

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE QUALITY OF SOCIAL INTERACTIONS BETWEEN TEACHERS AND PUPILS IN BUILDING A SAFE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT - AN ANALYSIS OF TEACHER EVALUATION FROM THE PUPIL'S PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: *The text presents a case study. The case study is used from the author's practice. The social interaction assessment was conducted as part of a project working with a particular classroom where there is an extremely high number of children with behavioural difficulties. There is a lot of noise, pupils find it difficult to follow school and class rules and most teachers do not like to teach there. As part of a comprehensive programme of work with this class, aimed at building a safe school environment, an evaluation of the teachers from the pupils' perspective was carried out. On the basis of the evaluation, a follow-up analysis of the typical manifestations of a "favourite teacher" and an "unpopular teacher" (according to the pupils' subjective evaluation) was carried out. This analysis pinpointed the source of problematic behaviour of pupils and served as a basis for suggesting changes to improve the situation and build a safe classroom climate.*

Keywords: *social interaction, pupils, problem behaviour, teachers, safe school climate*

Introduction

The quality of the social interaction among the teachers and the pupils is one of the important factors influencing the educational process with all its participants. The level of their mutual communication is influenced by the level of the communicative skills of the individual participants and their idea of the educational process and their approach to it. The ideas of the educational process as a whole (or particular educational aspects) can be in mutual agreement or in contrast. These factors significantly influence the level of the social climate, and its quality has an impact on the children's attitude to the educational process and to the ranking of education in their system of values. The approach of teachers influences their way

to give feedback to pupils who form their self-concept based on this feedback. This research focuses on the essential areas of social interaction in school.

Important aspects of communication between teachers and pupils are the choice of respectful communication (communication without communication stops), addressing them by their first name, and solving pupils' problems individually without the presence of others. Other essential factors in social interaction between teachers and pupils are empathy, trust, and pedagogical tact.

The importance of quality of social interactions in school in the concept of school success comes to the fore especially in the increase of pupils with so-called

relative school failure (e.g. Hrabal and Pavelková, 2010; Švamberk Šauerová, 2019; Ryberg, R., et al., 2020). This is encountered in those pupils who have at least average aptitude and have not yet achieved at least average results at school. Frequent factors behind relative underachievement tend to be specific learning/behavioural disorders not correctly recognized (e.g. the teacher perceives the pupil as stupid, rude, without appropriate mental talent - see Švamberk Šauerová, 2016), anxiety or shyness (see: Švamberk Šauerová, 2022), also specific classroom climate (e.g. incipient bullying, lack of a safe climate – see: e.g. Čapek, 2010), specific communication/interaction between teacher and pupil(s) (again, lack of a safe classroom climate - Švamberk Šauerová, 2019, Ryberg et al., 2020).

The quality of social interaction especially affects the formation of the pupil's own self-assessment and concept.

In the last decades, the quality of communication has been emphasized as one of the dominant factors in effective education. It stems from the great role of the individualization as a new paradigm that puts the respect of individual educational needs in its centre.

In this framework, the effective communication is connected to the formative assessment and respectful way of communication on the teachers' side, and building communication skills on the side of the pupils.

A positive communication style in the educational process is closely related to the formation of a positive self-assessment of pupils.

Self-assessment of pupils has received increasing attention in recent years, among other things also in relation to coping with school requirements, especially to the issue of school success and failure - respectively

in the context of school performance assessment (cf. e.g. Urban and Urban, 2018). Experts do not only focus on the importance of self-assessment in the academic environment, but also in the following contexts: employment (e.g. Zimmerman, Moylan, Hudesman, White and Flugman, 2011; McNall and Michel, 2017; León, Augusto-Landa and García-Martínez, 2021; Tomšíková, Smékalová and Slavík, 2014; Novotná and Nišpanská, 2017; Fišer et al., 2016), the influence of self-assessment in the overall educational career of an individual (e.g. Karaman, 2021), when self-assessment supports and maintains students' approach during the beginning of schooling and throughout the whole primary school (Vasileiadou, Karadimitriou, 2021; Panadero, Jonsson, Botella, 2017; Broadfoot, 1996; Laufková, 2017).

In view of the above, it is therefore necessary to pay attention to the individual factors of teacher-pupils interaction and the overall quality of their social interaction. In the text, we will also focus on the components that influence the communication in the educational process.

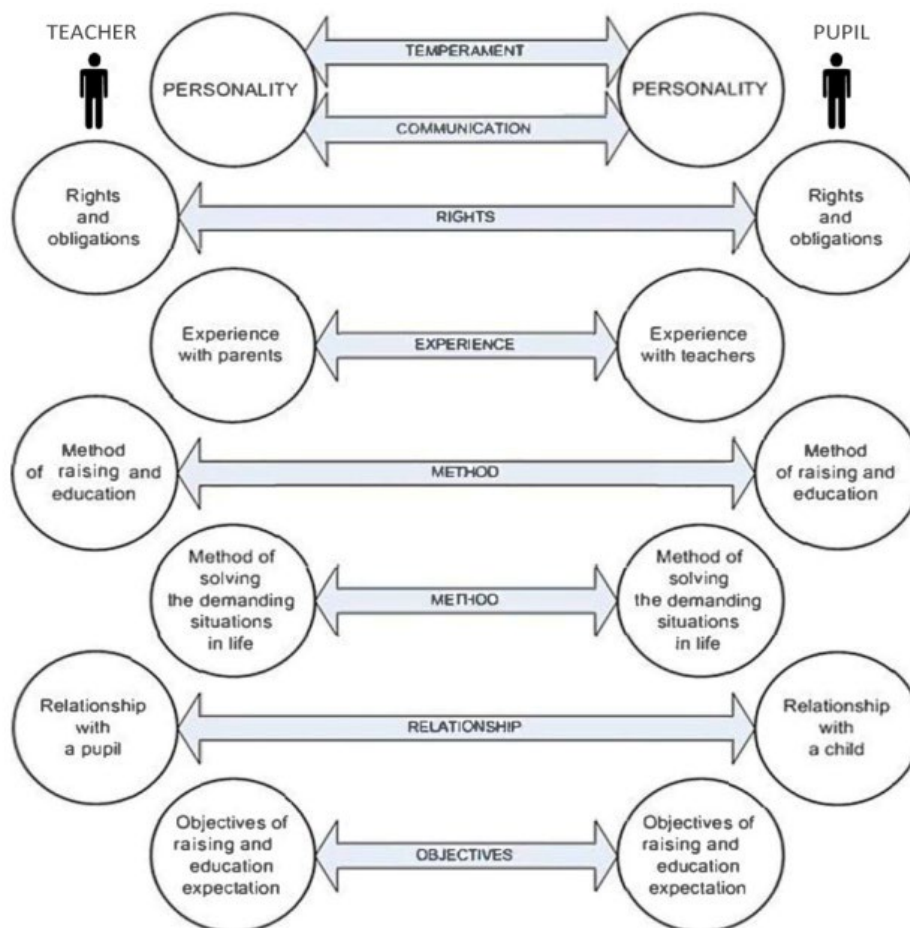
Graph 1 presents the basic factors that influence the interaction among teachers and students. From this graph, I would like to select those parts that are significantly related to school success and to the formation of attitudes and values of individuals who participate in this interaction. These attitudes significantly affect the impact of the whole educational process.

In educational process it is very important that teachers and pupils have a specific understanding of the objectives and the expectations of the education and raising. Differing ideas of teachers and pupils in these areas are often the primary source of conflict and the emergence of negative attitudes (or mutual aversion) of one subject towards the other, which in turn

contributes to the emergence of a negative social climate of the whole class or leads to pupils' reluctance to learn (comp. Ezeanwu, Anyachebelu, 2020; Meskauskiene, 2015). We often encounter different ideas about the outputs of the educational process (resulting from the expected goals of education and

training). Some teachers put a lot of pressure to perform on pupils (cf. Švamberk Šauerová, 2019, 2022) and expose them to disproportionate amount of stress. They are convinced that the student will achieve good academic results in this way.

Graph 1. Basic factors affecting the quality of “teacher – pupil” communication



The second group of teachers strives to build a positive social environment of mutual cooperation. They feel the need to involve pupils in the formation of the school process, the operation of the classroom, offering various forms of cooperation.

In practice we unfortunately see many teachers' reluctance (or rather inability) to establish closer cooperation with pupils,

because it is related to their social skills, which they sometimes lack.

Very important is also the concept of the educational style, which is related to the understanding of the results and objectives of the educational process.

The child is being approached either as an object of teaching in the process of

education or as a social object that creates a positive atmosphere. Teachers who prefer an authoritative way of education emphasize the importance of school performance.

The difference in the parenting style of the parent and the teacher can also cause the problem. Parents who prefer an authoritarian parenting style may feel that a liberal school curriculum lacks a guiding concept.

Parents who prefer an authoritative style of education but enrol their child in an alternative school may feel that schooling lacks order and concept. In contrast, parents who prefer a liberal upbringing and enrol their child in a traditional (conservative) school may feel a great deal of pressure from the school to perform, regardless of the child's personality.

When the educational concept is incongruent, children are under pressure from both social environments - school and family (comp. Santiago, Garbacz, 2016), which can lead to a compromised safe classroom climate.

Another important precondition of building a positive teacher-parent-pupil relationship and safe climate is the harmony of notion about a successful pupil (that may differ again). There we have to consider especially those pupils with specific educational needs demanding increased care and attention from teachers as well as from pupils.

Each participant in the learning process may also have a different idea of success. For one, success at school means having good grades, for another, having good relationships with classmates, for a third, that he likes going to school. The same goes for teachers. For one, a successful student is someone who likes going to school, for another, one who wins school competitions or one that can sit still for the entire class.

Methodology

Objective

The aim of the research is to highlight the importance of the quality of social interactions between teacher and student in working with the classroom collective. In the research investigation we focus on the analysis of subjective evaluation of teachers by pupils of a particular class in which a large number of problematic behaviours are diagnosed. Also, the part aim was to analyse the basic characteristics of a "popular" and "unpopular" teacher in a specific educational environment. The evaluation of social interaction was carried out within the project of working with a specific classroom where there is an extremely high number of children with behavioural difficulties. There is a lot of noise, pupils find it difficult to follow school rules and classroom rules, and most teachers do not like to teach there. As a part of a comprehensive program of working with this class, an evaluation of teachers from the pupils' perspective was carried out.

In the evaluation, students categorized the teacher according to their own subjective opinion: 'favourite', 'unpopular', 'neutral attitude'.

On the basis of this distribution and the evaluation of teachers' communication and interactions, an analysis of typical manifestations of a "popular teacher" and an "unpopular teacher" was carried out. This analysis pinpointed the source of the pupils' problematic behaviour, and it served as the basis for suggesting changes to improve the situation in this class.

The methodological basis of the text is the research of specialized literature, the analysis of the long-term diagnostic and consulting practice of the author and the analysis of case reports from her consulting and pedagogical practice.

Other backgrounds of this paper are:

- increase in children with academic problems
- increase in behavioural disorders among pupils
- increase in psychological difficulties among pupils
- the experiences as a school psychologist.

Method

The survey was conducted with 26 pupils (15 years old) and 21 teachers teaching in this class during the last three years. The number of teachers is very high, there is a frequent turnover of teachers. They do not want to teach in this class. The pupils are perceived as problematic.

The pupils used an evaluation questionnaire – a combination of marks in the field of popularity, comprehensibility of teaching, willingness to explain the material, fairness, communicativeness. They also assessed the specifics of the teacher's personality. A structured interview was conducted with the teachers who were evaluated in the questionnaire.

Pupils also ranked teachers in the categories of "favourite", "unpopular", "neutral" according to their own subjective opinion.

Stages of the research project

The basic stages of the project included: setting the basic factors in the concept of a "successful child" from the perspective of the teacher and the student. Creating an evaluation questionnaire to assess teachers' social interactions from the perspective of students in a specific class. In addition, a qualitative analysis of typical manifestations of a "popular teacher" and an analysis of typical manifestations of an "unpopular teacher" from the students' perspective.

On the basis of the analysis, proposals were made to solve the situation in the educational practice of this particular school.

Evaluation survey

The survey took place in a specific class of high school with significant difficulties in the behaviour of pupils. There are 26 pupils in the class, 11 girls and 15 boys.

The pedagogical-psychological diagnostics by the school psychologist (the author of the post) revealed a high number of gifted/highly gifted students, low mutual tolerance, individualism of students and a low willingness to cooperate. The diagnosis of students in the class was part of the comprehensive care of the class.

The pupils filled out the evaluation questionnaire in the presence of a psychologist whom they trust.

They rated the teachers who had previously taught in their class. Some teachers only taught in the class for a short time, because of the problems with the pupils they refused to continue teaching classes. Men refused to teach classes more often (3:1).

Reasons given for reluctance to teach in the classroom:

- class with significant behavioural difficulties;
- high number of gifted children with very poor grades;
- low level of teamwork;
- negative atmosphere in the classroom.

Results

The evaluated teachers can be divided into three basic categories: liked (popular), disliked (students often formulated the teacher as unpopular or horrible) and neutral relationship.

The assessment from the pupils' perspective is alarming. Qualitative analysis showed typical characteristics students reported to teachers in individual categories (liked, disliked, neutral) - see below.

With regards to serious findings, a specific investigation was carried out in other classes to be sure, and observations were also carried out in the natural conditions of the school (breaks, lunches).

The results of observation and control evaluation of investigations in other classes (without problematic behaviour) confirmed the unfortunately detected trend from the class under review, namely the high aggressiveness of "unpopular" teachers, which can really be considered as a fatal failure of the school management and the control mechanisms of the educational process.

Qualitative analysis of the questionnaire – teacher characteristics (samples)

"Favourite" teachers (pupils' point of view)

„He has time to explain everything to us. He doesn't use the formal address³¹. He is a teddy bear, but very nice.

He will explain the subject to us and also what we don't understand from another cantor, I understand it from him. He takes his time, and I can correct the test. I always understand what I did wrong, I know how to do it better next time. He doesn't make a big deal out of it when I mess up or I don't know something. They teach in a fun way. It's interesting, I'm looking forward to these classes. I like that he trusts us and doesn't always check, that's what makes a person motivated to work. I liked that when our class teacher was sick, that even though we belong to the naughty class, he took us skating with his class. “

³¹ This teacher is generally the most popular at the school, he has an excellent results, the least

"Neutral" teachers (pupils' point of view)

„I don't enjoy her teaching. I don't know, she's so bland, I don't like her much. He doesn't know how to teach; he doesn't seem to like it here. He doesn't like us, he says he's coming here for punishment, but he's trying. He is teaching us and with the ringing he goes away but doesn't rush. “

"Disliked" teachers (pupils' point of view)

„They call us idiots, yell at us that they will cut our throats, he would rather quarter us, mom should beat us until blood spurts out of us..., calls us "dick", „shits “, this teacher swears at us – e.g. „motherfucker “, „cunt “, „fucker “- it always makes me sick. He keeps scolding us that we are a terrible class and that he will punish us and punish us, and we will see who from whom. My parents were at school, and he told them that he would like to spank me every day, but since I have the kind of parents that I have, he won't hit me (I feel like he would hit another student, my mother works as a rescue director), I don't know why I shouldn't scold the teacher when they are acting wrong. This teacher is „horny “, he always talks weird, the girls get nervous, but we don't even find it funny. He's always complaining that we're terrible, that he has a lot of work and then he has to teach here - I mean, why does he do it if he doesn't enjoy it?

Analysis of teachers' opinions

The teachers were subsequently interviewed. The teachers who teach in this class perceive the class similarly, depending on which category they belong to. “Popular” teachers do not perceive the class as fundamentally problematic, they perceive a higher level of noise there, and at the same time they agree with the results of the school psychologist's diagnosis that the class is made up of exceptionally gifted

difficulties in behaving with pupils, he very often implements project-based teaching.

children and that their talents need to be supported (tendency to frequent discussions during the class/with the teacher).

Teachers from the “neutral” group perceive the class more as problematic, they are more influenced by the opinion of their colleagues from the group of “unpopular” teachers.

“Unpopular” teachers openly slander other teachers in class, publicly vent their aggression verbally, raise their voice in collegial discussions, act categorically at pedagogical meetings (I will not discuss this with you, they are “scumbags”, they do not belong in a high school). The school management is not popular with the teachers and has a tendency to constantly punish the students. Aggressive behaviour of teachers is of no interest to the school management.

The school management has difficulty in "replacing" unpopular teachers, because most of the teachers in this class do not want to teach much (thanks to the high talent of the students and their frequent discussions, the class places higher demands on the teacher's pedagogical skills and resilience, as well as the ability to discuss and find less common solutions, which is not pleasant for all teachers).

Evaluation summary

Globally and nationally, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, we are seeing an increase in mental health problems, including an increase in aggression (WHO, 2022). Especially in schools, the social atmosphere has gotten worse, there is a higher level of aggression among pupils, and the aggressiveness of parents is increasing. Overall, it can be assumed that even teachers will not escape these consequences of the pandemic, and in the long term, the pandemic may also have an

impact on the increase in aggression among teachers.

The data obtained shows a very high level of teacher aggression, which is unfortunately becoming the "norm" in this school. The teaching staff does not see the above results as a major problem. They claim, including the school principal, that if the pupils did not violate the school rules, the teachers would not be aggressive. Even though the cause and consequences can be understood in different ways, it is necessary to insist that the teacher is a professional in the school and in no way such manifestations as those found in our evaluation cannot be tolerated.

The actions of teachers have a significant negative effect on the pupils' self-concept, the pupils put themselves in the “worst class” category at school, they feel that there is no point in trying, they don't want to learn, they refuse to cooperate.

In practice, we see a major negative impact of poor social interactions between teachers and pupils on the overall classroom climate and on pupils' self-assessment, both on an individual level and on a group assessment level.

Limits and discussion

There are not many similarly focused studies, because we are touching on a very delicate topic, which is the vulgar and unethical behaviour of teachers.

These manifestations are often found in teachers with advanced burnout syndrome, in schools with poor management (inappropriate principal personality), unhealthy school climate. Nevertheless, similar results can be found e.g. in the research of Winding, Aust, Anderesen (2022) who investigated the link between aggressive behaviour of pupils and burnout syndrome of teachers in Danish schools.

The research of Suryaningrat, Mangunsong, and Riantoputra (2020), while focusing on disputes between teachers and parents, offers interesting points of comparison with our topic.

According to research by Troop-Gordon, Kopp (2011), the characteristics of the teacher-child relationship (closeness, dependence, and conflict) predict changes in peer victimization and aggressive behavior over the course of the school year. In their study Relational and physical forms of victimization and aggression were studied and changes in peer acceptance and number of friendships were tested as possible mediators. The results of their study indicate the importance of the U-Z relationship, specifically with regard to the long-term perspective and development of the student, the formation of the student's self-concept, and possibly the prevention of the student's risky behavior.

The aforementioned study (we mean Troop-Gordon, Kopp, 2011) examines the extent to which characteristics of the teacher-child relationship (closeness, dependency, and conflict) are predictive of changes in children's peer victimization and aggressive behavior over the course of a school year. Relational and physical forms of victimization and aggression were studied, and changes in peer acceptance and number of friendships were tested as possible mediators. Longitudinal data from 410 fourth- and fifth-grade students (193 boys; 217 girls) and their teachers (N = 25) were analyzed. Whereas dependency on the teacher predicted heightened victimization from peers, a close relationship with the teacher forecasted less physical aggression toward peers. Moreover, decreases in number of friendships partially mediated the link between dependency on the teacher and heightened relational victimization for boys.

We came to similar conclusions in our research, namely that a close and positive relationship with teachers leads to lower aggression towards their peers.

The primary limitations of our study include the fact that the evaluation was conducted by students from a classroom that is not satisfied with the teaching in the long term and has significant conflicts with teachers. Once significant data was found, a secondary evaluation was conducted in other classrooms, randomly selected across the school, to increase fairness.

For discussions with the school principal, results were pooled from all classes to increase the safety of the first responding class.

A standardized questionnaire was not used for the evaluation, the reason being the desire to evaluate the educational process according to the current situation.

The sample on which the evaluation was carried out is not fully representative, it is a very specific class, with significant behavioural difficulties, so the results cannot be applied to the whole teaching staff or to all pupils. However, in a given class group, the observed behaviour of teachers can have a major impact on the actual behaviour problem of the class/individuals, so despite these limitations, the study brings very concrete results to educational practice.

Another limitation of the study was the low willingness of the school principal to cooperate, unwilling to accept the results of the psychological investigation. As in other cases of bullying, it is possible to observe a pathological acceptance of the negative norm of current social interaction at the school. The unwillingness of the principal to cooperate with psychologists is well known, so it may also affect the results obtained

from teachers who are fearless, impunity and scold pupils publicly and in conversation.

Conclusions and recommendations for practice

The research results showed that the quality of social interactions between teachers and students is an important part of creating a safe classroom climate and forming a positive self-concept and self-esteem of the pupils. It significantly influences the student's motivation to fulfil school duties and overcome study obstacles.

The social competence of both – pupils and teachers – must be constantly supported in the educational process and their quality checked regularly

An important factor in promoting school success is the teacher's confidence in the pupil (primarily their perception of the pupil in the categories of "good pupil", "cooperative pupil", "trying pupil"/ "lazy pupil", "stupid pupil", "uncooperative pupil", etc.).

According to our findings and in connection with the increase in pathological phenomes in society, it is necessary to create targeted programs to support the mental health and wellbeing of teachers and students.

Suggestions for practice resulting from the investigation:

- Recommendations for school director, that student behaviour must be considered in the context of teacher pathological behaviour.
- Limit pupil punishments.
- Interview the teachers from the „unpopular“ category, terminate the employment of two teachers.
- Intensive work with the class, support of team cooperation, promotion of appropriate communication tools and strategies (communication skills training).

- Intensive cooperation with the class teacher, organization of regular classroom management classes, use of a project prepared for Czech Television (CT Edu School wellbeing, main author Švamberk Šauerová, 2023).
- Workshops for teachers – relaxation techniques, stress reduction, increasing resilience, increasing self-efficacy, formative assessment in teaching, assertive techniques with emphasis on selective ignoring.

For now, the management has only made the “necessary changes” - i.e. the exchange of two of the most aggressive teachers, the classroom will be moved from the basement to a higher floor, closer to the principal's office, in bright spaces, additional workshops are prepared for teachers – “communication with a problem student”, “formative assessment”, “mediation procedures in the teacher's work”, an intensive and continuous work with children - as an example of a motivational approach, this class (as the only one in the school) was allowed to meet with a Czech Olympian (Lukáš Krpálek - possibilities of the author, who also works at the school, where Olympians are more often educated), the students conducted an interview, processed the interview and published it in the regional press.

In any case, this case study of the class shows the importance of the quality of social interaction and its influence on the success of students in the class.

This study clearly demonstrated the importance of communication in the self-assessment of pupils and the building of a safe climate in the classroom, as well as the importance of regular evaluation among pupils.

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