

INTERACTIVE METHODS AND NEW PARADIGMA IN BULGARIAN SECONDARY EDUCATION

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Abstract: The Bulgarian secondary education is subject to serious pressure from the public, which is the result of changing needs. Teachers are expected to be more educators and less trainers. The new task of the pedagogue distances him from his role as the bearer of information, and draws him closer the role of a coach. The teacher is expected to form real skills in the students, based on their socio-emotional competence. In this respect, more and more attention is paid to interactive learning methods. They involve the active involvement of the pupil in interaction, both with other students in the class and the teacher. In essence, this is a completely different educational paradigm. It is diametrically opposed to the familiar one of the Bulgarian teachers. Interactive training implies not only the use of certain techniques, but insightful philosophy of this new paradigm. It reflects the overall re-orientation of the educational process, from the communication to the interactive aspect of the communication - targeting the teacher's focus from educational outcomes, to the process itself and the significant socio-emotional factors. The article presents research aimed at checking how many interactive methods are conceived in the context of the new educational paradigm. It reflects the current attitudes of eighty-four teachers towards the interactive approach. It follows their personal emotional attitude as well as their willingness to focus on the emotions and their students' experiences by adapting their teaching methods. The frequency with which the interactive methods are applied in the practice of the respondents is investigated. All indicators are analyzed in the context of the three stages of secondary education - primary, junior secondary and secondary. Significant differences are emerging in the degree of the integration of the new educational paradigm in the various stages of secondary education in Bulgaria. The main conclusion of the study is that the most interactive methods are often applied in the initial stage. Here, teachers are most likely to devote resources and adapt their pedagogical approach to social and emotional processes in the classroom. Gradually, in the lower secondary stage, the focus moves to the amount of knowledge learned by the pupils, whilst at the high school stage, the interaction is least well represented as the pedagogical method and part of the new educational paradigm.

Keywords: interactive method, new educational paradigm, research, secondary education.

INTRODUCTION

Rumen Valchev introduces the idea of a new paradigm in education. It is a reflection of the school and educational environment in relation to the changes occurring in society. "... not learning but studying is becoming more and more the essence of the system, and personal development is the natural focus of education. ... it means the school is to be seen as a group project in whose centre are the personalities of young people ..."¹⁰. Following the logic of the conception of both the formation of skills and the acquisition of knowledge, it is inevitably the importance of the interaction to reconcile these two processes. "The student is in a real situation of complete learning - in which he is emotionally/intellectually involved and in which he develops all his personality and intelligence, not individual components"¹¹.

Here is one more crucial aspect of learning that is based on interaction - the students' emotional commitment to the process. Presenting the new paradigm, Valchev goes even further and places the focus of education not on results but on the process. "The school in this paradigm - he says - is oriented not to goals but to the process of achieving these goals"¹².

1. Exposition

1.1. Prerequisites

Linking all these aspects - group activity, personal development, emotional inclusion, skills formation, knowledge acquisition - in the context of the process idea - raises a legitimate question about the relationship between interactive learning and group dynamics. To use the full capacity of interactive forms of training, the teacher has to

¹⁰ Valchev R. Interactive Methods and Group Work in Contemporary Education, Open Education Center, Sofia 2006, p. 13

¹¹ again there, page 14

¹² again there

reorientate his focus - from the outcome to the process. In other words, to understand the essence of the group processes taking place in the particular class; to adapt the pedagogical form to the stage of its development as a group; to adapt its own behaviour to values and norms.

1.2. Methodology of the study

For the purposes of this study it uses the *definition of interactive pedagogical methods* proposed by Valchev. "Interactive methods are based on the simultaneous acquisition of knowledge, skills formation and attitudes by placing young people in situations where they can interact, and then discuss results on the basis of their experience"¹³.

The second factor that is deliberately explored is the teacher's willingness to participate and develop emotional exchange in class as an element of the interaction. Pedagogical interaction depends largely on emotional interaction¹⁴. On the other hand, the American Psychological Association has published a document known as "Student-centered Psychological Principles: Guidelines for Reconstruction and School Reform". One of the principles set out in the document reads: "Learning is most effective when considering differential developments in and between the physical, intellectual, emotional and social spheres"¹⁵. According to the concept of affection, the emotional interaction creates an attachment of the pupils to the teacher, as well as between them¹⁶. This generally affects classroom communication and stimulates group cohesion. In this context, the teacher's ability to orient and effectively manage the emotions of his students outlines the basis for the effective application of interactive teaching methods.

1.2.1. Structure of the poll

A questionnaire was developed with a total of 11 questions. The structure and content of the questionnaire are geared towards three main areas:

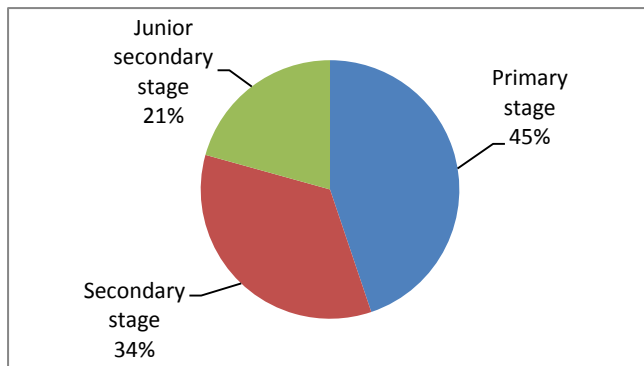
1. Teacher attitudes towards the use of interactive learning methods;
2. Frequency of use of interactive methods and techniques in their day-to-day work;
3. Teacher orientation in the group processes taking place in the classes with which they work.

In addition to the questions that reflect the three areas of research, a discriminatory item is included allowing the structure of the sample to be checked. The hypothesis of the frequency of use of interactive methods is tied to the educational stage.

1.2.2. Structure of the sample

Eighty four teachers were interviewed, forming an random sample. Discriminatory issues have been applied that defragment the sample at a critical stage in which the relevant teacher teaches. This distribution is shown in Graph 1.

Graph 1: *Distribution the teachers.*



This criterion is important for the present study because it differentiates the age group of the pupils being worked with. It also reflects some specific features in the organization and content of the pedagogical process. The sample is not homogeneous, but each of the subgroups is sufficiently represented to be able to apply methods of analyzing and collating information.

1.3. Results

1.3.1. Teacher attitudes towards the use of interactive methods

There are three attitudes reflected by the interviewed teachers regarding interactive methods: "They are the only way to reach today's children" - 15.43%; "In some cases, they can help to improve the perception of the learning material" - 80.92%; "The material is too bulky and there is no time for such things" - 3.57%. In general, the attitude

¹³ again there, page 14

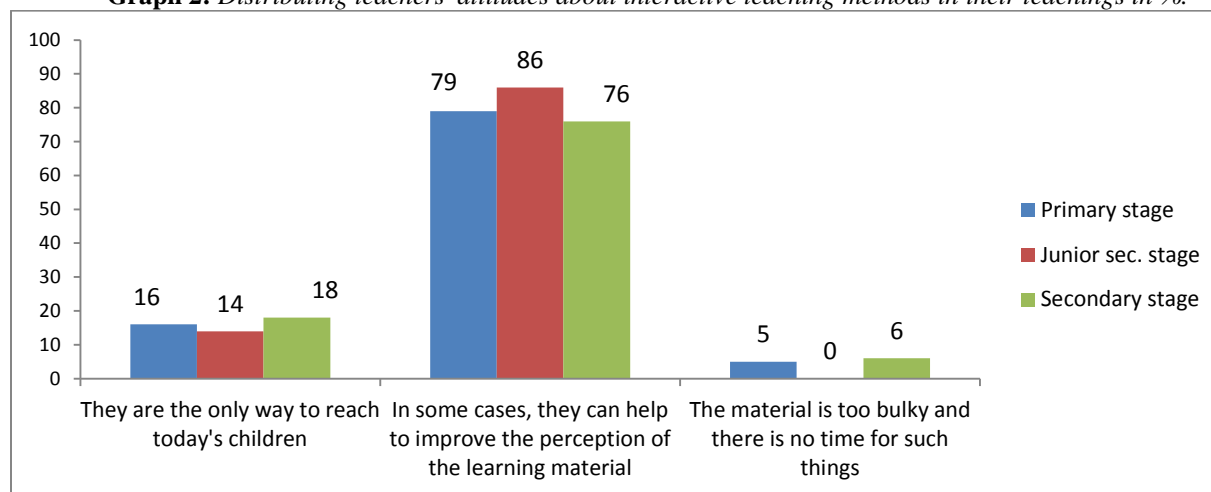
¹⁴ again there, page 41

¹⁵ through Slavin, R. Pedagogical Psychology. Science, Moscow, 2010

¹⁶ Sternberg, R., Williams, W. Pedagogical Psychology, East West, Sofia, 2014.

of the interviewed teachers is rather positive. There are no responses to the negative spectrum: "They create a problem with the discipline in the classroom and a lot of time is lost for organization" or "The games are for the kindergarten, and the school is for learning". The distribution of responses by age group of students is shown in Graph 2. For better visualization, the data is presented as a percentage of the respective sub-sample rather than as an absolute value.

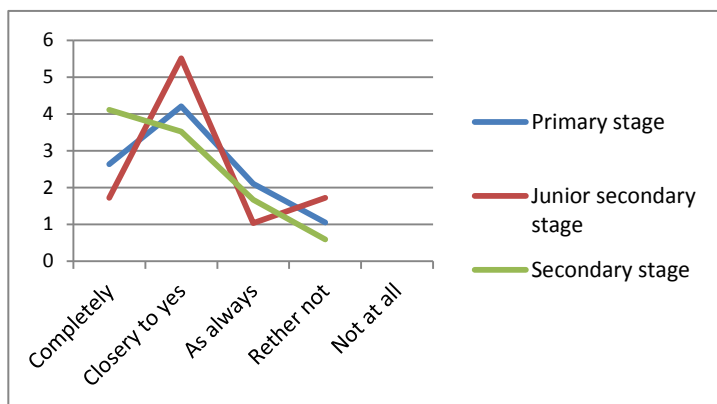
Graph 2: Distributing teachers' attitudes about interactive teaching methods in their teachings in %.



The propensity of teachers to use interactive methods to achieve specific didactic goals strongly dominates. The surveyed teachers are more focused on the quantitative measure of methodological activity - the amount of knowledge learned by students. Interactive methods are understood as a means of acquiring knowledge, not as a way of creating an environment stimulating the learning of this knowledge by the students.

In order to cover the attitudes of teachers to interactive forms of learning, it is important to also reflect the affective component¹⁷. In other words, how they feel by applying an interaction in their lessons. Questions 5 and 6 aim to explore two aspects of the personal emotional experiences of the respondents - how "comfortable they feel" and how insecure they feel, by using interactive forms of learning. The data from question 5 is presented in Figure 3, where the results are assimilated to 10 in order to compare the three sub-samples that are differently represented.

Graph 3: Subjective assessment of the personal comfort of teachers when applying interactive methods in class.



The overall trend reflects the fact that teachers feel comfortable applying interactive methods during their work time with students. The graph of the lecturers in the junior secondary school is noticeable. There are two peaks - the big one corresponds to "closer to yes" and the small peak is "rather not."

At the primary and the junior secondary stage, there is a pronounced accumulation of answers at the left end of the scale. At the secondary level, two internal groups are distinguished - those who feel good and those who experience discomfort when using interactive techniques in their class.

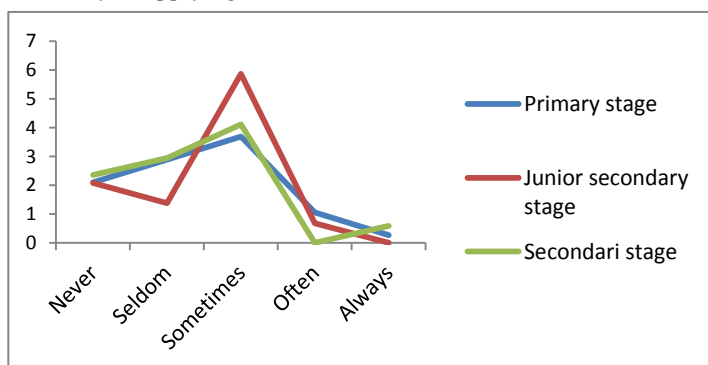
It is interesting that upper secondary stage teachers who have said they feel "completely" comfortable are almost twice as much as others. The primary teachers are the closest to the standard Gaussian distribution¹⁸.

¹⁷ Pratkanis, A., Breckler, S., Greenwald, A. Attitude Structure and Function Psychology Press, New York and London, 2014.

¹⁸ Kalinov, K. Statistical Methods in Behavioral and Social Sciences, New Bulgarian University, Sofia 2010.

The data obtained for the sixth question are different, requiring respondents to determine how often they experience insecurity in applying interactive forms of training. They are presented in Figure 4, after alignment to 10.

Graph 4: Subjective assessment of the teachers' sense of insecurity in applying interactive methods.



By comparing the trends of the three sub-groups, it is clear that there is a similarity between those of primary and secondary school teachers.

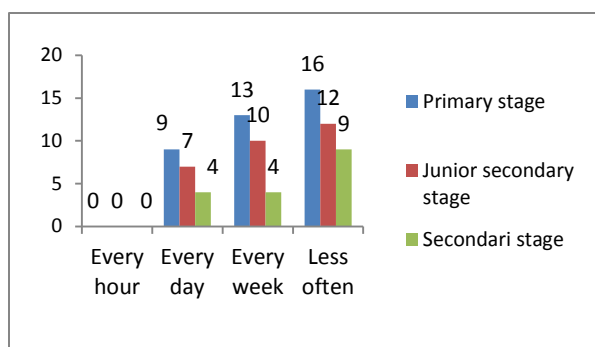
Here again, the primary teachers are the closest to the standard distribution. From this observation it can also be assumed that they are the most reflexive in terms of the interaction of their classes and their own emotional experiences in this process. Of course, such an assertion is more of an assumption at this stage. In order for it to be confirmed or rejected, it is also necessary to analyze data from the

question of frequency use of interactive methods.

1.3.2. Frequency of use of interactive methods

Question number 4 examines the frequency by which teachers use interactive methods in their practice. In essence, this issue reflects the first of the two factors that will be statistically analyzed. The obtained results are presented in graph 5.

Graph 5: Frequency of application of interactive methods in class.

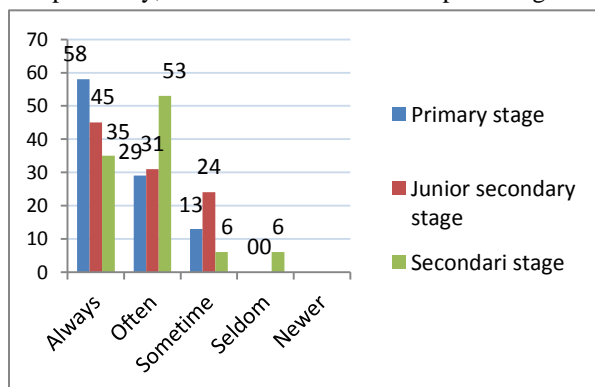


In all three stages of secondary education the same tendency is observed, reflecting the tendency of teachers to rarely use interactive techniques during their classes. None of the respondents indicated use as an hourly frequency. 23.8% claim to use interactive techniques every day. Weekly use was chosen by 32.1% of teachers. Almost half (44.1%) have indicated that they use interactive learning methods less frequently than once a week.

1.3.3. Teacher orientation in group processes taking place in classes

The questions in this category reflect the extent to which teachers are able and willing to orient themselves in the emotional and social processes in the classes they work with. In other words, to what extent they are willing to engage in interaction or social and emotional interaction with their students.

The distribution of the answers received on the eighth question regarding the frequency with which the teacher applies his / her style of teaching with the emotional state of the students is presented in the following graph. For comparability, the data is converted into percentages.



Graph 6: Conforming the style of teaching to the emotional state of the class in %.

It is noteworthy that the greatest attention to the emotional microclimate in the class is devoted to the initial stage. In addition, teachers here are sufficiently reflexive to select the methods according to this microclimate. More than half of primary school teachers are here - 57.9%. The older the students, the less often their teachers have chosen the answer "always".

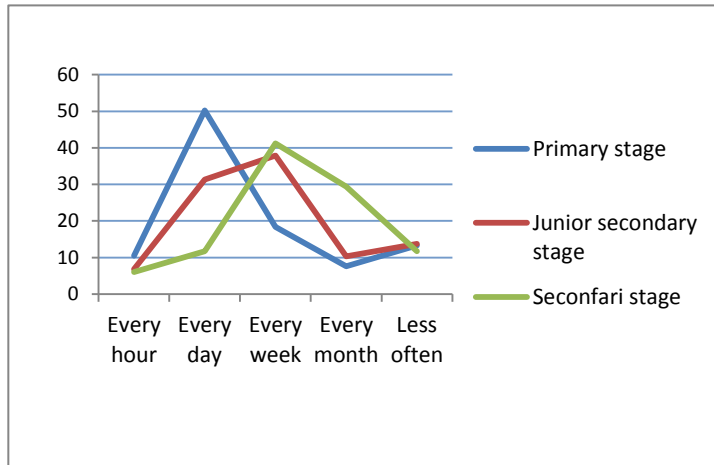
Upper secondary stage teachers tend to neglect the

emotional state of their students. Half of them (52.9%) responded "often". In this age gap there are also teachers who have the answered is "seldom".

There is a clear tendency, with the age of the pupils, to decrease the focus of the teachers on the emotional experiences of the class. This reflects on the pedagogical approach which changes from interactive during the initial stage, to gradually becoming formalized upon the approach of the upper secondary stage.

A further question (number 10) was added to the questionnaire, which examines the frequency with which teachers pay special attention to the interpersonal and team processes taking place in the classes. The obtained data is presented in graph 7. In order to be comparable, the data is presented for each category as a percentage and not as absolute values.

Graph 7: *How much time do teachers devote to working with interpersonal and team processes in the classes they work with.*



The distribution of the results obtained on this issue is similar to those of the previous one. The peak reflecting the answers of the primary teachers is displaced by one point to the left of the peaks of the other two groups of teachers. This means that at the initial stage, focused attention is geared towards interpersonal and group processes. In other words, at an early stage, educators tend to monitor the emotional status of the students and the classes they work with.

The tendency to lower the engagement of teachers with the group dynamics and their emotions, increases with the age of the students. The lower-secondary line is almost

flat-bottomed between the second and third degrees of the scale, whilst the upper secondary stage has a clear third-degree peak and dissipates to the fourth.

CONCLUSION

On the basis of the research conducted, several main conclusions can be made regarding the interactive forms of training:

- Teachers have predominantly positive, neutral attitudes toward interactive methods
- The focus of the pedagogical process is on results rather than on processes and environments that help them improve
- There is a tendency to formalize the "teacher-pupil" interaction, increasing with the pupils' age
- By moving to the upper stages of secondary education, it reduces the frequency of interactive methods in class
- There is a persistent tendency to neglect the social-group and emotional processes in the lower and upper secondary classes

When compiling all the obtained data, it can be said that the new paradigm still has not found its place in Bulgarian schools. Despite the demands and pressure of society on the education system, teachers are not ready to take on their new role and focus not on the student's development as a person, but on learning a "volume of knowledge".

LITERATURE

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