

The PEDAGOGICALLY SENSITIVE TEACHER in a POSITIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

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Theoretical framework

The increasing focus on cognitive learning goals in primary schools leads to a unilateral approach of children's development. For a multilateral approach the socioemotional development of children needs more attention. This requires a more pedagogically sensitive teacher. Pedagogical sensitivity is characterized by precise and attentive observation of the child's behavior and a correct interpretation of this behavior, before the caregiver acts in an adequate way (Ainsworth et al, 1978). The alert observation, correct interpretation of the child's behavior and the subsequent tactful actions are essential for a good teacher - pupil relationship (Van Manen, 2014).

A basic and essential condition for learning and development of every child is well-being. To create a positive learning environment that fosters well-being and resilience in pupils, five foundations should be taken into account: 1) socioemotional competencies, 2) engagement through strength, 3) positive emotions, 4) positive relationships, and 5) a sense of meaning and purpose (Noble & McGrath, 2008). This requires of (future) teachers a positive attitude towards the development and capabilities of their pupils, on the one hand, and the ability to act in a pedagogically sensitive way, on the other hand.

Intervention

The course consisted of 8 intensive sessions of 4 hours each (32 hours in total), in which knowledge and practical guidance were offered. The sessions had a strong interactive character, in which experiences were shared in small groups and in which the student teachers analysed video clips from their own practice. Between the sessions, the student teachers worked on their pedagogical sensitivity and positive learning environment with the provided knowledge and tools in their own (training) class.

Research Questions

1. To what extent does the course affect the pedagogical sensitivity of the participating student teachers?
2. To what extent does the course affect the educational approach of the participating student teachers?
3. To what extent does the course affect the social well-being of the pupils involved?
4. To what extent does the course affect the learning environment in the classrooms of the participating student teachers?

Method

RQ	Instrument	Respondents
1	Questionnaire Pedagogical Sensitivity (Diemel, 2014)	Teachers EG (n=22) + CG (n=13)
2	Primary Teacher Questionnaire (Smith, 1992)	Teachers EG (n=22) + CG (n=13)
3	Well-being of pupils in upper grades primary school (De Lee & De Volder, 2009)	Pupils EG (n=134) + CG (n=61)
4	Pedagogical Climate Scale (Donkers & Vermulst, 2008)	Pupils EG (n=312) + teachers EG (n=23)

Results & Conclusion

1. Teachers in EG scored significantly higher on subscale 'timing' than CG on $t=2$. No significant differences on other subscales.
2. No significant differences.
3. Pupils in EG were significantly more involved than in CG on $t=2$. No significant differences on other subscales.
4. No significant differences.

Theoretical background on pedagogical sensitivity in combination with practical tools (applicable in their classroom) seemed to enable student teachers to act in a pedagogically sensitive way; observe children and react timely and adequately on their behavior.

However, more research is needed to find out how pedagogical sensitivity is developing during an intervention of several weeks and how it affects the learning environment of their classes. This requires a more in-depth, qualitative research approach.

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Noble, T. & McGrath, H. (2008). The positive educational practices framework. *Educational & Child Psychology*, 25 (2), 119-134.

Van Manen, M. (2014). Weten wat te doen wanneer je niet weet wat te doen. Pedagogische sensitiviteit in de omgang met kinderen. Driebergen: Nivoz.