INTERACTIVE EXERCISE IN TEACHER TRAINING IN RESPECT OF CREATION OF SANE RELATIONS AMONG CHILDREN

Influence of situation on assessment of social features within the exercise conditions

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Abstract: This paper summarises recent experience in interactive exercises that were carried out within the psychological training of elementary school teachers in accordance with the newly conceived approach, as focused to develop sane interactions. This work continues the investigation presented in the previous conferences of the research project “School and health for 21st century”. Reviewed are the nature of model interactions and the group feedback, being substantial factors of the interactive learning in context of solutions of model problem situations, group discussion, and experimenting with own/individual behaviour patterns.

Keywords: Interactive exercise, sane relations, model interaction, group feedback, self-assessment, perception paradigm.

Introduction

The output of our research project is to be a theoretically supported and research-verified modification of the project of the so-called interactive exercises (IE) that have been conceived by us, as of early eighties, as a part of the psychological training of a future educator.

In the course of time we verified different IE variants in the groups of pedagogy and social pedagogy students, in the groups of managers etc.

The techniques, the objective of which is to improve social competence, cultivate social features, or to increase the level of social skills, are in fact based on a simple thesis, which was underlined particularly by professor J. Čap in the Czech

Republic, namely that features of a personality are developed (formed) within activities, particularly in those the fruitfulness of which is conditioned by the given features. At the same time, in his law on personality formation within a joint activity, he has emphasised the influences of emotional climate and called attention to the fact that even otherwise desirable activities and actions complicate and only disturb the positive personality development, where performed within a negative emotional climate.²

The concept of the training techniques is usually derived from a paradigm of a certain psychological school or individual author’s concept, as well as respecting which social/professional area they intervene or which training techniques they prefer.

Our concept has been inspired particularly by the humanistic psychology, underlining the behavioural component of the training as well as situation context.

We keep to several basic sources of inspiration:

Apart from the humanistic psychology classics, it is the teacher training by T. Gordon (T.E.T. – Teacher Effectiveness Training), in particular his concept of interaction and communication with a pupil. The so-called “POT” (Problem – Oriented – Training) by W. Pallasch and H. Reimers accentuates the situational nature of model interactions. From the viewpoint of preparation for the teacher profession, the so-called “PGT” by G. Kase is inspiring. It is a goal-oriented utilisation of psycho-drama in the work with future teachers (Psychodramatisch-Gruppendifenomisches Lehrertraining), again with an elaborate feedback system of (self-)correction. For the structuring of the view of mutual interpersonal ties, inspiring is also the concept of the Ukrainian author, T. S. Jatsenko, who has been developing, on a long-term basis, the variant of training interactions of determined teachers, the so-called ASPO (aktivnaya sotsialno-psikhologitcheskoye obutcheniye).⁵

Exercises establish a facilitating environment for an efficient interactive (or “psycho-social”) learning (cp. Hermochová, S. 1988 p. 7).

Basic conditions of efficiency of the interactive learning:

- supportive climate of the group interactions (facilitation and social buttress),
- high intimacy of the group interactions,
- high intensity and depth of experience,
- reasonable feedback,
- openness,
- interoperation based on co-operation,
- acceptance.

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⁴ (cp. in.: Költze, H. 1990)
Facilitator’s group interactions and interventions establish conditions for a creative individual action on an IE participant who is provided with the group feedback upon respecting his/her autonomy and authenticity. The feedback facilitates the searching (discovering) of individual solution method of MPS, based on the contrast of a similar effort of other members of a task group. Within the interaction man is involved through all components of the mental activity – through cognition, living, and action. Therefore the model interactions (interaction etudes, interactive model situations) are also designed so that an IE participant would really act, be emotionally engaged in the situation, and would duly derive the new cognition from the model action experience.

In a social situation “integration of the cognitive, emotional, and activity learning” occurs. We understand the interactive learning as a special case of the social learning taking place on the interiorization of interactions principle.

The exercises are oriented to the cultivation of the perceptual, communicational, and behavioural skills, however, we lay stress also on the value and knowledge context of activities and on the encounter of social situation, its coping with ((1) problem occurrence, (2) redefining it to a task, (3) resulting solution).

Utilised are first of all the interactive etudes, group solutions of model problem situations, and group discussions oriented to reflection of group events. Etude performance requires putting oneself to the defined situation, selection of a psychologically reasoned strategy of conduct and implementing it within the group conditions, co-operating with other group members. On the group solution of the model situations used is the “overplaying of sequences” of key moments of situations development or overplaying of solution variants, accentuating the putting oneself to the situation protagonists. The group discussion is defined as a common “thinking aloud”, enabling a correction of an individual point of view and problem solution. In the end of a session, the group discussion is determined to the reflection of the events within a group, being focused to the analysis of the session progress and effect.

The intra-group interactions respect principles usual for the model solutions of problems in training groups, namely the:

a) “Here and now” principle,

b) Predicate personification principle,

c) Accentuating of the “language of feelings” principle,

d) Activity principle,

e) Intimacy atmosphere principle,

f) Strict confidentiality principle.

Every participant has the “stop right”, i.e. not to participate, or to interrupt any activity within the exercise without stating any reason. This concerns even processing of running feedback information (questionnaires, tests, inquiries, etc.).

As reported earlier, we have been gradually changing the “IE” according to experience and needs of the psychological preparation of students. With respect to the involvement in the “School and health for 21st century” project, we have been orienting

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the “IE” more markedly towards the problem of sane relations. We wish to contribute
to the future teacher’s ability to participate in the cultivation of relations among pupils
within the interactive networks of the school social environment.

However, this does not mean a claimed re-orienting of contents or the use of new
marks for old procedures. Whereas formerly, we laid higher stress on the interactive cer-
tainty and functional aspects of the interactions, in fact, we can formulate the objectives
of the actual concept of the “IC” as follows:

- Recognition of interactive stereotypes and techniques themselves as focused to
  the skill of accepting and providing feedback;
- Contrast of habitual strategies of social behaviour with others (more efficient and
  alternative) options of interaction and communication;
- Awareness of personal contribution to relations in member groups;
- Acquiring of basic information on interactions and methods of their cultivation
  and self-development in the context of individual and group value orientation;
- Starting the motivation to the creation of sane interpersonal relations in the field
  of both professional and personal life.

In this study we wish to focus particularly to the problem of the feedback (FB) as
a phenomenon derived from the group interactions and, at the same time, a factor, which
types the nature of other interactions to great extent.

The FB processes figure in several layers. As a mechanism facilitating and regu-
lating intra-group interactions and as a mechanism inducing and aligning changes on
the intrapersonal level.

Relations in a certain group establish a relatively closed (more exactly: limited)
unit – system. This system has its structural and dynamic sides.

In optimum case, the system is integrated, i.e. internally structuralised (differenti-
tated) and, at the same time, organised (hierarchized). Hierarchized are both processes
(actions, activities, co-ordinations) and even positions of individual actors (constella-
tion) and their mutual relations.

As every system consisting of elements that are distinct, different, even con-
trary as for their (1) features, (2) motives, and even (3) objectives, or (4) methods
of asserting them, it “tries” to avoid all that may result in its disintegration. As
a rule, it tends to a certain optimum level of “tuning” of interactions. An example
may be the Piagetian equilibrium at level of psyche or homoeostasis processes at
level of organism. Naturally, this is possible only where necessary FB mechanisms
function.

At the same time, every system is a product of its own self-regulation and ex-
ternal regulation (both intentional and non-intentional). Thus, its dynamics is expressed
by the tendency towards a certain harmony or at least “avoiding” disharmony. This tend-
ency is all the more marked, all the more contradictory are the relations among the
unit’s elements or substructures.

7 ŘEZAČ, J.: První zkušenosti z interakčních cvičení v rámci profesionálních praktik na PdF MU. Pedagog-
ická orientace, 1991, 2, pp. 79–82.
8 For more details, see: ŘEZAČ, J. K problému adaptace na sociální prostředí. In.: Střelec, S. ed. Studie
To hold out in this system or to intervene it in a pedagogic manner (regulate, control, modify it) first of all assumes to be able to well look around this social landscape and to see, which “data” may be utilised for orientation in it, which are yet to be acquired and what data an individual is to provide others about him and about environment so as to pace relatively safe though this landscape together with them in a relatively non-conflicting manner.

As used for years in psychology and sociology to disclose events in the micro- and macro-social context, the traditional term environment (social, material, physical, organisational, etc.) has not been adequate any more. Constructs have appeared related to the same reality, but accentuating other aspects of mutuality of an individual and its social world.

Understanding the interaction as a network accentuates the strength of ties (contacts), their density, homogeneity, and their nature or valence – for example mutual supportive relations (supportive network) etc.

The term social situation views interactions as an action, event, which takes place in a certain environment, has its actors, its process in time and is “about something”. The basic situation parameters are space, time, content. The situation paradigm underlines the intentional acting of an actor. As early as J. Hlavsa and M. Langová took for determining, within the situation, the “subject’s intervening activity” by means of “diverse instruments” (1982, p. 238).

The understanding of the interactions as a social situation, as the “space, in which life takes place, things, relations, concrete qualities are co-created” as a “process created by all who are present, including conditions and circumstances of their human communication” seems to be optimum starting point for the analysis of interpersonal relations.

However, we should not leave out the basic philosophical viewpoint either, which consistently distinguishes conditions, causes, substance, and the phenomenon side of man’s meeting people and products of their participation.

In fact, we can thus say that the social interaction may be understood as a system, which features the following parameters:

- Level of integration of intra-group interactions,
- Hierarchic stage of interactions, actions, and also position of actors,
- Harmony (disharmony) – i.e. “equilibrium” of individual system components relation,
- Regulation level (and the self-regulation ability).

The self-regulation ability depends on the quality of the FB systems. And, let us add on, we do not grasp this system only as “interaction of interactions”, as “well interconnected network of relations” that function well (or unsound). A key part of this system is the values that regulate the direction of a system to its objective and compare methods of its reaching.

9 What the situation “is about” is determined particularly by the so-called dominant value of the situation. M. Řezníček presents that the “dominant value is represented by the value, around which action is unwound, thus the value that structures, characterizes the action” and determines basic relations between all elements of the situation (Řezníček, M. 1994. p. 27).

10 ibid.
The problem

Being one of the basic IE techniques, the method of playing interactive etudes teaches an individual:

- Co-operation on seeking optimum strategy of social behaviour for certain social situation,
- To relate general principles of solution of a certain situation to its individual predispositions and personality particularities,
- To tune up its behaviour and conduct so that it would really correspond to its intention and would fulfil the sense of the action).

The basic condition of the learning efficiency is a reasonable perception and interpretation of situation influences. In the model interactions confrontation of individual problem concept occurs. Each actor of the exercise action bears, from his previous history, habitual methods of perception and interpretation of persons, their mutual relations and events; He has his individual perception paradigm.

We define them as follows: (1) Subjective, (2) relatively compact (3) method of perception and (4) interpretation of the social reality (5) spontaneously adopted in the course of socialisation, (6) cultivated by the intentional learning and self-education (self-regulation), bound to objects and relations between them. This way grasped perception paradigm relates also to the perception of oneself, to the relation to oneself and even to other people.\(^\text{11}\) On the basis of present experience with IE we may say it manifests:

Immediately:
- In the ways (style) of evaluation of the social reality,
- In the perception schemes bound to persons, relations, situations, “problems”, events,
- In the pre-attitude to a certain social reality (*appetence – aversion; willingness – deprecation; openness – closeness;* etc.);

Implicitly:
- In the ways of solving the social situations,
- In the interactive style (attitude),
- In the preference of certain ways of social behaviour.

In the model exercise interactions and in the group discussion the point is that necessary data from the external FB would be available to the actor. So as he could use such FB information, be able to receive them undistorted and evaluate (interpret) them correctly.

\(^\text{11}\) Close terms are: perception scheme; framing; relation frame, etc.
A participant of the exercise shall learn:

Upon the FB immediately after the etude
- To accept the FB information (especially when conflicting his actual view influenced by his situation experience),
- To confront the group FB with own image of the current output and possible situation influences intervening the output.

On the analytical discussion at the conclusion of the session
- To detect consequences of own perception stereotypes and interpretation style in a possible distortion of subjective image of the output and situation,
- To think of the quality of data, which he himself provides to others,
- To detect internal and external factors intervening the process of transaction of the FB data.

A high number of intervening variables enter in the current self-assessment. From the internal ones it is first of all the present level of self-evaluation, interactive (self-)reliance, the skill of cultivated (structured) self-observation and self-assessment.

The term self-assessment denotes an action, activity, process, while the self-judgement rather its result: internal, mental representation of this action’s result. In the context of the interactive exercises it is a certain presently outlined image of oneself, which is as if inserted into a memory album of other images from other times and other environments. However, such album belongs to someone who, due to all of these images, views himself somehow and takes himself for somebody (so-called situation self-concept). At the same time, he finalises his image of himself, which continually exceeds to future – i.e. his relatively stable and relatively clear self-concept (clarity of self-concept).

Their role play here not only content data (verbal), but also accompanying non-verbal data that bear their meaning and need not be sensitized or reflected as for situation. But they can return retroactively in sketching in the valence of experiences and valuating judgements and manifest themselves in changes of the so-called interpersonal sensitivity.12 The self-assessment may also be intervened by the perception defence. The play is also joined by actions concisely named “naive explanation”, i.e. perception/attribution mechanisms. They acquire special significance on interpreting efficiency of subjectively significant activities and on coping with situations of success and failure. Most often they manifest as offensive or defensive attribution (see the synoptic table).

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<th>„Offensive attribution“</th>
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impulse). Attention is paid separately to the specified mechanisms on a common analysis of methods of providing the FB on the interactive etudes.

When applying the interactive etudes, first of all a group FB followed immediately after the etude. Each of the participants provided the FB information on what, according to his experience, complicated, disturbed etc. binding of a contact (thus the performance in the etude was not in question, but the FB information on what took place inside the assessing person in the course of the action). Then – accordingly – what pleasurable and sthenic experience brought it the binding of a contact in the model situation, and what the binding of a contact facilitated. After the confrontation of an etude protagonist’s experience and the group FB, a video feedback (VFB) usually followed as a kind of “objectification” of the group FB.

Due to the preference of the FB by the IE participants, a marked withdrawal of the VFB has been recognized in the recent years. About five six years ago it was good enough just to bring a video camera and as much as obverse reactions occurred (“...everyone records us..., ...cameras everywhere all the time...”). A relatively simple availability of the video technology and sometimes even its indiscrete utilisation within education resulted in the fact we have nearly given up the VFB and we have been using it only upon request of the IE participants (we offer its optional use). Therefore we sought for other possible FB procedures that would facilitate the cultivation of the look in and such a nature of interpretation of own performance in the exercise model situations that would enable the confrontation of the look-ins even from a time distance. We started to more utilize the assessment scales and social feature and sign inventories, summarising results of whose were obtained by every IE participant in a graphic form, whereas the anonymity of assessors was maintained. The graphic output provided information on what features he/she was attributed by other group members, how they agree or differ in the look-in to his/her social features and signs in an interactive etude etc. These data he/she could then think over, seen from the time distance, and to utilize them both to a possible correction of the situation behaviour within the group and to the look-in to himself/herself.

The interactive exercises are a part of the psychological preparation of a future teacher, which means that, unlike sessions with managers or persons spontaneously interested in the training, we can specifically utilize the knowledge from the basic psychological disciplines, particularly of the personality psychology and social psychology. By the way, it is symptomatic that this inter-tie must “get started”. Students mostly lack the ability to automatically utilize the knowledge in psychology for the interpretation of actions inside a group and they do not project them into their self-reflection in a more significant way. In an unplanned manner, the exercises thus also become an impulse for the interconnection of knowledge with action, with a concrete, though model, social situation.

The investigation itself

The study has processed current results of five IE groups (groups where programme was not maintained as a standard were not included) from 61 participants (participants with incomplete data were not included).

Techniques: Mutual assessment of “everyone by everyone”, self-assessment (inventory: a scale); following structured feedback.
Procedure:

1. Self-assessment and estimation of the (group) assessment (“how other people possibly perceive and assess me...”) (inventory: 9-grade scale; assessed features: equanimity, concentration, broadmindedness, optimism, creativity, determination, attractiveness, naturalness, consistency, social maturity, intellect, form, self-reliance);
2. Assessment of other person as an IE partner (inventory: 9-grade scale);
3. Assessment of other person after its performance (in the interactive etude), prior to the performance itself (inventory: 9-grade scale);
4. Following FB (verbal), after the etude;
5. Self-reflection after the etude;

Method: Quantitative and qualitative analysis of assessments and of the assessment judgements on the individual and group feedbacks.

Results

Self-assessment and estimation of group assessment

In the above specified features the IE participants assess themselves mostly restrainedly. The relatively most favourable assessment concerns the social maturity (7.15 p.) and intellect (7.13 p.); then, with minimum differences, follow the optimism, form, consistency, naturalness, equanimity, concentration, within the interval 6.9 to 6.2 points. The least positive view of the investigated persons (IP) concerned the features broadmindedness, self-reliance, determination (for overview, see Fig. 1).

The sensitivity in the self-assessment of features is markedly different with individual IPs. Nearly one third of the IPs assess their features in a rather differentiated manner (var. 4.82 to 2.5), however, most of them assign very close scale values to the assessed features.

A positive feature of the IE is that the assessment and self-assessment gradually differentiates and current results indicate that the perception sensitivity increases due to the reflected assessment.

The estimate of the group assessment is rather slightly pessimistic. Most of the IPs expect, in most assessed features, rather a less positive evaluation. The most marked
difference is as for the features: *consistency* (-2.6 p.), *intellect* (-1.5 p.), *social attractiveness* (-1.1 p.), *social maturity* (-0.9 p.), and *creativity* (-0.9 p.).

Rather optimistic was the estimate only for the *broadmindedness* (+1.4 p.). Relatively exact was the group assessment of the *equanimity, naturalness, interactive self-reliance* (0.1 p.), for summarising results, see Fig. 2.

**Assessment in the context of performance in the interactive etude**

An interesting comparison is offered by the assessment of a partner immediately before and after the etude. We hereby note that, in this situation, the IE participants are led to a detail, structured observation (the situation is defined as a perception exercise the reason of which is to detect as many details of the social behaviour as possible); thereto corresponds a verbal FB, which is usually differentiated, rather detail, and quite critical.

![Figure 2 Estimate of the group assessment (n = 61)](image1)

![Figure 3 Comparison of the protagonist’s assessment before and after the etude (IE model personality)](image2)
If we use, for the following assessment, the inventory of features, for which self-assessment had already been performed earlier, the result is markedly more positive than the current verbal FB. As clearly visible in Fig. 3, which represents total results (profile of the IE “modal personality”), after the interactive etude performance such features receive a more positive evaluation as the concentration (even by the highest scale rate) (+2.1 p.), attractiveness (+1.8 p.), and naturalness (+1.9 p.). However, it is just the concentration and natural style that feature most “reservations” on the verbal FB following immediately after the etude. Only the self-reliance is clearly perceived in a more critical manner.

![Figure 4 Distribution of the difference between self-evaluation and expected evaluation](image)

If we have a look at the distribution of the differences between the self-assessment and the estimation of the group assessment for individual assessed features (see the ratio Fig. 4), it is clear at first sight that nearly all features are perceived in a relatively differentiated manner.

![Figure 5 Distribution of the difference before and after the performance of the interactive etudes](image)
The distribution of differences between the assessment before and after the interactive etude clearly indicates a “more global” and less critical perception of partner’s social features. An actual performance is assessed within a more limited scale of details (see the ratio Fig. 5).

First experience indicates that, after the etude, the assessment could feature empathy more markedly on the basis of a felt belonging (“...it will be me standing there in a moment...”). A certain role is seemingly plaid by the anticipation of own future performance. On the group FB, in respect of a person waiting for its own performance, a frequency of assessment judgements is increasing related indirectly or directly to such person. The FB provided to the etude protagonist often merges into considerations how the assessor will cope with the same situation in a moment. The analysis of statements related to oneself, during the FB, indicates that they prevailingly express rather a negative anticipation of own performance.

It seems that the following verbal FB is perceived, within given situation, as a support, in particular on two levels: (a) as an assistance on the tuning of a performance on the seeking of an optimum variant of the social behaviour strategy; (b) as a partner support increasing the reliance in action. Thus the verbal FB is related more to an actual situation and actual performance.

It would be necessary to more sensitively differentiate the assessment of the situation manifestations of the interactive etude protagonist (i.e. of special features of an actual social behaviour) from the assessment of relatively durable features and characters of a personality.

**Conclusions:**

1. The self-assessment of the IE participants seem to be reasonable, relatively differentiated;
2. in the estimation of the group assessment prevails rather a negative anticipation;
3. a relative adequate estimate relates to the assessment of the features: equanimity, self-reliance, naturalness, optimism;
4. a rough estimate concerns the expected group assessment of the features: consistency (-), social maturity (-), intellect (-), attractiveness (-), creativity (-), broadmindedness (+);
5. the assessment of the social features of a partner, not related to the performance, is more differentiated, more sensitive, shifted towards more strict assessment judgements;
6. the assessment immediately after the performance of another person, and before own performance, is less differentiated, shifted towards more positive assessment views;
7. the assessment of partners in the course of coordination is more bound to situation, rather than to initial assessment of own personality, and the original view of a partner is nearly not changed;
8. by the end of the IE (after half a year) the participants of the exercise more precisely differentiate the assessment of situation manifestations in the behaviour and of relatively stable features and personality characters.
INTERAKČNÍ CVIČENÍ V PŘÍPRAVĚ UČITELE NA UTVÁŘENÍ ZDRAVÝCH VZTAHŮ MEZI DĚTMI

Abstrakt: Příspěvek shrnuje aktuální zkušenosti s interakčními cvičeními, která proběhla v rámci psychologické přípravy učitelů 1. stupně ZŠ podle nově koncipovaného pojetí se zaměřením na utváření zdravých interakcí. Práce navazuje na šetření prezentovaná na předcházejících konferencích výzkumného záměru „Škola a zdraví pro 21. století“. Referuje o povaze modelových interakcí a skupinové zpětné vazbě jako podstatných faktorech interakčního učení v kontextu řešení modelových problémových situací, skupinové diskuse a experimentace se vzorcem vlastního chování.

Klíčová slova: interakční cvičení, zdravé vztahy, modelové interakce, skupinová zpětná vazba, sebeposuzování, percepční paradigma.