Learning to Cope with Problem Situations in Vocational Education/Training

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Abstract

Resolving teacher-student conflicts in high school is a challenge that can negatively impact the learning environment, school climate, or student development. This article analyses the most common situations that cause conflicts. Based on the findings, we present a practical example (a model situation solved using the participatory method) where we tried to resolve these conflicts and improve the relationships between teachers and students. One of the School Problems, or problematic situations, is the miscommunication and misunderstanding between the mentioned parties. Conflicts often arise from misinterpreting assignments, mismatched expectations, or emotional reactions. In response to this issue, we conducted a practical experiment in the safe environment of a university, during which we simulated real conflict scenarios and looked for effective ways to resolve them. In the roles of teacher and pupils/students, some students were future teachers of practical teaching.The results show that effective communication, empathy, and dialogue can significantly reduce conflict and strengthen teacher-student interactions.

Keywords: Participative methods, Pedagogical competence, Simulation of social reality in teaching, Frequent social situations in the teaching process

1   Introduction

Milmeister, Rastoder, and Houssemand (2022) researched vocational education and its perception in different European countries. Respondents from Eastern European countries recommended vocational education, while respondents from Western European or Scandinavian countries most often recommended general secondary education. One possible explanation is the traditional value of practical and vocational education. At the same time, some of these countries' economies are strongly oriented towards producing goods

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(predominantly Eastern European countries) rather than services (predominantly Western European countries), which supports opportunities in crafts and industry. In the context of the above research, a vocational school graduate is more accessible to the Czech Republic than a general education graduate. Thus, from the perspective of secondary vocational school education, teachers need to be equipped with competencies that develop their teaching skills, as vocational skills are assumed to have already been acquired. From other investigations (Kucharčíková & Tokarčíková, 2016), (Puri, 2022), (Olimov & Mamurova, 2022) and (Leupin, 2016), reflective methods seem to be one of the possible forms of teaching such teacher competences.

One form of reflective approach to teaching is the Participative Approach. This is sometimes referred to as the interactive or student-centred method of teaching. This method emphasises student subjectivity and the student's construction of knowledge. Participatory methods assume a high level of activity and personal involvement of students in the learning process. It is recommended for smaller groups of students. They can promote better acquisition and subsequent retention of what has been learned. The method is based on simulating real situations and practising various tasks through role-playing (Průcha & Veteška, 2012). Role-playing is helpful if, students share a similar experience, which is challenging to recall due to its emotional nature. Here, learning occurs from replaying past experiences. The role-playing method is useful because it helps students to use their experiences from real-life situations; we talk about Simulation methods (Kucharčíková & Tokarčíková, 2016).

2   Simulation Methods

Lucas, Spencer, and Claxton (2012, p. 63) list five different types of practice in the context of other publications: Getting the feel, Automating, picking out the hard parts, Improvising, and Doing it for real. The latter is consistent with our concept of teaching. Of course, we recognise that this is a gradual increase in acquiring new knowledge and skills and that the last step is the most comprehensive and difficult. However, in our concept we do not impart to students the professional knowledge of their profession, but the pedagogical competencies that will help them to impart the professional knowledge to their students more effectively. The teachers of vocational educational training must be able to provide clear guidance on how to practice more effectively, such as if an activity needs to be divided into parts, carried out in a time interval with a gap, deliberately slowed down, carried out without visibility, etc. As our students, future teachers, have to acquire professional competence through repetition and practice, they now acquire teaching competence by practising behaviour in specific situations. School problems/problematic situations. (Lucas, Spencer & Claxton 2012). Learning takes place in context by developing professional competencies, focusing on pedagogical competencies applied to professional competencies. The context is essential in vocational education. Most learning takes place twice - at work and in educational institutions. A student

can be taught a skill in one place to apply it widely in another, often in the transition from school to real life. (Lucas, Spencer & Claxton 2012, p. 90)

Didactic staging prepares jobs where social interaction is an essential prerequisite for jobs. Staggering school conflicts or parts of the teaching process (called micro-teaching) can be useful for preparing future teachers. The simulation method "dramatises" the subject where possible and appropriate. Students participate in roles that are appropriate to the nature of the course. Through simulation methods, we emphasise the interrelationship of content and create a sense of the systematic interrelationship of all subjects in the curriculum. Simulation is a very effective way of establishing professional and social skills for future teachers to use in their professional and personal lives. Based on the needs of learners and the evolution of the authentic teaching practice, the project's authors plan to innovate the scenarios created. The concerned educational tool is very sensitive to the achievement of some prerequisites, and failure can eliminate the achievement of the intended educational objective. In this respect, it was mentioned that adequate time was needed to treat teaching and that material support, including the special skills and attitudes needed by teachers, was provided. (Qobilovna, 2023).

In our concept, we often talk about teaching innovation, which is the improvement of the effectiveness of the education process. Implementation of the method requires a thorough methodological and organisational preparation. In the above-mentioned problems, scenarios will be developed according to the educational objectives of the subject and the field of study where the simulation was carried out. This scenario includes, in particular, the expected knowledge and input skills of learners, the output educational competences of students, teaching time, staff and materials support, literature references and the use of didactics, the location of implementation, organisational instructions for teaching learners, input information for "active teachers" (the following: teachers), tasks for the figures (students), recommendations for solutions from the perspective of pedagogy, didactics, social psychology, communication or tactics. (Kucharčíková & Tokarčíková, 2016), (Puri, 2022), (Olimov & Mamurova, 2022)

The scenario includes a description (of the school problem) and role elaboration. It is important to capture the skills that are then actually manifested in the actions of the persons involved (teacher, students, parents) and co-create the atmosphere of the situation. The roles are not developed into full dialogues. However, their development is limited to a description of the main stages of the situation, always from the point of view of each person acting. The themes correspond to the reality and problems occurring in the school environment. The role descriptions of the other participants are unknown. (Leupin, 2016)

The teacher familiarises the learners with the situation and motivates them appropriately. Subsequently, he/she selects volunteers for the roles of actors. The teacher assigns written instructions to the actors, including a description of the person being represented and a detailed role description. The other learners will set the scene, prepare the props and then take the place of the audience. The spectators follow the action and make notes, evaluating in particular - the performance of the actors (verbal and non-verbal communication; methods

used …), the course of the model situation, and the outcome of the situation (achievement of the goal). If not all pupils/students are involved in the different roles, it is necessary to familiarise all present with the context before the actual start of the production. Only then can the production begin. The teacher monitors the situation and intervenes only if there is a real need. If the production loses momentum, the teacher can instruct the students individually on how to play the role or indicate the direction they should take. The activity can be supplemented with audio or video recordings but in compliance with GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) (Puri, 2022).

Once the simulation has started, the teacher observes the action, takes notes and intervenes only in the most necessary cases (e.g. when the learner drops out of the role, when the performance is stuck, when the plot diverts in an undesirable and irrelevant direction).

At the end of the simulation (after approximately ten min.), another model situation with the same or a different scenario will follow, according to the timetable. For the new model situation, learners will switch roles so that as many people as possible are involved in the storyline.

An important step is the evaluation of the performances of each actor in the simulation. The trainer starts a feedback session in which the actors perform first. The actors should self-critically assess their performances. Then, the learners (audience) give their comments. During the performances of the two groups mentioned above, the teacher will only be the discussion moderator. During the discussion, the teacher will guide the learners to the optimal solution of the scene/situation using questions. Finally, the teacher will evaluate the whole activity and reiterate the optimal solution that meets the requirements of pedagogy, didactics, psychology, law, and communication.

3   Research in the Preparation of Future Teachers

In this paper, we present partial outputs of the project, which responds to the current needs of students of the bachelor's programme Teaching Vocational Education and Training and the follow-up master's programme Teaching Vocational Subjects for Secondary Schools. A survey of students in real teaching practice in secondary vocational schools has identified suggestions for curriculum innovation in the programme.

The existing content of the courses is taught not only in the form of a lecture but the method of conversation and discussion of the possibilities of solving specific educational and training problem cases from teaching practice is used. By incorporating simulation teaching, learners actively address the situations they are most likely to encounter in practice and, as the survey revealed, perceive them as problematic.

Forty-nine respondents (N = 49) participated in the study in April 2023. The respondents were the above-mentioned undergraduate or postgraduate students. Since approximately half of the students in the program are currently in a combined program and often already teach in secondary vocational schools, they face specific educational and training problems

they address in their teaching practice. The innovative courses are aimed at developing the competences and skills of the students, future teachers, which they will apply in their practice. Another reason for the introduction of simulation teaching is the greater effectiveness of such teaching in the acquisition of appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes. Pathological phenomena in society (as shown by the Czech School Inspectorate reports) are also manifesting themselves to an increased extent, which teachers have to address in their classes.

The questionnaire asked about two School problems/problematic situations that the respondents encountered and in which role they were (Student, Parent, Teacher, Teaching Assistant, Student in teaching practice at university, or Another role), results in Table 1. The results show that these are overwhelmingly problem situations perceived from the teacher's perspective.

Table 1: Role of respondents in individual problem situations

Role	Problem situations #1	Problem situations #2
Pupil/Student	6	3
Parent	0	1
Teacher	25	21
Teaching Assistant	3	2
Student in teaching practice at a university	13	16
Another role	0	0

Other questions focusing on problem situations were:
- Why do you perceive this situation as problematic?
- Describe how the situation was solved.
- Rate whether the solution was correct.
- Who would you turn to if you did not know how to solve the situation yourself, and why this person?

Respondents described problem situations they encountered. In the analysis, we assigned the following characteristics to the situations: Discipline of pupils/students in the teaching unit (n = 43); communication with parents (n = 7); health of pupils/students (n = 7); management of teaching (n = 5); pupils'/students' behaviour (n = 4); pupils'/students' motivation (n = 4); aggression of a pupil/student towards a pupil/student or a teacher (n = 3); teacher's authority (n = 2); bureaucratic apparatus and out-of-school organisation systems (n = 2); pupils'/students' psychological problems (n = 1); pupils'/students' work in the teaching unit (n = 1). The sums of situations do not agree with the number of respondents ($\sum n \neq N$), as some recalled only one situation.

We were also interested in why they rated the situation as problematic. Most often, respondents were concerned about the health of those involved, were shocked by the

behaviour of the actors in the situation or were not aware of the teacher's handling of the situation.

From the answers to the questions (Describe how the situation was solved; Rate whether the solution was correct; Who would you turn to in case you did not know how to solve the situation yourself and why this person?), it was mostly a correct identification of an inappropriate solution to the situation, however, in other comments the respondents were asked how such a situation should have been solved correctly.

4 Outputs Based on Research

The project aims to incorporate a simulation method into teaching students in the field of vocational education - the so-called model situations from the standard school environment of secondary schools. A timetable of teaching a full-time form of study: 4x3 lessons are devoted to implementing the method of model situations (= 4x3x50 minutes). A timetable of teaching a combined form of study: 1x4 lessons (= 1x4x50 minutes) are devoted to the implementation of the method of model situations.

More problem educational areas/problem situations will be developed, which future teachers will encounter in their teaching practice. We present only three:
1. distraction of pupils/students in teaching (focusing on attention, motivation of students),
2. communication with parents (unpleasant behaviour),
3. dealing with bullying in the classroom - the classroom lesson.

Scenarios for the mentioned educational problem situations were developed as part of the content and methodological preparation for the implementation. The project will include creating teaching material (learning support) on the issue of simulations of various teaching situations. Tables 2, 3 and 4. (Note: Situations are numbered in the following tables according to internal markings.)

Table 2: Scenario of the problem situation 1

SITUATION 1: Discipline in the classroom
The role of the student
Petr is in the 2nd year of secondary vocational school. He enjoys hockey and all kinds of exercise, even during school hours. Following the set rules of behaviour seems to be a superhuman task for him. He cannot, for example, speak only when called upon, sit still and do what the teacher says, not shout at his classmates when he is thinking of something, etc. Sometimes, he shouts at a classmate who does not want to cooperate with him. The teacher calls it swearing. According to Peter, it's not that bad. When he gets angry, his dad says he talks in a completely different way. Communication suggestions for the student: "Why do I have to learn this? Could I watch hockey, my parents are playing now?" He turns to his classmates and encourages them to play the game with him. First, he asks one classmate, then when he is not interested, he turns to another. If they don't want to cooperate with him, he shouts at them in a rude way. "It's not fair of you." "Teacher, let him play with me, do you think what you are telling us is good for anything?" When the teacher calls out one of his classmates, he dehumanises their answer, whether it is correct or not: "They keep reporting and still the answer is not much, I know that too." Or, "We've already said it, so let's go to lunch; I'm tired of it." "He doesn't know, so don't call him out and tell him yourself, teacher."
Role Classmates
His classmates are annoyed by Peter's behaviour; he draws attention to himself, shouts indiscriminately at them and comments loudly when something goes wrong. The classmates do not want to cooperate with Peter; they show it and try to get the teacher's support.
The role of the teacher
You are a beginning teacher teaching a specialised subject. Your colleagues, including an experienced class teacher, complain about Peter's behaviour. The class teacher and his colleagues complain that Peter's behaviour is worsening. Even consulting with parents has not helped. Choose some lesson preparation you have previously worked on and start teaching the class. Try challenging the pupils/students to make the lesson interesting and active.

Table 3: Scenario of the problem situation 2

SITUATION 5: Discussions with parents about the student's progress
The role of the parent 1
You have a child with no educational problems, but he's having trouble with his grades. The teacher must have picked on him, he's unfair. If the teacher has the idea that my child can't do something, it's his problem - he's not teaching well. You go to school, and you talk to the teacher who is complaining about your child. You are **arrogant and in no way admit fault on your child's part, the fault lies with the teacher**.

The role of the parent 2
You have a child with no educational problems, but he's having trouble with his grades. The teacher must have picked on him, he's unfair. If the teacher has the idea that my child can't do something, it's his problem - he's not teaching well. You go to school, and you talk to the teacher who is complaining about your child. You are **calm, but you are not willing to admit that the fault lies with your child. You contradict the teacher and, finally, promise to talk to your child.**
The role of the teacher 1, 2
You are a teacher who has called a student's parents to the school because of a failing grade. In addition, the student has cheated on written work, copied, has no homework, etc. Try to reason with the parents.

Table 4: Scenario of the problem situation 3

SITUATION 8: Problem Parents - Addressing Bullying with the Parents of the Aggressor
The role of parents
Christopher started at the secondary vocational school; from the beginning he was accompanied by behavioural problems. At first impression he seems quiet, but he managed to win over his classmates who then "served" him. He often had conflicts with classmates who did not want to submit to him. He ignored his teachers and behaved in a purely purposeful manner. He was very quick to comment and put down teachers in front of the whole class. Christopher was above average intelligence. As parents, you're in frequent contact with the school. They would come in to complain about various teachers, their attitudes, and practices. Father included the school with various suggestions as to what the school should change to help Christopher thrive better. Teachers agreed that Christopher was smart and handled the curriculum with ease. However, they also have to take into account his completely inappropriate behaviour, which is lowering his grades by at least one grade level. Thanks to a lot of pressure from his parents, Christopher has so far managed to get through to Year 2 "only" with a reprimand from his class teacher. A week ago, the classroom situation escalated. There was an incident in which Kryštof grabbed a classmate's hand and cruelly broke a bone in the wrist of her left hand. Resistance arose not only from their parents, which culminated in a request for Christopher to be transferred to another class, or better yet - to another school. You are Christopher's parents; you are invited to school by the class teacher. You are fundamentally opposed to any solution the teacher proposes: reassignment, discipline, ... you show no regret. You argue: the field of education, which is in another school 50 km away, the intellect of Christopher, the girl definitely caused her own injuries, the school is to blame.
The role of the teacher
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What are you going to do? You invited Christopher's parents to school, you don't feel good about it, but you have to deal with the situation.

Solution options

Assess criminal responsibility. (Youth Responsibility Act)

Consultation with the Police of the Czech Republic.

Talk individually with Christopher about how he would handle the situation now.

Talk to Christopher's parents. (Getting from a position of "the school is fighting with you" to a position of "the school wants to work with you to find a solution to this situation").

Open a discussion with the students in class on the topic of rights violations, aggression.

Recommend family therapy to parents.

Recommend expulsion from school to the principal.

Set up, support long-term cooperation with school counsellor, external psychologist.

Establish an agreement between teacher, parents, school, or other interested parties.

5 Conclusion

The model situations were piloted with third-semester students of the above-mentioned bachelor program. The learners evaluated the teaching method used positively. They found the situations engaging and followed a pre-prepared script during the staging. The feedback, as well as the analysis of the problem solved, was beneficial for the learners. During the feedback, the learners also actively discussed issues that could arise in teaching practice.

The structured staging methods have a precise scenario beforehand. Students are forced to explore the issue in depth and from multiple perspectives. This fact develops critical thinking in students. It is interesting to see and point out the student's own mistakes. The class was conducted in a friendly atmosphere and gave students an insight into the teaching profession. Positive can be seen, especially in the students' statement that they did not think that the teaching profession is so demanding in terms of preparation and communication. We have also achieved learners' activity regarding their choice of problem situations. The authors'

intention to activate the students in the teaching and also to motivate them to participate in the ideas for the scenarios, was successful.

We reiterate that the most important thing is a safe environment where the student can try out different solutions to problems.

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