Chapter 9

Personality and Education: Contemporary Issues in Psychological Science about Personality in Teacher Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to sensitize the public about the importance of research on personality in the process of teaching and learning, regardless of whether it refers to the personality/temperament of children or teachers. By analysing the personality of teachers, the job-fit theory and different theoretical models of personality and temperament in psychology are showcased. With the aim of a better understanding of the moderator’s role of personality in the context of education, a systematic review of relevant studies is presented within Croatian cultural context. Finally, an empirical study is presented which was conducted on future preschool teachers who evaluated their personality as well as their best and worst teachers’ personalities. It was determined that there are significant differences in estimated personality traits of the best and worst teachers. Finally, further guidance in exploring the role of personality in education was provided, with an emphasis on methodological aspects and some specific scientific research designs.

INTRODUCTION

What you are comes to you. — Ralph Waldo Emerson

The contemporary education process, in the formal or informal context, is influenced by numerous factors that have strong effect on the quality of teaching and learning, and consequently on learning outcomes (Vizek-Vidović, Vlahović-Štetić, Rijavec & Miljković, 2003). With the aim of creating high quality teaching and learning, it is very important to clearly determine which factors those are and what kind of effect they have on the education process. The main focus of many studies has been, and still
is, the teachers’ competences, which is understandable. However, despite the teachers’ highest competences, few teachers succeed in creating the most quality teaching and learning, and some of them do not (Tatalović Vorkapić, 2012; Tatalović Vorkapić, Vujičić & Ćepić, 2014). Therefore, certain non-cognitive and implicit factors have a specific effect on the education process. In addition to that, there is very little debate on the personality as one of the mentioned factors in contemporary educational sciences from the psychological perspective. Even though educational psychology has emphasized the significance of the personality role in the education process, either the child’s or the teacher’s personality, there has been very little systematic research on this subject. Especially, since the focus of research interest is on the personality effect on the educational process or learning outcomes.

Therefore, this theoretical review and empirical research focuses on the attempt to systematize recent and relevant research on the role of personality in the field of psychology of learning and teaching taking thereby into account the characteristics of two contexts: the context of learning and teaching in kindergartens and the context of learning and teaching in primary schools. So, the main contemporary issues in psychological science regarding the role of personality in educational settings will be discussed. It is inevitable that teachers possess personality traits that are specific to the educational work with children of (pre)school age. This is in accordance with the personality-job fit theory (Holland, 1985). Besides, a large number of current studies have demonstrated their relevance for an efficient process and outcomes of teaching and learning (Tatalović Vorkapić, 2012; Tatalović Vorkapić, Vujičić & Ćepić, 2014; Ćepić, Tatalović Vorkapić, Lončarić, Anđić & Skočić Mihić, 2015). Nevertheless, teachers’ personality traits are still very deeply stored within the framework of the process of implicit learning in practice, which is not good (Jančec, Tatalović Vorkapić & Lepičnik Vodopivec, 2015). In addition to the neglect of the influence of personality in practice, the similar situation could be recognized in the selection for admission to the relevant study programme and during the study. To be precise, there is no any kind of personality assessment in that selection as an indicator for study admission at Croatian faculties. The aim of this chapter is to present contemporary research from a broad definition of identity, through the implicit definition of personality to the known theoretical models of personality in psychological science that prove the importance of specificities in the educators’ personality in the context of learning and teaching.

A similar situation of a lack of systematic scientific studies is also evident in the field of research of the personality of (pre)school aged children and its role in the education process and learning outcomes. With the goal of an efficient and healthy development of a child, a significant number of international studies have stressed the need for quite different reactions of different preschool teachers to behavioural patterns of the children’s temperament (Arcus, 2001; Kochanska, 1997, 2007; Tatalović Vorkapić & Lučev, 2014; Zentner & Bates, 2008; Zupančić, 2008). Similarly, adequate teachers’ reactions to children’s behaviour in the process of teaching and learning are very significant, since they often have a direct impact on the atmosphere and climate, motivation and the learning outcome itself. Although there are longitudinal developmental studies of personality and temperament, there is a lack of a direct analysis of the moderator effects on children’s personality in the process of teaching and learning. The relevance of very few studies of interaction between different temperaments of educators, children, and parents should be added. This chapter also addresses some relevant methodological issues in this research area, related to the variable context and the variable of individuals who evaluate the children’s temperament, evaluator’s subjectivity and bias in evaluations, and the type of evaluation (self-evaluation and evaluation by others).

Apart from giving relevant and contemporary overview of the theory and research about personality in education and its relevance for quality teaching and learning, some empirical results are presented
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