a parent, mentor, and a responsible person in his work, who loves his work and students. He must be patient, kind, cheerful, unbiased and equitable.

The results of the survey are shown below in tables 03 and 04; all answers were divided into groups according to their meanings and percentage. They are fixed verbatim.

6.3. Results Overview

Summarizing all the results we can say that both groups of students mention such professional qualities as professionalism, good knowledge of a subject, experience, ability to explain, well-preparedness and usage of unique, individual approaches. As for personal qualities, they are equity, honesty, sociability, responsibility, kindness, friendliness, sense of humor and attraction. We define these qualities as so-called “core qualities”. Although there are common features in students’ answers, we still see differences in the perception of the teacher personality as regional characteristics play a crucial role and it is not easy to change them (Amako, 2017). They are explained by national peculiarities and by traditional understanding of the role of a teacher in each country. For example, in Russia, a teacher is perceived as a partner because education itself is the process of cooperation. The task of a teacher is to create a positive atmosphere to study. We imagine someone who is well-educated, interested in his subject and can make pupils and then students feel this interest. This is the teacher who is taking part in intellectual and moral formation of a student’s personality (Zhernakova, 2015). Otherwise, if we look at the role of a teacher in Asian countries, for example, in China, we see the importance of a teacher as a senior, wiser mentor and sometimes even a parent. The role and importance of a teacher is on the second place after the parents’. Children are taught to listen to the teacher what he is saying and teaching. The teacher is the model to follow, he shows the way how to study and investigate (Speshnev, 2012).

Table 01. Important professional and personal teacher’s qualities according to Russian students’ answers

Important professional qualities	%	Important personal qualities	%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional who knows his subject; • Highly qualified 	39%	Unbiased	37%
Strict	37%	Sociable, able to communicate with different people	31%
Punctual	31%	Easy going, positive	29%
Love the subject, interested in sharing knowledge	25%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding • Responsible 	24%
Can explain interestingly and easily	18%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Warm-hearted • Friendly • With a good sense of humor 	22%
Well-prepared	16%	Even-tempered, level-headed	16%
Intelligent, clever	14%	Helpful	14%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well-organised • Hard-working 	12%	Polite	12%
Creative, use unique methods of teaching	10%	Honest	10%
Modern	6%	Charismatic	8%

Table 02. Desirable professional and personal teacher's qualities according to Russian students' answers

Desirable but not so important professional qualities	%	Desirable but not so important personal qualities	%
Punctual	24%	Sense of humor, optimistic	29%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strict • Kind 	8%	Charismatic, open-minded, sophisticated, tolerant, understanding	18%
Modern, use innovative technologies in teaching	6%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy-going • Sociable 	10%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With a higher education • Individual approach • Can motivate a student • Active 	4%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attractive • Patient • Polite 	8%

Table 03. Important professional and personal teacher qualities according to Foreign students' answers

Important professional qualities	%	Important personal qualities	%
Knowledge (specialized knowledge of teaching, knowledge of the subject), high professional knowledge, fully understand the subject, professional for subject	40%	Patient to students	50%
Fluent in english (speaking)	31%	Kind, affectionate, generous	44%
Teach clearly, use simple words to explain the difficult things (ability to teach, explain, to guide students' learning activities, to control classroom atmosphere, to make teaching activities successful)	28%	Responsible, conscientious	38%
Knowledgeable, well-educated, good literacy, good academic ability	25%	Friendly	22%
Ability to organize and manage, logic, well-organised (have teaching planning), well – prepared	22%	Equitable, justice	19%
Know how to approach students	16%	Easy going, beautiful and perfect, excellent, aspirant	13%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pronunciation standard • Blackboard writing is clear 	13%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Honest • Serious, earnest • Love students as kids of herself respect students 	9%

Have a long teaching experience	9%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Humor • Staminial • Willing to help, caring • Selfless, enthusiastic 	6%
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Table 04. Desirable professional and personal teacher qualities according to foreign students' answers

Desirable but not so important professional qualities	%	Desirable but not so important personal qualities	%
Personal image (look pretty, beautiful)	13%	Humorous Kind	16%
Psychologist, observant	9%	Equity, justice	13%

7. Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to find the influence of international students' cultural affiliations in a multicultural classroom and find core qualities of a teacher personality which are important for his professional culture development. Summarizing the results of the survey, we defined professional and personal qualities that are common for both groups of the respondents. The comprehension of such qualities leads to new awareness, self-perception and behavior (Korhagen, 2017). Thinking over these core features helps teachers to find their strong and weak sides in communication with students, work at their own self-images and self-esteem. As is widely known, the person with a high self-esteem is more likely to communicate with than the one with a low self-esteem. And this person probably thinks more positively of others and expects to be recognized by others in the same way (Hinner, 2017). This is quite important, especially, when realize that a teacher and then a teacher educator are considered both as a connoisseur of his subject and as a pattern (Swart, Graaff, Onstenk, & Knezic, 2018).

However, we should note that depending on an educational context some features of a teacher are highly appreciated, while in another situation, the same features might be considered inappropriate or misplaced (Göncz, 2017). So, it is impossible to take teacher qualities and standardize them (Korhagen, 2017) as we are all individuals with our own personal, cultural backgrounds. When working with different students, from different countries and cultures, teachers can not be the same. As pointed out above, national boundaries are not easy to be erased (Fichtner, & Chapman, 2011). The results of the survey proved the idea and showed the discrepancies between groups of students. The question is whether it is necessary to blur the distinctions. Furthermore, the teacher himself has his own national and cultural identities which may influence their overlook of teaching, and the importance of their own cultural affiliations (Fichtner & Chapman, 2011). Consequently, the formation of a positive ethnic identity both of teachers and students are significant. When students identify themselves with their ethnos and, at the same time, they are educated in tolerance to other cultures, they desire to acquire values of

different ones (Gabeeva, 2013). In other words, it helps to create “culturally responsive classrooms” (Burridge, Buchanan, & Chodkiewicz, 2009, p. 76).

In such circumstances we are talking about a multicultural teacher and developing a multicultural competence (Almazova, Khalyapina, & Popova, 2017). Multiculturalism is becoming a personally-professional feature of a teacher. This teacher plays a special role in following the ideas of multiculturalism as a new philosophy of interaction in a multicultural world, called to realize the policy of agreement and stability, cooperate to cultural pluralism and defend the cultural diversity in an educational system (Kochenkova, 2012). Accordingly, a multicultural classroom gives an opportunity for a teacher to have different experience, meet with cultural diversity and psychology. This makes a teacher reflect on his ways of teaching, how to make the learning process effective and interesting, meet expectations of the students. On the other hand, this new environment makes him think about his personality and behavior. In this case the found universal core qualities will help to safe inner balance and self-esteem. Anyway, the teacher should remember about students' and his cultural affiliation as it transforms the process of study into process of culture exchange which gives respect and tolerance to both sides of the process and as a result develops teacher professional culture.

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