

## **Pedagogical Optimism as a Dimension of Professionalism of Early School Education Teachers**

The main objective of the dissertation was to explore the subjective vision of the professional realities of early school education teachers, with the special focus on the presentation of their viewpoint on the role and significance of this career in the context of its professionalization, as well as pedagogical optimism as a dimension of professionalism. This research objective has determined the adoption of a specific research paradigm, methodology and methods of study. In order to explore the teachers' perspective, it was necessary to adopt the qualitative paradigm.

The dissertation consists of two parts: theoretical and empirical. The theoretical part begins with a review of the literature concerning a teacher in general and an early school education teacher in particular. The latter group was the focus of interest of the dissertation's author. The first chapter presents an analysis of concepts, approaches and viewpoints. Their selection was dictated by the need to show the specific character of the teacher's profession and especially the career of an early school education teacher. The second chapter of the theoretical part is centred around the issues of professionalism. The chapter commences with a general discussion of terminology, followed by an analysis of selected concepts and approaches, and further exploration of these pertaining to professionalism of a teacher. Next, on the basis of this analysis, the main indicators (dimensions) of teacher's professionalism are put forward and discussed in connection with the current theories and studies. The final chapter of the theoretical part pertains to the issue of optimism, its selected concepts and theoretical perspectives. The penetration of the notion of optimism into pedagogy and early school education is outlined. The theoretical part is completed with the discussion concerning the search for definitions of pedagogical optimism.

The empirical part, based on the interpretative paradigm, contains four chapters. The first one presents the methodological basis of the author's research and the research paradigm adopted, describes the planning process and the course of research, mentions difficulties and limitations.

Then, the fifth chapter presents the reconstructions of a definition of an early school education teacher's role and describes the model of an early school education teacher, developed on the basis of analyses and interpretations of the respondents' statements. The model comprises descriptions of important qualities regarded as the most specific and characteristic, including: comprehensive knowledge, thorough and multidisciplinary

preparation for the profession – such a teacher should have many talents (artistic, musical and organizational), predisposition towards work with a young child, that is a positive and optimistic approach, patience, understanding, kindness, inventiveness, creativity and openness to new ideas, passion, friendly appearance, correct articulation ability, as well as belief in oneself and one's capabilities, described by the teachers as self-confidence. The sixth chapter presents a vision of professionalism of an early school education teacher, resulting from the narration of the surveyed respondents. It turns out that teacher's professionalism has many dimensions for the respondents, such as: comprehensive knowledge, soft skills (including the skill of cooperation with parents and with other teachers), lifelong learning and development, passion and vocation, aiming at high standards, ability to balance the professional and private life, and high self-esteem. For early school education teachers, the most important indicator (dimension) of their professionalism is their knowledge, as well as factual and methodological preparation for their career.

The seventh chapter presents optimism and pedagogical optimism from the perspective of the surveyed early school education teachers and refers to the place of pedagogical optimism as a dimension of professionalism of early school education teachers.

In the presented research, the data obtained in interviews made it possible to go beyond the pre-conceptualized framework (resulting from the survey of literature on the subject) and to discover the elements not described so far and new for the explored issues – such as a definition of the notions of optimism and pedagogical optimism by the early school education teachers.

The surveyed teachers perceive and fulfil their professional roles in various manners, they view the role of a teacher and a pupil in different ways, and demonstrate diverse approaches to their responsibilities, which is reflected in the proposed typology of an early school education teacher. We can distinguish here: an enthusiast, a teacher with passion, an innovator, an expert-authority, a guardian and a “strongwoman.” Needless to say, this typology has a character of a proposal and demands further conceptualization.

The dissertation ends with the summary which formulates and presents the general conclusions and guidelines how to improve the system of preparation of early school education teachers for their profession.

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