Emotional intelligence factors helping teachers cope with emotionally tense situations and enhancing effective pedagogical communication

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Abstract

In this paper, we focus on the relationship between emotional and social intelligence and pedagogical communication, which significantly affects both the effectiveness of pedagogical communication and the atmosphere in the school classroom. These are two important phenomena whose relationship cannot be underestimated. The ability of meaningful and effective communication is a basic requirement for the teacher's personal characteristics as well as for the teaching profession. Equally important for the teacher's work are the emotions from the quality of which the teacher's behaviour towards the students derives. For this reason, the teacher needs to be equipped with developed and cultivated emotional intelligence that the empathetic and sensitive approach to each student requires. The aim of the paper is to find factors that help teachers to cope with emotionally tense situations and thus benefit effective pedagogical communication. It is also necessary to mention the ways in which effective communication affects both the class atmosphere and climate of the class and school. The method of grounded theory was used in this research.

Key words: effective pedagogical communication, emotional intelligence, empathy, atmosphere, class climate, self-efficacy, flow.

Faktory emoční inteligence, které pomáhají učitelům zvládat emocionálně náročné situace a posilují efektivní pedagogickou komunikaci

Abstrakt

V tomto příspěvku se zaměřujeme na vztah emoční a sociální inteligence a pedagogické komunikace, který významně ovlivňuje jak efektivitu pedagogické komunikace, tak atmosféru ve školní třídě. Jde o dva důležité jevy, jejichž vztah nelze podceňovat. Schopnost smysluplné a efektivní komunikace je základním požadavkem pro osobnostní charakteristiky učitele i pro učitelskou profesi. Pro práci učitele jsou stejně důležité emoce, z jejichž kvality se odvíjí jeho chování k žákům.

Neméně důležité pro práci učitele jsou emoce žáka, které usměrňují učitelovo chování vůči žákům. Z tohoto důvodu musí být učitel vybaven rozvinutou a kultivovanou emoční inteligencí, kterou empatický a citlivý přístup ke každému studentovi vyžaduje.

Cílem výzkumu je s využitím metody zakotvené teorie najít faktory, které učitelům pomáhají zvládat emocionálně napjaté situace a tím přispívají k efektivní pedagogické komunikaci. Je také třeba zmínit způsoby, jakými efektivní komunikace ovlivňuje jak atmosféru ve třídě, tak klima třídy a celé školy.

Klíčová slova: efektivní pedagogická komunikace, emoční inteligence, empatie, atmosféra, třídní klima, sebehodnocení, flow.

Introduction

The ability of empathetic and constructive communication is one of the fundamental prerequisites for the work of a teacher. It is based on the developed communicative competence of the teacher, which is indispensable for his/her interactions with the student(s) within the educational process (cf. Bakić-Tomić et al., 2015, Meyers et al., 2019). The emotional intelligence of the teacher is firmly tied to successful communication as it influences it in all aspects (for example, what words the teacher chooses, for what purpose he/she communicates, whether he/she can identify the feelings of the student or interaction partner).

Therefore, high demands are placed on teachers with an emphasis on the ability to communicate effectively and make decisions in a variety of situations during the process of education. In addition to the theoretical knowledge in the field of pedagogical communication, the teacher is expected to master practical skills focused on correct

articulation, good rhetoric, ways to cope with stage fright and difficult situations, such as classroom conflict, or communication barriers. Moreover, equally important is the teacher's ability to assert and defend his/her opinion, apply his/her authority to teaching and insist on compliance with established rules. 'Teachers who display emotional intelligence are described by deliberate reflective (not reactive) character, more flexible (not resilient to change), affirmative communication (not aggressive or passive), more future oriented and optimistic (not pessimistic and negative) and are creative and practice positive behaviours (nonreactive habits). To thrive towards academic excellence of students, teachers must possess strong Emotional Intelligence and effective teaching' (Soanes, & Sungoh, 2019, p. 1820).

1 Effectiveness of pedagogical communication and emotional intelligence of the teacher

The issue of effective pedagogical communication can be viewed from several perspectives. The issues of the relationship of emotional intelligence and effective communication of the teacher were addressed by Sutton & Wheatley, 2003; Fried, Mansfield & Dobozy, 2015; Toraby, Modarresi, 2018; etc. The result of effective communication between the teacher and the pupil/pupils are the pupil's knowledge, skills, attitude, and newly acquired or further developed competences. The teacher approaches pupils in a targeted way and adapts each specific communication act to the pedagogical situation conditioned not only by the environment and current atmosphere of the school class, but also by the psychological state and individuality of the pupils. Effective pedagogical communication is considered to be such communication, through which the pupil acquires knowledge, skills and attitudes in a positive emotional climate, is permanently motivated to learn independently and mutual relationships between the participants of education are reflected (cf. Mareš, Křivohlavý, 1990; Šeďová, Švaříček, Šalamounová, 2012; etc.).

It is assumed that teachers who have built up adequate competences are empathetic, have excellent leadership skills and self-control, and have better performance in overall teaching efficiency. *'In order to become effective teachers, they must consider their teaching competence beyond the intellectual competence, professional skills and academic qualification'* (Naqvi, Iqbal, & Akhtar, 2016, p. 211). Through communication, the teacher significantly influences the atmosphere and climate of a particular school class, can induce or/and further develop relationships of trust and sympathy between him/herself and the pupils. On the contrary, by his/her insensitive actions, the teacher can provoke feelings of antipathy and mistrust in these relationships (cf. Šeďová, Švaříček, Šalamounová, 2012, s. 19–21). The teaching situation is determined by certain factors, both on the part of the teacher and on the part of the pupil/pupils, when the teacher

considers him/herself the dominant participant in pedagogical communication in the classroom, which also sets the structure of mutual communication. The teacher is the primary factor in whose responsibility it is to set up interpersonal relationships, in the style of his/her preferred teaching style. It is also the responsibility of the teacher to evoke positive emotions in the pupils towards the subject and to their own personas. The pupil then reacts to the induced situation and whether this process is successful will be reflected in how far he/she identifies with the teacher and teaching objectives (cf. Šeďová, Švaříček, Šalamounová, 2012; Gavora, 2005).

Effective pedagogical communication is a manifestation of both the professional readiness of the teacher and the maturity and quality of his/her personality. One of the important factors influencing the quality and effectiveness of teacher communication with students is teacher's social and emotional intelligence (Jůvová, 2013; Vogel, ed., 2018). The way teachers act and communicate with each other and with students/ students is significantly reflected not only in the atmosphere in the class, leisure or other pedagogical activities, but also in the overall climate of the school (cf. Verma, 2013). For this reason, it is necessary for the teacher to stably demonstrate a developed and cultivated emotional intelligence, which is a prerequisite for an empathetic and sensitive approach to each student/student. Therefore, communicative competences are understood as a multidisciplinary complex that needs to be applied to educational activities. Such a multidisciplinary complex is perceived as a set of applied soft skills, which include empathy, healthy self-confidence, ability to work in a team, ability to accept criticism and give effective criticism, use analytical thinking, credibility, creativity, discipline and self-control, curiosity, ability to manage conflicts and ability to assert oneself. Soft skills are a manifestation of emotional intelligence (cf. Peters-Kühlinger & Friedel, 2017). As Goleman (2009) states, '… emotional aptitude is a meta-ability, determining how well we can use whatever other skills we have, including raw intellect'. For Goleman (2009, p. 88), emotional intelligence (EI) is the ability to manage one's emotions and empathize with other people's emotions. Goleman divides EI into the following five basic components: 1) the knowledge of one's own emotions, 2) the control of one's own emotions, 3) the ability of self-motivation, 4) the ability of empathy, empathy with other people's emotions and 5) the ability to adapt one's actions based on other people's emotions. Teachers also need the ability to reflect, in particular, to think about themselves, their personality, looking back on their actions, thoughts, attitudes, feelings, revise a certain section of their own life or behaviour and effective decision-making in situations that are personally significant (Švec, 1994, Průcha, 2002; Korthagen, 2014a, b). *'Emotions that teachers experience are not only important for their performance and satisfaction in the classroom, but they also affect their interaction with students and students' achievement'* (Toraby, Modarresi, 2018, p. 513). Sutton & Wheatly (2003) emphasise the necessity of the emotional competence of teachers, both in general for their own well-being and for the efficiency and quality of the teaching process in the classroom and for the socio-emotional development of pupils.

Throughout the educational process, great emphasis is placed on the ability of empathy, which the teacher shows in communication with his students. It is specifically the effort to understand students, in the emotional, social and cognitive areas. In this context, there is the need for active and empathic listening during education, where the teacher focuses on the student, shows his/her understanding, and appropriately encourages the student with verbal or nonverbal expressions (cf. Barr, 2010; Meyers et al. 2019). A complete acceptance of the student with his individual peculiarities fits into the context of the teacher's positive emotions. *'It's a fair, tactful and unsuspecting relationship. It is the basis for creating a student's trust in the teacher'* (Gavora 2005). Another important factor in the teacher's relationship with students is enthusiasm, which contributes significantly to the positive atmosphere and climate of the classroom. Humour, which *'helps to alleviate the situation, reduces tension and promotes friendly relationships in the classroom. Gentle humour encourages students, gives them courage and breaks down conflicts,'* also contributes to the positive emotional tuning of the educational process (cf. Gavora 2005).

2 Pedagogical communication characteristics

Pedagogical communication has its goal, participants, specific environment, basic unit, forms and methods. The interactions that participants of educational situations enter are influenced by relationships that can be divided according to the mutual position of the participants into asymmetrical and symmetrical. In the case of asymmetry, the teacher's authority towards the pupils is asserted when deciding the course of communication. Symmetrical relationships are established between pupils. The characteristics of both participants are important for effective and correct pedagogical communication. On the teacher's side, the characteristics include experience, preparedness, psychological and other qualities. On the pupil's side, the characteristics include personality traits, age and achieved level of socialization obtained in both family and school environments (Gavora, 2003, pp. 26–27; Svatoš, 2009, p. 76).

In pedagogical communication, the teacher uses own self-efficacy and has faith in his/her own pedagogical abilities. The teacher's self-efficacy begins to build from the first pedagogical experience and continues to develop and change. In teaching, it is manifested by the ability of the teacher to cope with failure, his/her determination, willingness to accept the challenge and the overall positive effect on the surroundings. These abilities are derived from psychological processes that self-efficacy affects, for example cognitive, motivational, selective and affective dimensions (Bandura, 1994). It also plays an important role in protecting the teacher from the burnout syndrome, which is the result of many influences, among which emotional exhaustion and work stress play a major role (Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008, pp. 154–156). The emotional intel-

ligence can be divided into a personal and social level. On a personal level, they distinguish self-awareness skills and self-management. The social level consists of relationship management and social awareness (Bradbery, Greaves 2013, p. 36). The knowledge of one's own and pupils' emotions is very important for the profession of teacher. *'Emotion knowledge is a construct that has been studied across the life span, and it has come to play a central explanatory role in predicting the quality of social relationships in many different contexts for people of all ages'* (Garner, 2010, p. 300).

Pedagogical communication is determined by a specific sociocultural environment, the quality of which determines its effectiveness, content of teaching and curricular documents together with applicable social standards. The basic unit of this specific type of social communication is pedagogical information which is understood as an umbrella term for various activities in the educational process (cf. Prozesky, 2000; Gavora, 2005; Rubin, 2011, etc.). The quality and effectiveness of pedagogical communication is further influenced by the school climate and specific atmosphere in a particular class (cf. Meitisari et al., 2018; Mousena & Raptis, 2020). The change in the atmosphere of the class in a negative direction occurs when communicating in case of conflict or when communicating under the influence of stress take place. A situation where a teacher makes an error of judgment or does not correctly reflect the educational situation may become a trigger for aggressive communication. Another factor that affects the effectiveness of communication is asymmetry in teacher-pupil communication when, from his/her position, the teacher can determine its conditions (Gavora, 2005). It is not, however, possible for the teachers to do so without respect for the individuality of the pupil and without empathy. A unique phenomenon of pedagogical communication is communication by action (cf. Watzlawik 2014), which mainly includes the teacher's attitudes towards the pupil and his/her reactions to educational situations. This communication may include situations that are perceived negatively. The seriousness of what a teacher does in relation to what he/she says is extraordinary. Only if there is a unity of content, verbal and nonverbal communication in the teacher's speech is his/her speech credible.

3   Research design

The aim of our research was to find emotional intelligence factors that help teachers cope with emotionally tense situations and thus contribute to effective pedagogical communication. Due to the stated goal, we have chosen a qualitative research design for this research using the method of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1994; Creswell, 2012). The semi-structured interview method with five respondents was used to obtain the data. The research sample consisted of five teachers of the lower-secondary level at elementary school (R1 – R5) obtained by deliberate selection and with a duration of

practice of more than three years. The semi-structured interview focused on expressions of emotional intelligence. Bradberry's work (2014) was used as an inspiration for creating the structure of the interview. We asked the respondents questions that can be sorted into several categories that correspond to the construct of emotional intelligence. These are as follows:

1. Ability to listen
    a. Do you listen to other people's problems?
    b. How long can you listen to other people's complaints?
2. Showing emotions
    a. Do you realise your emotions in teaching/when learning?
    b. Describe how you show joy.
    c. Do you show joy in public?
    d. Do your surroundings affect your mood?
3. Working with error and managing failures
    a. Do you forgive others?
    b. If you forgive someone, how do you feel about them?
    c. How do you imagine perfection?
    d. Is there anything you want to perfect?
    e. Describe your reaction to the failure.
    f. Are you going back to your mistakes and wondering what you might have done differently?
4. Conflict resolution
    a. How do you resolve conflicts?
    b. Do you like to expose yourself to conflict?
    c. Are you falling easily into a conflict of rage?
    d. Do you think about the consequences in a conflict?
    e. Are you taking risks in achieving your goals?
5. Problem solving
    a. How do you solve problems?
    b. How long do you usually solve problems?
    c. What do you do when the problem is unsolvable?
    d. Are you uncomfortable rejecting someone, and if you do, do you do it anyway?

4 Research results

The interviews were analysed by triple coding; open, axial, and selective (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). By the open coding, 8 subcategories were identified, namely:

1. Manifestation of joy and experiencing joy.
2. Injustice, forgiveness and not forgetting.

3. Reluctance to give up.
4. Perfection is not a priority.
5. How to solve problems.
6. Don't live in the past, have a goal and don't be afraid to take risks.
7. Assertiveness – I say yes, only if I want to.
8. Don't get stressed or panicked.

These subcategories were then discussed with respect to the central phenomenon of coping with emotionally tense situations. One of the skills of individuals with developed emotional intelligence is the ability to control their emotions, which is manifested precisely in emotionally tense situations. Therefore, in the interviews, we asked respondents to focus on these manifestations of emotional intelligence and try to describe them. We also asked respondents about the way in which they try to resolve conflicts in their practice and how they try to manage their emotions. They do not get overwhelmed by problems and try to quickly forgive the pupils. The analysis also included axial coding resulting in a paradigmatic diagram below (figure 1).

Figure 1
Paradigmatic model of managing emotionally tense situations by teachers
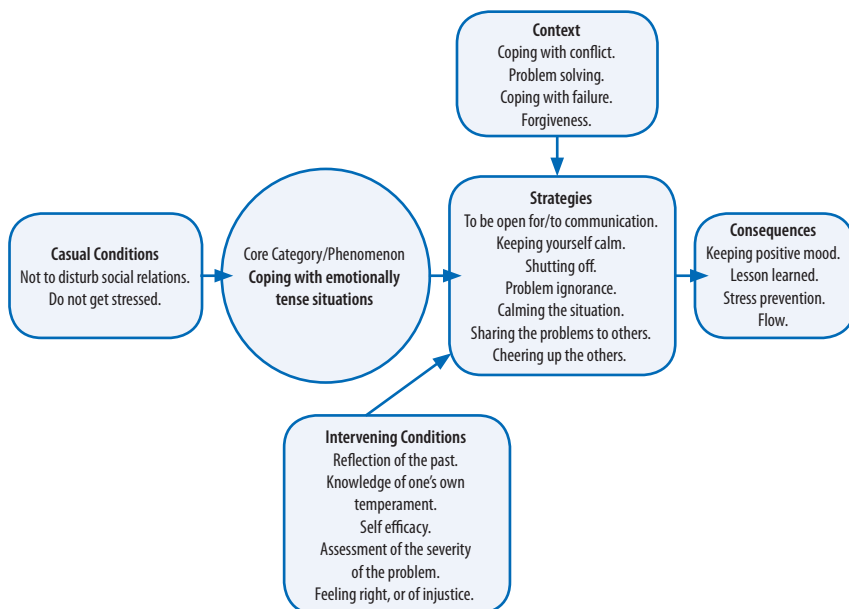
Next in the analysis was the implementation of selective coding with the central category of coping with emotionally tense situations, in connection with the phenomena of emotionally intelligent behaviour and the ability to resolve conflicts and problem situations. The outcome of the selective coding is presented in the 8 categories below:

1. Coping with emotionally tense situations and not letting ourselves be limited in expressing and experiencing joy

   The clash of good mood with the negative mood of others can create an emotionally unpleasant situation. This is where the art of enjoying joy and success blends with the possibility of an individual getting into an environment where the mood is bad. In this case, the ability and resilience of the teacher to resist negative influences should be demonstrated (cf. Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008). R3: *'When I'm in public somewhere and someone calls me the good news, I won't have a problem rejoicing out loud – when I come somewhere and there's a bad mood, I try to encourage a good one. I'll try to be humorous.'* Respondent R2 tries to be indifferent to the negative mood: *'If, for example, I find myself somewhere where someone is complaining and has a bad mood, I don't want to be influenced by that.'*

2. Coping with emotionally tense situations and not forgetting

   To maintain a good atmosphere and trust between the teacher and the students, the act of forgiving is necessary. However, this does not mean that even if teachers master the act of forgiveness, they can forgive, but remain careful. Forgiveness will allow you to move on and not stay in the past. It is also influenced by various factors: the amount of wrongdoing, regret, whether he/she was right, etc. A good example is the respondent R2's approach: *'Mostly, I try to forgive more for myself, because if I am angry with the student or person, it will not help.'* The respondent R3 approach is also interesting: *'I forgive very soon. If the student regrets his act or action, then immediately. But if he can't admit a mistake, I'll forgive him inside, but I won't show it on the outside. I don't forget, but I can forgive quickly.'* In connection with forgiveness, caution is also addressed, which also affects one's feelings. Negative feelings are especially evoked by the situation when the teacher still reminds (not only) the student of the transgression: *'I forgive very soon. It depends on how the student treats me. After forgiveness, I keep a little distance. I have a feeling that something else could happen. I don't trust him that much anymore, and I'm careful'* (respondent R5).

3. Coping with emotionally tense situations and reluctance to give up

   This is the ability to manage one's anger and emotions in case of conflict, with an emphasis on the need to think about the consequences. This is especially true of the teacher's ability to handle tense situations and remain calm. Respondent R4 summed up the constructive approach to conflict resolution in a statement, which tries to resolve it in peace by agreement or tolerance: *'I would describe communication as the most common way of resolving conflicts. Possibly some tolerance. I am a relatively non-conflicting person.'* Respondent R1 also tries to protect social rela-

tions during a conflict: *'When it comes to a conflict with a person who is really close to me, I try to solve it so that those relations are not disrupted. I'm trying to handle it with a cool head.'*

4. Coping with emotionally tense situations and perfection, which is not a priority
Disappointment and feelings of inadequacy generally help to overcome the awareness that perfection as such does not exist. In the desire to achieve perfection, not only teachers but students face the mistakes and errors they make. Failure then evokes negative emotions and at the same time causes frustration when too much energy is expended on something unrealistic. As respondent R2 states: *'I don't think perfection exists, so I don't even imagine it. I don't think so, and that's right.'*

5. Coping with emotional situations and problem-solving
Teachers deal with problems differently. Some overlook them, some deal with them systematically and others postpone them. However, the effort to name abstract problems and focus on their solutions is evident. If the teacher focuses on problems, obstacles, and failures in teaching, it evokes negative emotions in students, as well as a feeling of insolvability of the problem. On the contrary, the vision of success and new opportunities will help to better manage the surrounding situation, even if it is negative. Respondents consider it important that teachers do not fall into despair. Respondent R1 does not consider any problem unsolvable: *'There is always a solution, willingly or unwillingly, it can always be done somehow'*. Respondent R2 tries to avoid stress: *'If the problem is unsolvable, then I do not solve it.'* Respondent R3 tries to find a constructive solution: *'If it is a problem that affects more people, I try to discuss it with others and bring it into an overview. If I don't know how to handle it, I'll ask for advice from someone who I think might know'.* Respondent R4 proceeds analytically when solving the problem: *'I try to name the problems if it is something abstract. Secondly, I try to cut it into smaller parts that would be systematically graspable and then solve it.'*

6. Coping with emotionally tense situations and not living in the past, having a goal and not being afraid to take risks
Although failure can deeply affect teachers and affect their further work, by lingering in the past, they fail to cope with failure. But dealing with feelings of failure is key to their work. Respondent R2 says: *'I'm going back to my failures a lot. In my opinion, it is good to return to this, but only to a certain extent. Rather, think about what it may bring us in the future. Learn from it, but don't bother.'* Respondent R4 has a negative reaction to failure. However, the respondent approaches them constructively: *'Nevertheless, thanks to working on myself, it is an opportunity for me to improve. It is an occasional self-reflection.'*

7. Coping with emotionally tense situations and assertiveness – I say yes, only when I want
The teacher should be assertive and master strategies to deal with negative people. These people tend to spread these problems around themselves and burden others.

It is therefore important to have a set level of listening, so that the teacher cannot be accused of insensitivity and at the same time knows when to say enough. Rejection is the tendency not to pay attention to them, or to avoid direct confrontation, which can evoke strong negative emotions. Respondent R1 comments: '… *I would say that when it comes to rejection, I've learned quite a bit, to say no.'* Respondent R5 adds: *'I don't like to reject people, but I have no problem with that.'* Conversely, direct confrontation can evoke strong negative emotions and thus the need to deal with this situation.

8. Coping with emotionally tense situations and not succumbing to stress
   Negative emotions can cause stress, which has unfortunate consequences for a person, physiologically, socially, and psychologically. Thus, there is a need for teachers to get rid of negative emotions and keep an eye on them. There are many examples of how to avoid these negative emotions and they have already been mentioned in the previous categories: not living in the past, not focusing on problems, being assertive, etc.

Storyline

From the presented 8 categories we began to formulate selected conclusions and theories. Several important moments can be found for the construction and dynamics of the relationship of the teacher's emotional intelligence and his/her ability to cope with emotionally tense situations.

The first is primarily the specific conditions in which teacher-student interactions take place during pedagogical communication. These interactions are linked to the teacher's ability to permanently perceive and reflect the current atmosphere in which specific communication takes place. If the teacher responds empathically and flexibly to the atmosphere changes and mood swings in students, he/she should be able to set it up and keep it in a positive mode for the duration of the teaching unit/lesson/interactions. Therefore, it is expected the teacher uses his/her openness and generosity in dealing with minor conflict situations that pupils can mirror.

An essential prerequisite for coping with emotionally tense situations for teachers is also their self-confidence and perceived fitness (or self-efficacy) accompanied by an effort to achieve symmetry of relationships where it is possible to minimize differences between communication partners, in this case between the teacher and the student. In the case of a complementary relationship, the interaction is based on an inequality in which the differences are maximized. The teacher then, based on the assumption that the pupil defines their relationship in a similar way, expects an adequate pupil's response, for example an appropriate behaviour (cf. Watzlawick et al., 2011, Gavora, 2005). The mutual agreement in understanding and accepting the role of teacher and student is then reflected in positively tuned communication acts.

Self-efficacy and striving to achieve symmetry and synchronization of relationships where possible then create a safe environment for both teachers and students, and a new comfort zone from which one can move on to further learning. Under such conditions, 'flow' is also a significant phenomenon, with full concentration on the activity, the realization of which brings joy and inner satisfaction to both students and teachers. The phenomenon of flow occurs when an individual performs an activity he or she likes, by which he/she leaves the boundaries of the comfort zone and enters the learning zone through experience and personal experience (cf. Czikszentmihalyi, 2014). Provided the teacher is resilient, with high self-efficacy developed and is empathetic with the potential of high emotional intelligence, the teacher can reach the flow phenomenon with his/her students, because the teacher has a natural authority and trust of his/her students. Only then, in practice, the teacher can cope with the emotionally tense situations calmly and appropriately. An equally important factor for the manifestations of emotional intelligence in teachers is also the connection with the diversity and higher frequency of non-verbal communication in social interactions with students. The frequent use of non-verbal expressions both attracts pupils and supports the credibility of the message.

5 Discussion

After the analysis of semi-structured interviews, it can be stated that to cope with emotionally tense situations, teachers need the ability to master solving problems and conflicts. But the teacher's emotional intelligence is not just a matter of managing one's own emotions. An important role for the teacher is also played by empathy and the ability to recognize emotions in students, to be able to establish a closer relationship with them based on helpfulness, empathy, sense of humour and trust. In a questionnaire survey conducted among secondary school students in the Czech Republic, 52% of students are helpful in the first place in the ranking of the importance of a teacher's personal characteristics. The second place is taken by empathy with 20%, the third by humour with 11.67% of the respondents. This is followed by 10% credibility and honesty, for which 6.66% of students favoured it (Lerch, 2017). The results of our analysis can therefore be included among the basic constructs of teacher/pedagogue communication competencies, with respect to the connection between pedagogical communication and emotional intelligence (see Zlatić et al., 2014).

Conclusion

The communication competence of the teacher includes the ability of expressing empathy, active listening, willingness to cooperate with the student and willingness to give the student space for self-expression. Ensuring a calm and friendly atmosphere is a criterion for quality communication. In the educational process, the harmony of verbal and nonverbal communication, including paralinguistic elements, is important for the effectiveness of pedagogical communication and achieving the necessary quality. A teacher who can effectively resolve conflicts between students, manages his negative emotions and has a well-organized time, demonstrates a developed communicative competence. The importance of communication in teacher-student interactions is growing. The role of the teacher changes, he/she becomes a tutor and a mentor for the students, and considerable demands are placed on his/her emotional intelligence. The topic of the relationship between emotional intelligence and pedagogical communication thus becomes the focus of pedagogical research.

Acknowledgment

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