

ON A ROMANIAN BRANDING OF THE TEACHERS FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL

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Abstract: *The present article aims to identify the main qualities that characterize a well-seen/good teacher in the Romanian culture. We try to put together a lot of different elements that can specify the branding in the educational field, especially high standards that explain the appreciation and the authority owned by the successful teacher or the desirable manner to be appreciated teachers by the "beneficiaries". In our study we take into consideration the most requirements that the "second beneficiaries" (the parents) had when they preferred most a teacher for primary school (to educate their children) and, also, the self-image of the favourite teachers. The research methods that we used are questionnaire survey and case study, statistical processing of data. In the same time, the purpose of this research is to support teachers in their intention of being the active mentors/symbols of debutant teachers in school, using responsibly the communicational resources and revealing some desirable didactical skills and qualities. As a result of the study we form a very complex portrait of the teacher with a positive/ desirable brand.*

Key words: *branding, good teacher, representations, portrait.*

1. Conceptual Limits. The Acceptance of Branding/brand

According to *Business Dictionary*, branding is "the process involved in creating a unique name and image for a product in the consumers' mind, mainly through advertising campaigns with a consistent theme. Branding aims to establish a significant and differentiated presence in the market that attracts and retains loyal customers."

In *Small Business Encyclopedia*, branding is "The marketing practice of creating a name, symbol or design that identifies and differentiates a product from other products."

Pinto (as cited in Cohen, 2011), in *Very Memorable Design*, affirms that branding is "the defined personality of a product, service, company, organization or individual" (either good, bad or indifferent).

We sustain the idea that *branding is more than a name and symbol* because in our perception, branding is the identity of a something or somebody (product, service, people or individual) that remains memorably in our mind through different elements (such as messages, emotions, experience etc.). In today's dynamic marketing landscape, over thirty branding definitions from marketers and theoreticians are being used the term "brand" having a wide range of uses for businesses, products and individuals.

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An authentic and strong personal brand makes you known for the best things that you can do and recommends you as a specialist/expert in a certain domain. In this way, a professional branding says about you as a master of limited field of activity.

In the educational field, we consider proper the means in which *brand is also who people* (beneficiaries and community) *think you are* as teacher.

2. Purpose of study. Questions. Research hypotheses

In fact, we are interested in finding the answers to the following questions: what beneficiaries expect from and appreciate from/at teachers in school (as brand)? Which representations have they in mind on the good teacher? Can we identify some features that should be owned by every teacher in order to be appreciated by the beneficiaries?

The main objective of present study is to identify that features of an appreciated teacher that define the teacher branding.

Each profession has its specialists and experts, but behind the knowledge and the professional abilities/ *hard skills* are *soft skills* that are more important.

Traditionally, a large segment of speakers uses the term "good teacher" meaning both different things from one person to another but also common acceptances. For instance, a good teacher is, for some people, an exigent teacher promoting competition, while, for other people, is that gentle, calm teacher promoting harmony and cooperation. For all the participants, a good teacher is considered so if his/her students understand the lessons and if they apply the knowledge in various contexts and situations. A good teacher can also be a permissive teacher or a dogmatic teacher, can be an understanding person or a draconian person and can be a serious person or a humorous person.

The **hypothesis** of this research are the following:

1. It is assumed that there are features that specifying the brand of the good teacher for primary school.
2. It is assumed that the students who choose the didactic profession were influenced by some traits of their good teacher(s), in their option.
3. It is assumed that the measure in which hard skills and soft skills count into beneficiaries' representations it can be determined.

Independent variables: parents' expectations, students' expectations, individual instruction and assessment of the respondents (including pupils' family vision on education); the ability of self-monitoring.

Dependent variables: different points of view on didactic branding.

The research group consists of a sample of 13 teachers for primary school from urban and rural areas (Table 1) and 10 students from Preschool and Primary School Pedagogy (Table 2).

The sample of teachers was chosen according to the following criteria that sustain the label "good teachers":

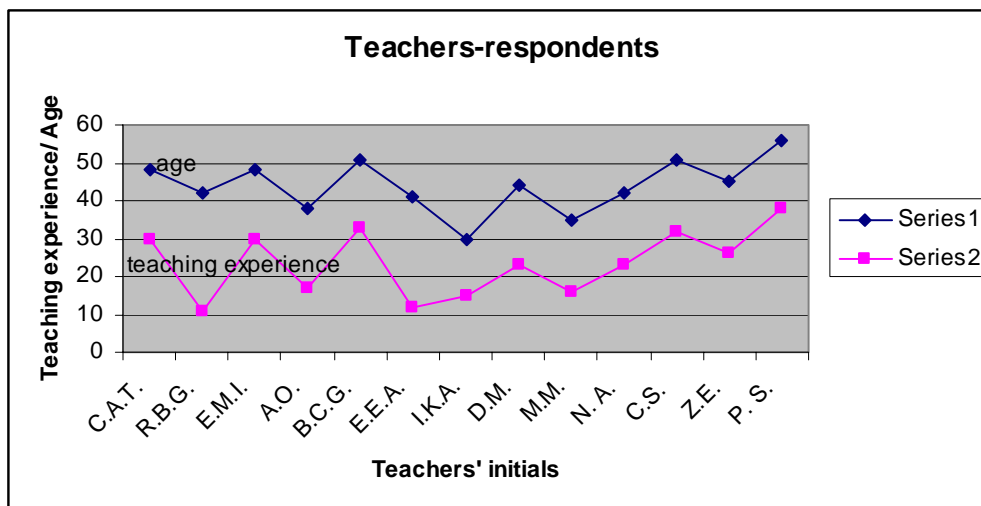
1. the information from the school managers, confirmed by the methodical/mentor teacher /inspector that has known that teachers for primary education;
2. personal investigation among pupils/students, most of them realized in our special class inspection for obtaining the first degree in education, when we asked the pupils if they have loved/appreciated their teacher. We took into consideration not

- only the affirmative answer (usually obtained) but also the certain paralinguistic – a very decided "yes" or a strong "yes, we do!"
3. the huge number of parents that asked for their children in the beginning of primary education a certain teacher;
 4. the school results at different contests and exams (only when the pupils have not been helped by others trainers or teachers at home, including parents or other relatives).

Teachers-respondents of primary education

Table 1

No.	Teacher's initials	Age	Teaching experience	Didactic degree	Nr. of students in the classroom	Area
1.	C.A.T.	48	30	1st	20	urban
2.	R.B.G.	42	11	2nd	29	urban
3.	E.M.I.	48	30	1st	28	urban
4.	A.O.	38	17	1st	20	urban
5.	B.C.G.	51	33	1st	32	urban
6.	E.E.A.	41	12	1st	20	urban
7.	I.K.A.	30	15	1st	19	rural
8.	D.M.	44	23	1st	26	urban
9.	M.M.	35	16	1st	20	urban
10.	N. A.	42	23	1st	36	urban
11.	C.S.	51	32	1st	22	rural
12.	Z.E.	45	26	1st	31	urban
13.	P. S.	56	38	1st	30	urban

Fig. 1. *Distribution teachers-respondents on age and teaching experience*

Students-respondents

Table 2

No.	Student's/ master's initials	Age	Graduated schools	Is he/she teacher in school?
1.	S.A.	29	Pedagogical High School; other higher education study	Yes
2.	A.D.	38	Pedagogical College; Fac. of Letters	Yes
3.	O.A.	22	Pedagogical High School	No
4.	L.S.S.	48	Pedagogy of Primary and Preprimary School	Yes
5.	M.M.	29	Faculty of Letters	Yes
6.	C.N.	30	Pedagogical College	Yes
7.	E.R.	28	Pedagogy of Primary and Preprimary School	Yes
8.	G.M.A.	31	Masters in Intercultural Communication in the European Union	No
9.	I.K.A.	30	Pedagogy of Primary and Preprimary School	Yes
10.	I.E.	35	Faculty of Theology	Yes

Questionnaire for teachers of primary education (Annex 1) includes 4 items (semi-open and open items).

Questionnaire for students (Annex 2) includes 3 items (semi-open and open items).

3. Research Methodology

This research is a qualitative one. This assumes in a smaller extent the quantification of the results obtained for an interpretative analysis.

The main methods used are the case study and the investigation by interview and questionnaire.

4. Results of the Research

In the teachers' opinion, the professional traits which individualize the teacher (generally speaking) were various: correctness, coherence, accuracy, accessibility of the teaching language, friendly voice, in concordance with conduct; elements of teaching style: openness to innovation, creativity, flexibility, teaching style: permissive or authoritarian when needed; fashion style: classical, neat, decent and comfortable; conduct: proper, responsible, professional; respecting and promoting professional ethics; other elements: teaching skills, pedagogical tact, adaptability of the teaching act in accordance with the educational needs, organizational skills, very good communication with students and their parents.

Their own professional features considered to be most appreciated by the primary and secondary beneficiaries (the students and their parents) are: seriousness, school results of the students, availability for solving educational problems required by parents, rightness, ability to conceive a flexible and creative design of the teaching approach, care for the children's individual needs, the students' achievements in school and extracurricular activities, ability to stimulate/reward deserving students, availability to ensure the

teaching material and for playing. A good and confident communication (with students and their parents) and availability for extracurricular activities are considered the main qualities of the best teachers in addition to the good and creative activity conceived.

The sacrifices/ efforts that a teacher makes in order to maintain the high standards of performing at its best the teaching profession identified were: attending to continuing training courses, financially supporting some of the training courses, the purchase of specialized books and teaching materials, time required to prepare school and extracurricular activities, neglecting the family even on weekends. All the teachers answer that "time" as main resource in preparing for teaching (allocated both daily and for life long learning), having different points of view in labelling it as *sacrifice, effort, a simple way to realize educational objectives, a necessary investment in didactical profession*. Then the respondents indicate ensuring the teaching material (that requires money).

The recommendations considered useful for the debutant teacher for primary school or for the teachers with a low eligibility degree in the eyes of the secondary beneficiaries, in order to increase their rating are: design and implementation of didactic strategies in an effective and stimulating way, valorisation of the students' efforts and achievements, identification and use of effective ways to ensure family involvement throughout the students' development, self confidence, pedagogical optimism, rightness, balance between pretentiousness and indulgence, moral and professional integrity.

In the students' opinion, the professional traits which individualize the teacher (generally speaking) were also various. At the language level, they identify: oratorical talent, environmental adaptation, simplicity, diction, expressivity, intonation, ability of good communicator, clarity and warmth of the way of speaking, accessibility, clearness and adequacy. The teacher' language should be accessible, but ample in the same time. The teacher should be a language model for the students, using a wide array of synonyms especially for the specific terminology in such a way as to ensure the students' understanding of the concepts discussed. Also, in all situations, one should employ the formal language and be sure to be grammatically correct.

As the elements of the teaching style, students indicated: proving not imposing, allowing students to make mistakes; openness to innovation and focusing on students, combining modern and traditional methods in teaching while taking into account pupil's interest, positive attitude, adaptation to the needs of the students, sense of humour, exploration of new tools and techniques in the classroom.

The teacher should be new, modern, charismatic and democratic and should possess the ability to offer personalized learning routes in accordance with their students' interests, capabilities, potentials, should prepare the students for further learning, offering them opportunities to practice what they have achieved, should scaffold learning, should demonstrate the usefulness of learning, thus motivating students. It is very important that the teaching style to be an interesting one, a combination between traditional and modern elements.

As fashion style proper to the teacher, students indicate: decency and elegance (indicated by four respondents), with good, fine and decent limits, office wear, formal, classic and modest. The teacher should adopt a dress code suitable for the context in which one works. Students would be more motivated to learn if they feel that the teacher respects oneself (proving this by giving the right amount of attention to the clothes one chooses to wear to work). By dressing appropriately, the teacher also shows respect to the students.

The conduct of the teacher is seen as characterized by flexibility and receptiveness to new ideas, integrity, respect (indicated by three respondents), responsibility, kindness empathy. It is appreciated a smiley face when is needed and an authoritarian conduct when is needed, pedagogic tact, professional behaviour in all situations, ethical, responsible so it can be a role model for the students.

Other relevant elements for a teacher are to know how to impose ethical rule without hardness, to have broad ideas about life, to be well intentioned and to possess patience and optimism.

Teacher's professional features most appreciated by the pupils/students are customization in achieving the teaching approach, optimism, flexibility in the implementation of the teaching approach, the ability to relate not only to the classroom, but with each student, creativity, ability to enrich continuously knowledge, learning through exploration and discovery, inclusion of student in doing a job, they should care for children's individual needs. Teacher should have exciting and interesting teaching methods in order to the pupils to stay concentrated and focused, should be more focused on what pupils know to do with all the information that they receive, than only to memorize it. Teacher should have a lot of patience, a big heart, enthusiasm, attractive teaching methods, desirable character and honesty, sense of humour, a friendly tone and a friendly face.

The favourite teacher is seen as the main source of information, a specialist, guiding and leading the course, using multiple methods, valorising their students' potential, having the ability to be up-to-date with the new technologies, using other teaching materials apart from the textbooks, selecting learning materials which are of interest for the students, ensuring a collaborative learning environment and admitting one's mistake, if the case may be, loving the children and teaching with passion. A good teacher is not seen committing any type of discrimination. He/she is also available listen the students' opinions, reward those who deserve them using kind words, offering a right amount of useful information.

The best teacher evocated by the respondents is an excellent communicator, knows every pupil's needs and has an excellent level of performance, owning openness to student, patience, calmness and understanding. He is also seen as a mixture of kindness and authority, a smiling face and a lot of understanding. Somebody remembers the teacher's kindness, her soft but authoritarian voice in the same time, her attitude and the passion she put in everything she has done for us. Somebody else relates that the favourite teacher was so warm and calm that formed her as a student in primary school and, in particular, as a citizen. A respondent evocate a good teacher showing confidence in oneself, as well as in the students' abilities, not skipping classes considered not so important (such as Arts or P.E.) in favour of Math and maintaining a joyful learning environment. One's primary school teacher was very gentle and always believed that in a wrong answer there is one truth and we always have to manage to discover it.

5. Conclusions

There are a great variety of opinions about a good teacher for primary school, the most amount of information being provided by the students and masters, not by the most appreciated teachers.

It is possible that a good teacher to be also a modest one or to be a very discrete person or to not have enough time to meditate on and write about the soft skills one possesses.

The first and the second from three hypotheses of this research we formulated were confirmed. The third hypothesis is only partially confirmed, if we take into consideration the portrait (a kind of puzzle-portrait) formed by respondents. The teacher's portrait include a huge amount of details, very important being one's good ability of communication, up-to-date with the new technologies, passion for students and didactical profession, availability to extracurricular activities and to ensure the teaching material, ability to stimulate/reward deserving students, optimism, correctness.

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Annex 1

Questionnaire for teachers regarding the identification of the features subordinated to the branding of the teaching profession

Teacher's initials:

Age:..... years, Teaching experience/Number of years spent teaching: ... years

Didactic degree:; Nr. of students in the classroom: ...

School:

1. Which are, in your opinion, the professional traits which individualize the teacher (generally speaking)?
 - language:
 - elements of teaching style:.....
 - fashion style:
 - conduct:

- other elements:
- 2. Which do you think that are your own professional features most appreciated by the primary and secondary beneficiaries (the students and their parents)?
.....
.....
- 3. Which sacrifices/ efforts (in the personal/professional field) generally takes a teacher in order to maintain the high standards of performing at its best the teaching profession?
.....
.....
- 4. Which recommendations do you see as useful for the debutant primary school teacher or for the teachers with a low eligibility degree in the eyes of the secondary beneficiaries, for them to improve their situation (to increase their rating)?
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Annex 2

Questionnaire for students regarding the identification of the features subordinated to the branding of the teaching profession

Student's initials:

Age:..... years; Profession/ Student at; Graduated schools:

1. Which are, in your opinion, the professional traits which individualize the teacher (generally speaking)?
 - language:
 - elements of teaching style:.....
 -
 -
 - fashion style:
 - conduct:
 - other elements:
2. Which do you think that are one's own professional features most appreciated by the pupils/students?
.....
3. Which features did you impress most from the best teacher you know as pupil/student (preferably performing in primary school)?
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