ACTIVATING TECHNIQUES IN THE TEACHER´S PSYCHOLOGICAL PREPARATION

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Abstract: The present paper concentrates on the construction of training techniques in the context of the needs for social competence development, subjectively expressed by pedagogues of various types of school. It monitors required changes of social skills as reflected in teachers´ subjective assessments related to themselves, their colleagues and the conditions of the teaching profession. The respodents in my sample also felt some problems in their communication with their superiors*, in* leading dialogues, *commnication with* problem idividuals *or in* problem situations *(conditions). Self-reflection and self-control in professional situations should also be enhanced; statements that called for* „starting self-development" *appeared as well, although they did not specify whether the* „self-development" *concerned one´s personality or one´s professional role.*

Keywords: training, interactive exercises, activating techniques, reflection on social skills and features

Introduction

Within the range of the research project ´School and health for the 21st century´ I direct my attention to the construction of a variant of interactive training, founded theoretically and specified by the needs of teaching practice, the so-called *interactive exercises*. In order to create the conception of the exercises and their continual updating, it is necessary to follow: 1) the current situation in the supply and level of the activating and training techniques at the teachers´ disposal, 2) the changing needs of pedagogical practice subject to the changes of syllabuses and cardinal pedagogical documents, and 3) the requirements of practising experts (teachers, instructors, social workers etc).

We have lately been experiencing a certain boom of training techniques. It is an understandable response to the previous preference of knowledge courses and training that rather concerned administrative and legal aspects of pedagogical work. This also brings some difficulties. Although various university departments provide their students

with coherent trainings, they mostly only give them *information* on training techniques. This is because the curricula are crammed with traditional disciplines, leaving little space to seminars or tutorials requiring work in small social groups (12 – 15 participants).

Training techniques should in their nature address people who subjectively feel the necessity for their self-development. In other words, there should be a wider offer enabling choice for various groups of students. Otherwise the leader of the training is to a certain degree forced to construct a kind of ready-made exercises ´catering for the majority´. Some participants in the training then logically feel that the training is *superficial* where he or she feels the need for a deeper intervention, that it is directed towards goals he or she has reached, or by means and methods he or she has mastered. These students often find out that such seminars do not bring any benefit to them, since they do not develop their creativity.

The very method characteristic of training techniques may not be suitable for every student either. If the training group includes students whose problem is an elementary interactive self-confidence as well as those who rather seek sophisticated ways of assertiveness or solution of interactive problems, the leader of the group can to a certain degree use this situation for cultivating co-operative interactions, but it would be more suitable if the two types of students worked in groups homogeneous from the suggested point of view.

The conception of interactive exercises was discussed comprehensively in my previous works[1] (including partial specifications of the exercises)[2] and therefore I will only briefly refer to the starting points and the used techniques, in order to explain the context of the test the results of which I am going to present here.

The starting points

Why interactive training?

The ´undesirable´ stereotypes (attitudes, habits, unsuitable perception schemes, ineffective styles of activities, unsuitable strategies of relations) are reflected and revised here; professional success is more and more markedly dependent on not only professional knowledge but also social competence, and the training techniques make it possible to simulate a majority of social situations from the fields of management, leading, care, education etc; the techniques based on group fellowship help to soften the consequences of the civilizational cultural development, especially the considerable alienation and a certain absence of informal interactions.

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[1] ŘEZÁČ, J.: První zkušenosti z interakčních cvičení v rámci profesionálních praktik na PdF MU. Pedagogická orientace, 1991, 2, 79-82.
 ŘEZÁČ, J. Interactive Excersies and Their Use in the Psychological Preparation for Profession. Využití interakčních cvičení v psychologické přípravě na profesi. XXVI. International Colloquium an the Management of Educational Process. University of Defence Faculty of Economics and Management. Brno 2008. CD ISBN 978-80-7231-511-6.
[2] ŘEZÁČ, J.: Od sebeotevření k sebereflexi. Sb.: Novinky v pedagogické a školní psychologii 97. Zlín 1998., s.64-68. 9
ŘEZÁČ, J.: Zpětná vazba jako aktivizující a facilitující faktor interakčního učení. In.: kolektiv.: Učitel,vyučování, situace. Brno, Paido 1994. ŘEZÁČ, J.: K problému rozvíjení sebereflektivní kompetence v rámci interakčních cvičení. Pedagogická orientace 1997, 4, s.12-18, ISSN 1211-4669

- The main (key) ideas of interactive exercises predominantly relating to the interactive component could be briefly formulated as follows:
- We can exert a really effective influence on somebody only ´together with him or her´ (**leading is not controlling**),
- education and upbringing will only be effective to the degree to which they will be **life itself, not only preparation for life** …,
- revealing is easier when done together (**let us discover things together – and study individually**),
- ideas are like children: we always have them with somebody … (**group discussion cultivates not only thought but also relations,**or **from individualism to individuality**),
- why do we want what we want? (**revealing the deeper layers of motivation and new motives -** *intransit motivation – Bruner*),
- life is an individual self-realization in the environment made by other people who strive for the same …,
- there will be no skill without activity, and no social experience without actually experienced relations …

Interactive training is directed to the cultivation of the following qualities:
A) the skill to initiate, continue, deepen and influence human relations; to affect other people, to enforce one´s interests and to exercise one´s influence without impairing other people´s activities and personality autonomy;
B) social smartness, ie the ability to pursue and develop a meaningful interaction adequate to the social situation as well as the participant´s needs and interests;
C) the ability to create plans, tactics and strategies of social action;
D) the ability to realize (to initiate and manage) social activities;
E) the ability to behave and act so that all the expression components are in harmony, and the individual´s action is clear for the partners (ie it is congruent and authentic);
F) the ability to perceive one´s own interactive style in the context of its possible consequences in pedagogical practice.

The participant of the exercise learns:
- *to recognize* correctly the outer *expectations* following from the situation,
- to choose correctly the *tactics* and *strategy* adequate to the situational **challenge,**
- *to mobilize oneself to performance* (motivation and condition),
- *to respond* to the situational challenge in an adequate way (so that one´s social behaviour is adequate (to the activity) as well as *harmonic,consistent* and *congruent*).

The participants in the exercise are learning to identify (and to appreciate properly) the key determinants of personality changes, especially:

the protagonists´ attitude styles (the dimensions of the interactive style have been derived from the experience of training groups and are formulated bipolarly (*direct – manipulative, creative – rigid, integrating – disintegrating, directive – indirective*),

the climate of intragroup interactions (it is assessed on the basis of the following polar characteristics: *freedom of speech – conformity, support – impediment to assertiveness, freedom* or *restriction* in mutual relations, *acceptance – rejection* of individual expression or activities, *empathy – social coldness, trust – distrust, affiliation – hostility*).

The planning and realization of the trainings (or individual techniques), aimed at the given principles, are easier if the author has a grasp of what changes in which fields of social life and personality qualities are preferred by the potential participants in the training sessions.

Research

The object of the research

The goal of the research is to find out the *frequency*, subjectively evaluated *quality* and *assets* of the training techniques studied within teachers´ further education during pedagogical practice, and to get acquainted with declarations about further needs for self-education in the field of training techniques.

The method

A simple structured questionnaire was used for obtaining the basic data; it also enabled the tested persons to supplement the answers to open questions with commentaries, notes or illustrations of problems from practice.

The sample

The research sample consisted of 166 teachers of various types and grade levels of school.

The results

The offer of training and activating techniques during lifelong education seems to be quite considerable: 54.8 % of the respondents have during their teaching practice gone through at least one active training of some kind. Nearly all the respondents have during their practice taken part in a number of (mostly passive) instructive sessions and courses (2–3 times a year on average). About one fifth of them were courses including or exclusively based on activating techniques.

They were trainings directed above all towards:
- communication
- assertiveness
- solution of conflict or problem situations
- management (time management, direction, leading)
- transactive analysis
- other business (other courses and workshops with special goals)

The subjective evaluation of the assets and quality of the courses is more down-to earth: only 27.7 % of the respondents consider the courses that they have completed as qua-

lity ones and beneficial for their practice. The detailed analysis of the accompanying notes and commentaries seems to show that the rather sceptical result is a bit distorted by the fact that the trainings always cater for the whole collective of a workplace and do not respect the individual needs of the participants. Therefore the courses perceived and evaluated as not really positive also include some which were given the label *'fair quality'* courses by a respondent but did not appeal to him or her because they tried to change the skills, qualities or features considered then by him or her as *'not important or necessary'*, or they were held at the time when his or her preferential engagement was needed somewhere else (topical problems at work, in the family,critical life situations etc). An interesting finding is also the fact that some teachers perceive the training courses with a pejorative touch due to the direct or indirect 'experience' of the misuse of psychology in everyday life (*'... the current society is flooded with the offer of enhancing forms of social skills. The victims manipulated at various shopping actions could tell us how they were unable to face the argumentation of trained sellers… all those who have devoted their time to vital problems can only watch how they are walked over by people of absolutely no character who have gone through a specific schooling…'* Tested Person (TP) No 88, female, 54).

The following CHART (1) gives a survey of the most frequent fields where the respondents feel a need for a relatively great positive change:[3]

Fig. 1. The subjectively perceived need for changes in social skills
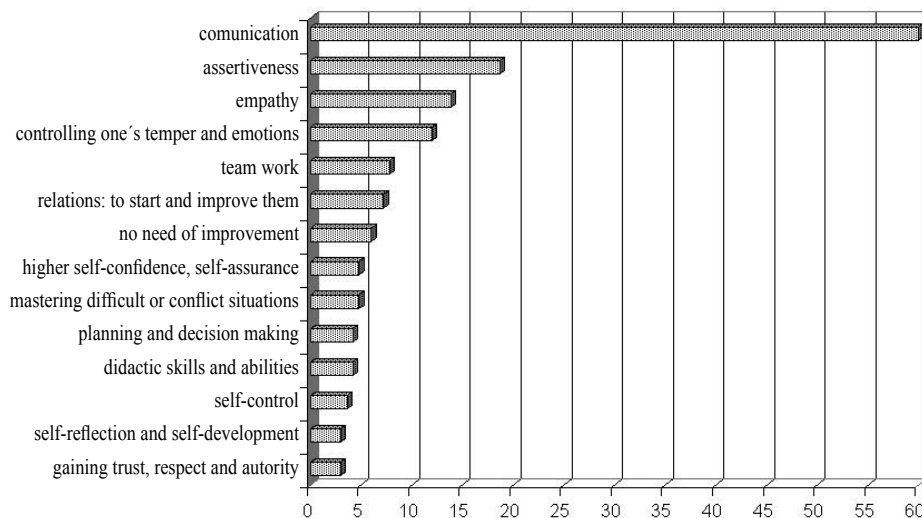
(the figures express the percentages of the frequency of the given categories in the tested sample)

In the field of **communication** the most frequent answer was either the general *'need for the improvement of one's communicative skills'*, but also the more concrete *'improvement of the skill at communicating with a group* (team) or *within a certain group'*, im-

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[3] The chart shows the percentage of respondents giving particular skills in which they would like to improve. The total number of the fields given was 108.

proving or obtaining the ability to listen, to reach a more perfect way of *expressing oneself*, to improve the skill at *communicating with young people* (or pupils). Furthermore, the participants want to improve *non-verbal communication* and to learn *effective communication*.[4] The respondents in my sample also felt some problems in their *communication with their superiors,* in *leading dialogues*, communication with *problem individuals* or in *problem situations* (conditions) etc. There also appeared a need to improve the *expression of criticism* or *rhetoric skills* and ´*to improve voice as a means of interaction and detection*´. The need to improve the parameters of voice in regard to the demands of profession has been signalized in some other studies (eg Frostová, J. 2007); the same author is also working out a system of voice condition exercises, which could, among others, be useful for the participants in the interactive exercises focused on communication. Appreciating voice parameters and care of voice as a working tool has led me to the intention of enriching the wider conception of interactive exercises with exercises improving voice and speech cultivation.[5]

Controlling one´s temper and emotions included especially: the need *to control one´s impatience, rashness* and *recklessness* in behaviour and action, and *to control emotions in difficult situations* and the teacher´s working conditions.

In the field of **team** work the respondents felt a need to improve the *team management* and *leadership of people*, to initiate and support *co-operation* and to establish a creative and pleasant *atmosphere* in work groups.

Emphasis was also laid on the improvement of one´s *self-confidence, self-assurance* and *self-evaluation* in the context of *the ability to perceive oneself correctly* and *to cultivate the self-evaluation* in one´s socio-professional role.

Human relations also needed various changes. The respondents signalized a need to improve *professional* and *non-professional relations*. They felt a certain handicap in the field of the establishment and development of professional relations. The most frequent problems concerned good relations with the pupils´ *parents*, as well as *pupils* themselves. The most frequent reported problem in the non-professional field was starting relations with ´*new people*´.

Self-reflection and self-control in professional situations should also be enhanced; statements that called for ´*starting self-development*´ appeared as well, although they did not specify whether the ´*self-development*´ concerned one´s personality or one´s professional role. This ´*start*´ is, interestingly, mostly expected from the outside.

As can be seen in CHART 1, a bit more than 6 % of the respondents either reported directly that they did not feel any need to change themselves in any significant way, or they did not answer the question at all (´*… I´m not aware that I would need to be more perfect in my profession or personal life. I´m trying to adapt to the given situation in the best possible way and to act so that in the end there is no conflict but mutual understanding and tolerance on both sides …*´ TP No 56, female, 33 years).

The illustrative information also brought answers to questions connected with the environment and people in the professional field.

A certain signal can be seen in the fact that the number of statements concerning this field was slightly higher than that concerning changes related to oneself (the absolu-

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[4] The terms are presented here as they were formulated by the respondents.
[5] Frostová, J., Řezáč, J. *Projekce zpěvnosti do profesní komunikace* /The projection of ´singing tendencies´ into professional communication/ (forthcoming).

te numbers were 108 : 132). The statements were less differentiated and related to fewer partial fields than changes needed in relation to one´s own Ego. Expectations regarding social features were more numerous in them than those regarding skills and abilities.

The statements quite often expressed relatively general and indirect (proclamative) evaluations suggesting disappointment about the changes in the teacher´s role and status (eg: *´I remember the times when the teacher was an example to pupils at school, in all respects if possible. This demand would be laughable today ...´* TP No 88, female, 54 years) or about the atmosphere at the workplace (*´... I often feel that my colleagues do not sufficiently understand human relations and are not loyal to the employer. Many of them have problems with maintaining good interpersonal contacts at the workplace ...´* TP No 164, male, 44 years).

Fig 2. The subjectively perceived need for changes in the colleagues´ social skills and features
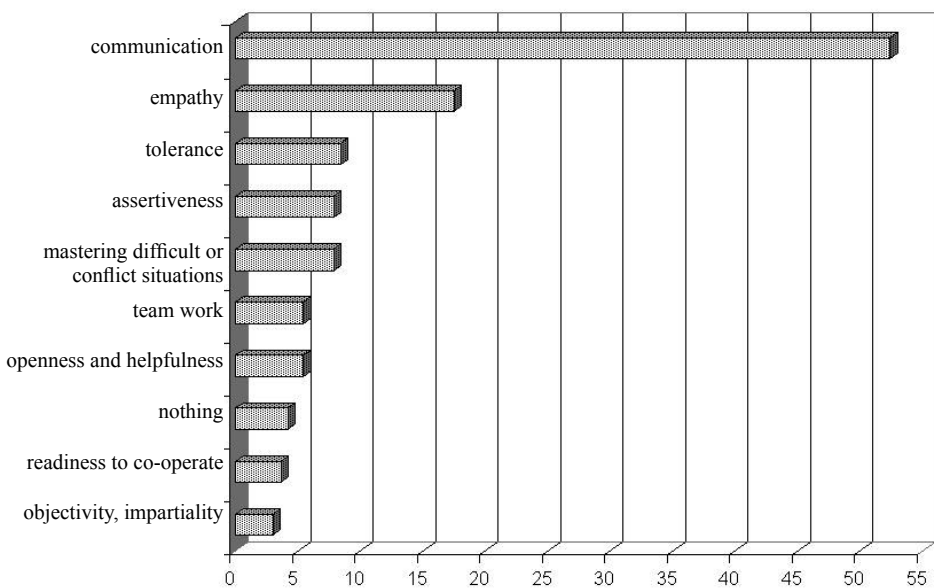
(the figures express the percentages of the frequency of the given categories in the tested sample)

The most needed skill is **communication** again (almost 55 %, see CHART 2). The concrete assessments are very similar to the subjectively perceived needs for self-correction. The most frequently expected change (in colleagues) is better listening to others and, as a general skill, a more effective and skilful communication. Open communication[6] is expected, as well as the art of discussion, a well-founded, quality argumentation, communicativeness (as a feature of the character), the art of expressing the real object of communication, acceptance of criticism, a better communication with one´s subordinates

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[6] The terms are again presented here as they were formulated by the respondents.

(respecting them as partners), effective communication, cultivated and adequate expression, and work with voice corresponding to the pedagogue´s erudition.

Colleague-related expectations also noticeably concern the level of management and leading people. The missing qualities include the following: readiness to co-operate, authentic (not ´self-serving´) quality observance of basic ethic rules in interpersonal relations,observance of norms and working orders, as well as moral norms (responsibility, respectability, reliability etc), co-operation, helpfulness, openness, impartiality, objectivity, willingness to help (social support) etc. The view of the need for change in colleagues (fellow workers, superiors, subordinates) is rather focused on social features than skills and abilities.

The analysis of the respondents´ accompanying commentaries suggests that human relations in teaching staffs are aggravating (´... *some colleagues are not trying to solve problems, leave working activities unnoticed, relying on an automatic solution of the problems; some of them are ´wet blankets´ ... assessing our collective as a whole, I feel that we are not a well co-ordinated team, because everybody wants something else and we are not able to agree on anything; rivalry and envy prevail ...´* TP No 156, female,35 years, a passage). The commentaries often contain complaints about changes in pupils´ behaviour and their attitudes to studying and to each other (´ … *it is not only aggression that increases steeply, and i t is not easy to master all situations with a smile on one´s lips and bitterness in a corner of one´s mind ...´* TP No 161, male, 28 years).

While here the assessments mostly relate to the features and qualities of the partners and teams, the self-assessment emphasizes skills or partial competence.

About one third (36 %) of the TPs feel the same need for positive changes of social skills and features in themselves and their colleagues,

34 % of the TPs feel a greater need for positive changes of social skills and features in their colleagues or in the environment (the climate of the school, its organization, the projection of the wider social environment),

30 % feel a more marked need for positive changes of social skills and features in themselves than in their colleagues.

The results of the probe suggest:

- an increasing interest in training techniques, but simultaneously some reservations about their content and the ways of their realization,
- in regard to the content and orientation of the training, the undoubtedly most desirable skills to be trained are communication, cultivation of interactive skills (leading and management, improvement of human relations and of the climate of intragroup interactions); understanding – empathy – social support and an adequate assertiveness in professional interactions,
- slightly higher demands for the colleagues to change than for oneself with the focus on social features,
- an indirect appeal for a change of the conditions of educational interactions (a better school climate and school management, value transformations of the society and the family: against aggression and arrogance in children, some parents´ unwillingness to co-operate etc).

Practical conclusions

- It is necessary to direct the training in the future teachers´ psychological preparation towards:
- Self-reflection and self-regulation (self-education)
- Perception and self-perception (adequate self-assessment)
- In communication towards
    - provision of an adequate and effective feedback
    - argumentation and critical thinking
    - carrying on dialogue and constructive discussion
    - authentic and congruent self-presentation
- In social behaviour towards
    - co-operation and team co-ordination
    - creating positive climate and providing social support
    - social behaviour strategy in the context of concrete social situations

AKTIVIZUJÍCÍ TECHNIKY V PSYCHOLOGICKÉ PŘÍPRAVĚ UČITELE

Abstrakt: Příspěvek je orientován na konstrukci výcvikových technik v kontextu subjektivně vyjadřovaných potřeb rozvoje sociální kompetence pedagogů různých typů škol. Sleduje potřeby změn sociálních dovedností, jak se odrážejí v subjektivních hodnotících soudech učitelů ve vztahu k sobě, kolegům a podmínkám pedagogické práce. Respodenti signalizují potřebu zdokonalit *vztahy* jak v *profesní*, tak *mimoprofesní* oblasti. Určitý hendikep pociťují v oblasti navazování a rozvíjení profesních vztahů. Výrazněji se ještě objevovala potřeba zdokonalení či zlepšení sebereflexe a sebeovládání v profesních situacích a objevovaly se i výroky volající po *„nastartování rozvoje"*.

Klíčová slova: výcvik, interakční cvičení, aktivizující techniky, reflexe sociálních dovedností a rysů