

PROMOTING EQUITABLE AND CREATIVE LEARNING COMMUNITIES BY VIG¹

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Abstract

In the academic year of 2018/19, Creative Partnerships Hungary² and the Hungarian Video Training Association started a joint venture to provide professional development to teachers involved in building creative education networks. With the financial support of the Open Society Foundations, the Videotraining Association has integrated into existing local partnerships in Pécs and Budapest and stepped up efforts to ensure equitable education for Roma and disadvantaged children. The partnerships aimed to develop the creativity and critical thinking skills of disadvantaged pupils, facilitating their access to quality education and their future employability. Recognising the different pedagogical skills of teachers, especially in heterogeneous contexts, the Videotraining Association introduced its VIG methodology to improve classroom interactions and promote reflective teaching practices.

The collaboration involved four teachers from *Pécs* and four teachers from Budapest, who participated in VIG sessions and Creative Partnership initiatives. The project facilitated individual teacher development through video feedback sessions and supported the delivery of VIG together with the Creative Partnerships methodology. Mini projects addressing local challenges were conducted, integrating creative professionals and teachers in collaborative work. Despite positive feedback, challenges have emerged in aligning VIG and Creative Partnerships, highlighting the need for further research.

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This study is the first publication of the project findings. The final (narrative) report for OSF was written by Szilvia Németh and Éva Sallai. The final report was due in July 2019. This is its edited and shortened version.

² [www. \[kreativtanulasesoktatas.hu/szolgalatasaink/kreativ-partnerseg/\]\(http://www.kreativtanulasesoktatas.hu/szolgalatasaink/kreativ-partnerseg/\)](http://www.kreativtanulasesoktatas.hu/szolgalatasaink/kreativ-partnerseg/) (Last visit: 18/03/2024)

Unintended outcomes included the creation of a new collaboration in the 9th district of Budapest to expand networks of creative education. The project increased the visibility of VIG among educators and created a substantial video documentation corpus for future research. Lessons learned have confirmed the effectiveness of VIG in providing personalised support and promoting reflective teaching practices. Recommendations included developing a VIG diary and further developing the implementation of the Creative Partnerships programme, emphasising teacher training, minimising intervention in workshops and appointing local coordinators.

In summary, the project has led to transformative changes in teachers' practice and students' experiences, emphasising the importance of personalised support, reflective teaching and innovative pedagogical approaches in nurturing creativity and empowering disadvantaged children.

Keywords: creative education, professional development, video training, disadvantaged children, reflective teaching, building collaborative networks

Introduction

In 2018, Creative Partnerships Hungary initiated a collaboration with the Hungarian Videotraining Association to provide professional counselling support for teachers, being involved in networks for promoting creative education. With the help of financial support from Open Society Foundations, the Videotraining Association was able to step into two already existing local collaborations in Pécs, and Budapest. Its joining developed further these local innovative networks on providing equitable and progressive education for Roma and disadvantaged children. The local collaborations aimed to nurture the creativity and critical thinking of disadvantaged children to support their access to quality education and future success in the labour market. The networks supported children to have a chance to get out of the circle of deprivation by empowering them with 21st-century skills and creative competencies.

The Videotraining Association³ was invited to these collaborations as it was recognized that the level of pedagogical-methodological preparedness of teachers varies highly within the collaborating primary schools in both localities. The school from Pécs belonged to the group of the most disadvantaged schools in Hungary. One of its two member schools was located in a segregated area

³ Project participants from the side of the Videotraining Association were: Mária Kovásznai Kozmáné, Dr. Éva Sallai; Éva Bartha, and Dr. Emese Szarka.

of Pécs and had Roma pupils in majority, while in its other member school students were of a very diverse socio-economic background. Teaching in a heterogeneous environment was a huge challenge for teachers, not only in nurturing creativity and critical thinking but also in establishing fruitful learning relationships with children. According to the methodology of the Videotraining Association, called VIG, learning always happens through interactions, and its quality is not independent from the quality of teacher-student interactions. This is the reason why the main aim was to support the development of constructive classroom interactions and the strengthening of teachers' reflective thinking.

So within the frame of this collaboration, the main objective was to allow participating teachers to reflect on video recordings displaying their successful interactions with pupils, by the lead of a qualified video trainer via short, supportive and therapeutic interventions. Altogether four teachers went through the VIG programme at Pécs, and four teachers in Budapest (9th district) which means thirty two personal sessions with eight pre-, and post-interviews took place in the 2018/19 academic year.

The second aim of getting into these local networks was to try to supplement the Creative Partnerships methodology and harmonize the two methods/programmes. During the project period Creative Partnerships classes were functioning at both schools. In Pécs, nearly 200 Roma and disadvantaged children were working together with creative professionals – with two local artists, eight art students of Pécs University (Faculty of Music and Visual Arts), and fifteen teachers. This team was joined by two trainers from the Hungarian Videotraining Association and two supervisors. Since the project started this collaboration has been active and its realisation enabled us to pilot various ways of cooperation.

Intended outcomes and the impact of the project

The project itself consisted of three main parts: the preparatory phase, individual development and feedback period.

In the preparatory phase, Videotraining Association demonstrated its method to the whole teaching staff. After that, the teachers participating in the project attended a four-hour awareness-raising training to make sure they were motivated and willing to cooperate. As a start for the Creative Partnerships work, a five-day training was delivered to prepare the voluntary art students for schoolwork. The training equipped them with a methodology called “high functioning classroom” and a 100-element basic toolkit for its implementation. Through this training, they became capable of helping to make positive chang-

es in the educational journey of the learners and their teachers at the participating schools and nurture the creativity and critical thinking of students in a classroom setting. For the last two days of the training session, the participant teachers also got involved, their preparation happened together with the artists and art students.

The individual development process started with an interview where the VIG trainer and the participating teacher agreed upon the framework and the rules of their cooperation. After the agreement, several recording-feedback sessions followed. During the process, the teacher had to decide on what problem she wanted to work on to get help with her most pressing problems. During the feedback sessions, the teachers reflected on the experiences of the previous recorded class concentrating on positive things, analysed them and used them as a base for development. Feedback sessions were held during the week after the recorded lesson, so the sessions required 45 minutes of the teacher's time weekly. During the projects, the trainers got 5-5 hours of supervision.

In parallel with this work, the Creative Partnerships classes started their work as well. The so-called local mini-projects were conducted by trained teachers and creative practitioners, each pair working in close cooperation. The mini-projects focused on tackling local difficulties highlighted by schools and teachers (e.g. reducing the risk of attrition, developing cooperative skills, managing disruptive behaviour, strengthening a positive image of the future, improving the 'visibility' of the school in the local community) or specific knowledge transfer and trans-disciplinary competence development. After an on-site observation session and two planning sessions, the local projects were implemented in 10 to 12 three-hour (3x45 minutes) modules and were concluded by detailed evaluation and presentation. The modules were incorporated into the structure of curricular classes. So six classes from Pécs School and 4 classes from a school from Budapest were taking part in the programme. Creativity and critical thinking of children were supported within core subject lessons – such as Math, Science, History and Hungarian Literature and Grammar. Artists and teachers delivered lessons and reflected on delivery together also every week. Art students and artists came to school every week, so it meant that they had 90-minute-long sessions with children and teachers regularly. The collaboration between creative professionals and teachers was supported by mentors and assessed and monitored by researchers, who took also an active part in the programme.

The video training ended with a closing interview where the teacher and the trainer discussed the results of their joint work and reflected on the difficulties. The reflection helped to reach the desired changes in the communication be-

havior between the participating teachers and their class environments. VIG was focused on the communication level of classroom interactions that made the identification of positive or negative situational communication patterns possible. Describing communication with specific terms is nearly impossible, so a video record gives a more credible picture. In the course of the project, the change in interactions in the classes of video-trained teachers were analysed. Based on the field experiences the individual professional development work with the video-trainer was a big help for the teachers. A remarkable change in the capability of teachers to explore their pedagogical strengths and in the development of their self-reflection was observed. In the final interviews, almost every teacher highlighted how important it was for them to get a video trainer's attention for 10 weeks. They appreciated the fact that trainers spent time helping them personally and concretely observing their work, reflecting on how satisfied they were, and designing the steps of change together. This personal experience greatly intensified their professional curiosity about what was happening in their classrooms. The result of this reflective thinking was a more conscious pedagogical work. As a concrete development the strengthening of teachers' self-confidence, recognition of the importance of positive feedback and putting it into practice can be mentioned.

Despite the positive feedback received from teachers taking part in the project, we need to think about the VIG practice so that, in every case, the school leaders decided who to offer this opportunity to. Teachers could not volunteer for the program. Despite this, the selected teachers were delighted with the opportunity, but except for three teachers, considerable time had to be devoted to defining the right working points. If they had some burning problems, it would have been faster. That is why by the time the deep work began, it was interrupted by the ending time of the intervention. So we can only hope that the teachers' (false) notion that „I have to give all children the same and equal attention „, had been successfully replaced by the approach that clearly states that each student has to receive periodic attention depending on the actual problems that need to be solved.

Unintended outcomes as a result of the collaboration

We worked not in one but in two disadvantaged schools. The project proposal was designed for one school only, but after starting the project, one school from Budapest 9th district also wanted us to cooperate with them. They wanted to start a Creative Partnerships programme, and they got interested in doing it accompanied by video training. As we were also interested in creating new local networks, we involved them in our project work. Two recognized artists started

their creative classroom projects together with the Creative Partnerships Hungary programme, and we initiated video training sessions with four teachers. Our work method was the same as in Pécs, finally, we were working in four classes with four teachers plus a control teacher with a control class. So this new school of Budapest also benefited from the project.

With the help of the project not only the already existing local networks were strengthened and widened, but a new local network in Budapest 9th district, around a primary school was established, too. The aim of the two local collaborative networks was the same: to nurture the creativity and critical thinking of disadvantaged children to support their access to quality education and future success in the labour market.

Video training is still a new method in Hungary. The project also helped to raise awareness of the method among more educators, the work at the project schools played an important role in the dissemination process of VIG.

Unlike the previous practice of VIG, in this project, whole lessons were recorded. As a result, we recorded a total of 64 lessons in the two schools. This huge video documentation can serve as a grand basis for future research material, as well.

Lessons learnt

The use of VIG was very effective in providing personal professional support to teachers. The original goal of this project was that VIG would enhance the impact of the Creative Partnership (CP) by providing participating educators with a service that helps them address their current concerns by demonstrating their strengths. Teacher-centred observation and discussion of classroom work were offered as an additional service to the CP programme. With qualitative research techniques, we wanted to measure how one process assisted the other. By doing semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with students it became obvious that as teachers' VIG work points were not closely linked to the Creative Partnerships program delivery, it was quite impossible to answer this question. Teachers were satisfied with both interventions (video training and CP) but they did not link them, they viewed and assessed them separately. In general, we can say that their classroom practice went through a significant transformation, moreover, their reflection and reflective thinking improved due to the project, but to state how the two programmes, to what extent strengthened each other, it was quite difficult to say. To have a valid statement about this, we need to do more research, but what can be said about it, based on this project experience is the following:

The function of VIG varies depending on when it is implemented. If done before the CP, its goal is mainly to prepare teachers for cooperation, if done in parallel with CP, VIG dominates and a kind of general professional self-development happens. If we want to assist the process of utilizing the experience gained in the CP and monitor the effectiveness of the new creative work in the classroom, VIG should be applied after CP, but its work points must be linked to the CP program itself. This would allow us to measure the extent to which VIG methodology can help the teachers with the sustainability of the CP program. This can be a way of reinforcing cooperation, as well as improving reflection.

According to the evaluation of the project activities we can say that in all the classes observed, and from the discussions with the creative practitioners and the teachers involved in the pilot, it was clear that new ways of planning, thinking, working and assessing had been introduced. This was evident in several ways:

- The creative lessons lasted for 90 minutes and were able to keep the children's attention and focus for this time. It took time for children to adapt to the longer lessons but previously experienced behavioural problems gradually disappeared.
- All students agreed that they wanted to create a positive atmosphere in the classroom. A big part of achieving this was to ensure that each student received individual attention from the group. A classroom community was created and strengthened that builds on the individuality and diversity of each child and fosters a collaborative learning environment in which each child's abilities and personality can flourish.
- The lessons observed and the descriptions of other lessons all showed flexible and imaginative use of space both inside and outside the classroom. All teachers reported that planning more physically active lessons improved the concentration and learning of children. The collaboration with creative practitioners showed them ways to use their pupils' imagination and curiosity in the learning process as an asset.
- In each of the lessons observed, there was time for effective reflection. In some cases, this allowed children to repeat elements of the work done in small groups to the whole class, reinforcing learning and ensuring that key concepts were understood. Overall, these discussions ensured that teachers had a good overview of how much learning had taken place and highlighted work that needed to be reinforced later. These discussions also helped to build classroom community. It was interesting to observe in the Budapest school how a large class (25 pupils) could have such a long period of reflective discussion without becoming unmotivated.

- The activities all showed that care had been taken to plan for challenge, collaboration, authenticity, inclusion, mobility and flexibility. Lessons started with warm-up exercises, then followed by a ‘main activity’ focusing on the learning content and a reflection. In an observed session, for example, after introducing the main exercise of the day, pupils were divided into four groups. They were told that four ‘stations’ had been set up around the school, inside and outside the school. At each station, they would find an envelope containing a set of instructions. They were to carry out the task described in the instructions and continue until all four tasks had been completed. Although there was an adult at each station, these adults played no role in guiding the children. However, they could answer questions if the pupils did not understand something. The lesson was therefore designed as a series of challenges to which the children had to find the answers themselves. The lesson required complex negotiations both within the group (how to solve this challenge?), between groups (in what order to solve the challenges so as not to do one at the same time as another group?) and with adults (to get answers to their questions if they were not sure what they were trying to do). This required a sophisticated level of collaboration, which the pupils managed with great success. All the teachers interviewed for this evaluation reported that they had welcomed the many new ideas that the creative practitioners had brought to the planning of lessons and that they already had or planned to use these exercises and approaches themselves.

Based on the project experiences, we propose to make changes in the way of delivering the VIG methodology. As an unintended effect of the project, we have concluded that developing a so-called VIG diary to enhance the impact of the VIG sessions would be very useful. To reinforce the effect of the VIG process, we concluded that we would develop a „VIG diary” in which, in addition to a maximum of five pages of educational material, we would ask the clients to write down in a few sentences between the two sessions what happened and their reflections on the discussion. We should do this because we think that in the „excitement” of the feedback, clients do not accurately note their own tasks, so the processual nature of the joint work is not strong enough, which means that the elements of change should be followed up more consciously. The educational material would serve to ensure that the texts expressing the spirit of the method (e.g. the importance of quality of interactions, understanding, relationship model, and initiatives-taking) can be read more often. In our experience, modern pedagogical principles (personalisation, positive feedback, differentiation, the role of relationship, acceptance, authenticity, empathy, etc.)

are not evidenced even for well-trained teachers. Care must be taken to ensure that these texts are brief and that the teachers' notes will serve their authors' professional development.

Regarding the delivery of the CP programme, it can be said that several improvements could be made to the future implementation of the programme which should be considered when the programme is repeated. They are the following:

- More training should be provided for creative practitioners in managing pupils' behaviour. There are various approaches and exercises they could be introduced to which would help them manage challenging behaviour and there should be room in the training for a deeper discussion of this issue. Creative practitioners need to feel confident to confront these issues directly.
- In most classes observed as part of the evaluation, there were several adults present in addition to the actual teacher and the practitioners. While it is to be valued that other teachers wish to observe the classes and learn from the experience, the 'observing teachers' mustn't interfere in the workshops. The briefings for schools entering the programme need to be enhanced and this issue can be addressed this in the teacher induction.
- It is important that teachers and school leaders are encouraged to have the patience to stick with the Creative Partnerships approach, which includes elements such as allowing longer lessons and greater use of the whole school building and grounds. There is concern about overreacting when behaviour becomes difficult. Evidence observed in the evaluation suggested that pupils' behaviour and their ability to concentrate and remain disciplined for longer periods improved in both schools, but that schools restrict pupils' freedom precisely when pupils are learning to cope.
- The experiences also convinced us that there is a need for a permanent local coordinator, who in a part-time occupation manages the upcoming issues of the local network. The permanent presence and availability of a coordinator significantly increase the efficacy of the work.

Summary of main conclusions

The main substantive outcomes of the joint project were fundamental changes in three areas, both for the participating teachers and for the students. The first is the acceptance of personal support, the second is the importance of developing reflectivity, and the third is the stimulation of curiosity to look for different solutions, both methodologically and in terms of the individual characteristics

of the children. How does - what happens to a pupil in the classroom or school - become important? This was the leading question in the professional developmental work for all teachers taking part in the project. Participating teachers have experienced the importance of professional development of being able to see and even talk about their own work in a way that is not controlling, judging or evaluating, but understanding and helpful with the help of a trained trainer. This personal experience has greatly enhanced the teachers' curiosity about what is happening in the classroom, which has had an immediate and tangible effect on the students' interest in classroom processes. Highlighting the importance of reflective thinking created a more conscious pedagogical work. As a result of this professional consciousness, concrete progress in teachers' confidence was visible, they started recognising the importance of positive feedback and putting it into practice. Students' feedback given to creative professionals reflected this positive change in teaching. Indeed, according to the participating students, the frequency and content of teacher feedback changed during the period of collaborative work, with more emphasis on reinforcing positive student behaviour, which they felt contributed to a positive classroom climate and a more peaceful learning environment.

ANNEX

A summary of the main working points and results of the training for clients who participated in the video training sessions⁴:

Challenge 1: Improvement of the relationship with a student who, on the recommendation of the teacher, was placed in an alternative school, from which he was dismissed after one month for unmanageable reasons and thus returned to his original class. The teacher would like this pupil to have fun at school and for her not to be angry with him when she criticises him, when he does not comply with the routines unless asked, etc.

Evidence of change: classroom recordings confirmed that Z pays attention to all tasks and actively cooperates with his classmates. It was also observed that he receives little positive feedback on his work. The teacher recognised that she would make a difference if she focused not on the problem behaviour but on the very many positive expressions that were happening. She expressed very serious reflections in the final interview. His professional self-confidence has been strengthened.

⁴ Main challenges and their evidences were summarized by Éva Sallai for the OSF narrative report, handed in on 18 July 2019. Source: manuscript.

Challenge 2: in a class of 4, pupils are difficult to control, the teacher can be very loud, pupils clown around and some do not work. She wanted to be able to control the learning process of the pupils in a quieter way, so we paid special attention to 3 pupils.

Evidence of change: During the recordings, the teacher's repertoire of behaviours was enriched by the impact she could achieve by physically moving closer to the difficult pupils at problem points. In this case, the ability to reduce discipline through positive feedback rather than punishment made a noticeable difference. The volume change was slow to change but was a substantial shift from the first intake. This teacher commented that for her the VIG was therapeutic because she learned so much during the process of working together.

Challenge 3: in another class 4, we specifically worked on changing the classroom behaviour of 3 students. One of them as the class clown was constantly making the work difficult, the second student was always bored and did not want to put any effort in, and the third student did not work in class.

Evidence of change: During the VIG process, the teacher was very skilful in stopping V.'s theatrical behaviour and recognised that she was giving very little positive feedback to the other two pupils to motivate them to work more persistently. He also recognised that these students were working continuously and only stopped for a few minutes, but he was paying attention to them during that period. It was clear to her that she had a tool in her hand because these children were very happy to receive praise from her.

Challenge 4: In a class 3 class, we focused on helping a young girl who was lagging to learn more optimally. There are no problems with her behaviour, but the teacher thinks she needs more help to meet the requirements in the upper grades. During the VIG period, this is very much in doubt.

Evidence of change: In the recordings, the result of the teacher's creative attempts was very clear. She checked much more often that the girl could follow the tasks, designed differentiated tasks, and made sure that there were tasks that the girl could complete. She gave lots and varied feedback. It is easy to see how safe the little girl feels.

Challenge 5: A request from a class 2 teacher was to work on the effectiveness of the Monday morning discussion circles. She thinks it is important for students to be able to share their experiences, but the class size is 26, so children run out of patience and don't listen to each other. She would like these sessions to be an opportunity to listen to each other, as well as an opportunity to express experiences and feelings. The teacher has a very strong personal relationship with the children, which requires her to be more patient in her group manage-

ment. She is accessible to all and welcomes and responds to all initiatives. This can also be observed in the conversation circle.

Evidence of change: The teacher's idea was to keep the discussion circles as a group while giving the others tasks to do independently. In the next recording, she saw that this was a step forward. Still, it should be emphasized in that group that they would have time to do the task later, so they should pay attention to each other because they were doing the tasks and not listening to their partner who was telling the story. In the last shot, you can see that the children understand the teacher's request better. The teacher is showing endless patience and genuine attention to the pupils. Showing this had a great impact on her because it confirmed what a valuable tool she has. She was increasingly reflective, eager to talk about her thoughts and her professional dilemmas and analysed well what she saw on video.

Challenge 6: An experienced teacher working in class 2 asked to focus her work with video recordings on observing the use of cooperative teaching methods, as she had not used this method before. She could not identify any other areas where she would need help.

Evidence of change: She could observe how the class works in groups and what changes could be made to make the work more effective. e.g. specific interpretation of roles in the group is needed, or the results of group work should be presented on a poster of a size that everyone can see clearly, because only then can they pay attention to the presentation. The teacher is well qualified, has excellent rapport with the pupils, gives a lot of positive feedback, and her organisation of work is good. I felt it was a complete success that he asked us to work together to follow a method that was new to him. In the final interview, she said that she had learnt a lot from observing the classroom processes and the children's workflow. The increase in reflective thinking led to a spectacular change in her work.

Challenge 7: The issue of "emotional education" was raised in the first interview and remained a focus throughout, because this was where the teacher felt insecure. He could not put his question precisely but rather spoke in general terms about his uncertainty about whether he was doing a good job of emotionally educating the children, although he thought he was doing his best. It was also flagged as a work point, with further clarification needed. A further, more specific question was whether she was helping the pupils with SEN in the class well, and she wanted to see herself teaching and whether she was on track in her interactions with her pupils.

Evidence of change: During the process, she was concerned that she might not be supportive of the children, so some of them might be afraid of her or hurt

by her behaviour. The second working point was the treatment of SNI children. In the latter, she used a rich toolbox and patience to do maths development work, which raised questions here about whether she does development work in non-mathematics lessons. It was difficult in the process that the teacher also felt hurt and unrecognised because of what had been said in the qualification process. It was only in the final feedback session that we were able to talk openly about this, and slowly built the trust that she dared to be honest about almost any issues that arose. It seemed to me that by the end of the process he had ‘dared’ to see what he considered to be inappropriate teacher behaviour in a problem situation and had considered what other options he had. He thinks he approaches each problem situation differently and more consciously. He is paying more attention to himself. He experienced the work process as upwardly mobile, very, very positive and forward-looking. She was pleased with the positive feedback she received from the video trainer. Quote from the teacher: “When I told you that you caught such good emotional moments on the children’s faces, it was, let’s say, very good to see that ...you wouldn’t think that really with every movement, every word, everything, we were conveying some kind of emotion and whether it ...the children were taking the broadcast or whether it was having an impact on them, but I saw it.”

“Here I felt it was all for me.” She experienced the powerful impact of positive feedback on her daily life as a concrete change. She feels more balanced and patient. She is more aware of the children, looking for the “key” to the children. She considers it good to be able to observe herself and to see her work with her pupils. She has already changed her approach to conflict situations.

Challenge 8: As a class teacher, she often finds working with children a struggle. He teaches them maths and physics, so they meet every day and can discuss current problems. She knows the family background of all the pupils in her class and keeps in close contact with parents and colleagues who teach in her class. She feels that her relationship with the children is good, but she is dissatisfied with them because they are unmotivated, not listening, immature for their age, not paying attention to each other, lack of responsibility (e.g. when solving group tasks). During the development of the working point, it was important to ask her to develop her self-confidence, she is not sure that what she is doing is good. In the end, the following working points were developed: children not listening to each other, not working together in group work, no task ownership - how could this be achieved, increase and strengthen their self-confidence.

Evidence of change: The colleague had a strong aversion to the camera, she found it difficult to understand that she could learn a lot about herself, her

teaching style, and her communication through the pictures. He was slow to accept and then to see the benefits. It was slow to build a trusting relationship that would allow him to talk honestly about his problems and stumbling blocks in front of the camera, and to receive positive feedback well. Throughout the process, the lack of self-confidence and the issue of disciplining children remained a focus. She varies her methods to ensure that she always delivers an enjoyable, motivating lesson. With the help of pictures and videos, we got to the point where she was satisfied with the children's work in class, recognised the power of pictures, was convinced that she was on the right track professionally, and was empowered.