

Development and Growing of Social Skills in Teaching Procedure: Teaching Actions and Suggestions

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Abstract

The main issue of this article is the cause of development and growing of social skills within the teaching and learning process in formal education using a series of teaching techniques. The common and profound social and political upheavals create new contexts for a man's social and political adaptation. As a part of this social context, the school is decisively affected by all these changes. However, as one of the most dominant institutions for the socialization of a young person and aiming to his multifacing development, the school needs to prepare him to be capable to manage his social interaction and adjustment factors and to help him adapt and be active citizen in the future social context. This paper attempts to contribute to this effort, by providing an additional asset to the teachers, aiming to the development and growing of social skills to the students of today and the citizens of tomorrow.

Keywords: social skills, teaching, formal education

Introduction

The development of modern societies provides new social adaptation data for an individual as a member and a citizen of a world who continuously changes. At the same time, it is noted that we lose the essence of communication through interpersonal relationships and personal interaction, by the unlimited and uncontrolled use of new media technology and the possibilities offered by social media (e-mail, Facebook, Instagram) (Christakis, Fowler, 2010). Therefore, a logical question arises: why “common” became so “individual” and, finally, what is the context, the essence and the content of communication? (Carroll & Kirkpatrick, 2011).

These developments have an important and decisive influence on the school, which is a social creation. However, at the same time, as a socialization institution for young individuals, the school aims its students to develop a multifaced personality, so they will be able to manage their social adjustment and interaction issues, and, on the other hand, to adapt to modern society's data and become more active as future citizens. Considering this perspective, the teacher, through his role and his work, is obliged to convert theory into practice “reflectively” and thoughtfully, to manage the new social conditions within the classroom and to contribute to each student's adaptation and personality enforcement (Zeicner & Liston, 1996; Paraskeva & Papagianni, 2008), in order to achieve both the regulation of the teaching process (self-regulation) and the ability of self-determination (self-determined), through the interaction and the communication with the other partakers inside the student's action field, looking for ways of knowledge acquisition (Dave, 2000). In particular, the student in the school context acquires knowledge, develops his critical thinking, his creativity, his learning motivations, his self-confidence. At the same time, he learns to be familiar with assessment and knowledge application strategies in resulting situations and in relation to other people (McNeil, 2009).

The school climate emerges as the most decisive condition for the achievement of all above: it includes effective communication and the development of an interpersonal relationship between the teacher and the student. In the perspective of a good school climate, the most suitable conditions are configured to build knowledge as a broader concept and dimension (Fykari, 2014). The development of emotional intelligence emerges as the most significant factor to establishing good communicative relationships between the teacher and the students and among peers, a fact which assists to the learning process. Key-elements for the emotional intelligence are self-awareness, self-control, motivation, empathy and social skills, which can be taught in formal education (Goleman, 2011). Based on the theory of multiple intelligences (musical-rhythmic, visual-spatial, verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal and naturalistic) (Gardner, 1983; Gardner, 2000), the child acquires knowledge, develops skills, grows and enforces critical and creative thinking, not only within formal education context, but through experiential learning (Kolb, 1984; Dewey, 1938,1980; Bakirtzis, 2000; Trilira & Anagnostopoulos, 2008).

All these subjects can be taught, thus can be learned. This study's interest, i.e. the development of social skills could be achieved by mutual and reciprocal connection between the child's characteristics and its social environment. In the foreground, family holds an active role in learning rules of behavior and interaction. Subsequently, the groups of peers reinforce the ways of a child's socialization during a first phase of indirect dependency of the family (Kyridis, 1996; Nicholas, 2009). In particular, positive interactions with peers help children to develop interpersonal relationships, communication skills, emotional understanding and emotional management (e.g. control of aggressive behavior). In contrast, children and adolescents with limited positive interactions face often rejection and marginalization by their peers, a phenomenon which affects both their social skills, and their school performance (Rubin et al., 2006: 81-103; Asher, Oden & Gottman, 1992). The socialization process contributes to the development of the children's communicative ability, of their emotion management and their regulation of behavior, which are considered as social skills.

Social skills are considered as very important for social adaptation in childhood and in adolescence. Related studies refer that children which have develop social skills can manage better their interpersonal relationships, have better self-image and become more resistant to challenges. Subsequently, timid children with low self-esteem can be extroverted, through growing of social skills. Also, children with aggressive behavior can gain self-control (Shapiro, 2004). Therefore, children's learning of social skills is an important springboard for their future social development, with benefits in various fields of life. This the reason why school in general and, in particular, the teaching process should aim to organize and implement actions that will grow children's social skills with a view to a creating of integrated and socially competent personalities (Shapiro, 2004).

1. Clarifying concepts

The terms “capacities” and “skills” are very often used in learning process and have different concepts. The term “capacities” (personal peculiarities) refer to an amount of empirical potential that composes an individual's personality. Capacity building is based both on the individual capabilities (hereditary factors) and on the social environment and its stimulus. The dynamic interaction between these two factors develops capabilities (Gillis & Butler, 2007).

According Goleman (2000), social capabilities include the abilities of communication, cooperation and team working, handling disputes and effective negotiations, organizing and effectively implementing actions, the ability to learn how to learn. The social capabilities which a European citizen is required to develop within the Society of Knowledge have been determined by the meeting of European Council at Lisbon and Santa Maria da Feira (2000): effective communication, teamwork, dispute management, acceptance of constant changes and developments, flexibility and adaptability, taking initiatives and risks (Wahlster, 2011; Kully-Martenset. al. 2012). The term “skills” determines the way an individual performs a series of actions, in terms of speed, accuracy and efficiency. Skills refer to the dynamic implementation of an activity and assist the functioning capacities of which they are expression and realization. The skills are acquired by an individual with education, systematic effort and exercise within the formal education, but they are also acquired in non-formal education through experiential learning and involvement with events and situations (Schneider & Byrne, 1995; Romanczyk, White & Gillis, 2005).

Regarding skills, several definitions can be identified in literature. However, the definition of Riehs, Singer & Van Nord is most acceptable (1989: “[skills are] the amount of information and former experience techniques, in addressing new problems or situations. It is basically the degree of a continuum of mental operations’ ease, accuracy and speed performance which are used to resolve resulting situations”). However, in order to achieve this definition’s functionality, both the identification and analysis of the existing situation’s basic structures and the clarification of the distinct relations between past and present experience are required.

“Social skills” can be easily acquired by imitating social norms, starting from the attitudes and behaviors of the parents, but they can also be taught through formal and organized education. “Social skills” training should take into account cognitive, behavioral and emotional control factors (Brandhorst, 1990: 2665-2666). The skills of communication, problem resolving¹, decision making, emotion management and development of equal relations that allow to someone to start and maintain positive social relationships with others are integrated to the wider context of “social skills” (McIntyre, 2006).

The development of social skills requires the growing of three basic elements of personality: observation, thinking and behavior. Observation contributes to the perception of the social situation. The individual must first distinguish the type of social situation. Through observation understands how other individuals behave in similar situations and these functions as an example-pattern. Thereby, the individual adapts its behavior according the situation involved (McIntyre, 2006). Thinking helps in interpreting and understanding the other individuals’ behavior. Behavior, as third and basic element, relates to the interaction with other people. While the children often know the way in which they should behave in a social situation, they encounter difficulties in the development of the appropriate behavior or react impulsively losing control of their actions (McIntyre, 2006).

2. The development of social skills at school

Regarding the school as an institution and, specifically, within the context of teaching process, teachers and students communicate, interact and develop a relationship through certain circumstances and under specific terms and conditions. This is true, because learning is a communication product. “Social skills” are part of the teaching and learning process because they represent key-parts of the individual’s development and are grown with the appropriate environmental stimuli (Verderer & Verderer, 2006). A good communicative relationship between teacher and student contributes to the facilitation of growing social skills. It has been found that good relations between teacher and student are associated with high levels of cooperation, social capacities and learning skills (Rimm-Kaufman et al. 2005: 377-394).

On this basis, school and the classroom consist a special cultural and social environment in which emerge social situations, relationships, expectations and pressures that contribute to the formation of learning opportunities which differ between students, because of each student’s particular individual and family characteristics. The approach to these diversities arises mainly from the correlation between educational outcomes and the students’ social background (Michalakopoulos, 1990).

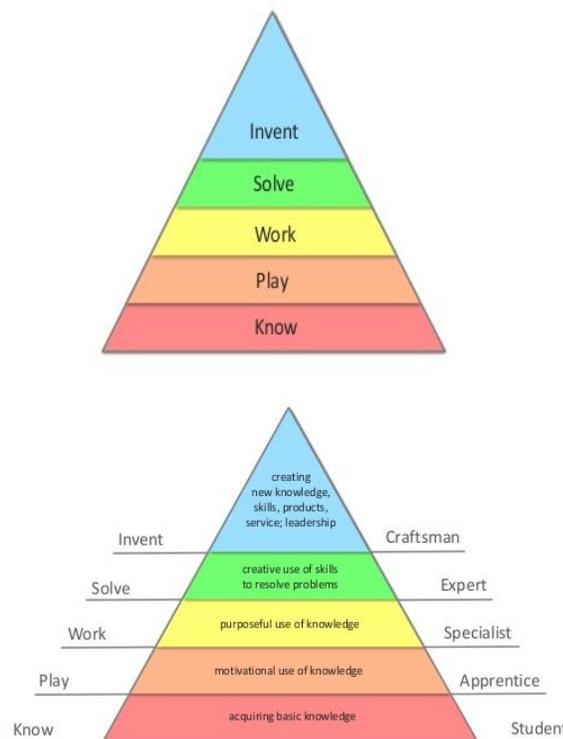
Therefore, flexible management and functionality in teacher’s work are very important, along with acceptance spirit, mood of understanding and attempt to develop positive relationships with all the student team and community, through functional interaction processes. However, the most significant interaction is both a means of development and advantage of social skills. In achieving this goal, the most important role belongs both to school and the family. The family, as the primary field to grow social relationships lays the foundations for a child’s social learning, whilst school provides an additional interaction field (Kyridis, 1996; Nikolaou, 2009).

For the above reason, the development of social skills within the school environment is necessary to occur in systematic and well-organized basis, as children may often lack of family patterns and relationships, thus they face problems to their developing relations outside their family. The lack of social skills can lead a child in isolation, school failure or delinquent behavior (Asher, Oden & Gottman, 1992: 136-157).

¹Interpersonal relationship problems resolving follows this exact order: identifying the problematic situation, distinguishing the nature of the problem, producing alternatives, choosing one of the alternatives and, finally, evaluating the result. Cf. A. Brandhorst, (1990), Social skills, trans. M. Terzidou, in: *Educational & Psychological Encyclopedia- Dictionary*. Volume 5. Athens: Greek Letters, pp. 2665-2666

The extent to which social skills are acquired and used determines the individual's degree of social competence and adjustment. According McCormick, Loeb & Schiefelbusch (1997) the development of "social skills" follows this exact procedure: At the beginning, the individual becomes understandable regarding its expressions (expression). Then, the individual learns to hear and observe the other members with whom socializes (openness). Next, the individual appears more receptive and open to the stimuli he receives from both the acceptance of the applied criticism to him and from contrasting his views of positions with others. Then, he harmonizes its actions with other people's actions within a group (cooperation) in order to achieve the development of relationships with the members of his group (modulation). Eventually, the individual creatively adapts to different situations and social circumstances (adaptation).

As the above stages develop, the children/students acquire and grow basic social skills, mainly through playing, which is the primary form of interaction between them. The children progressively acquire the most conscious altruistic behaviors, by developing the ability to recognize and accepts other children's needs. To this end, a very important role belongs to the form of discipline applied by the family and the school, along with the relationship both between parents and between children and teachers as well. Also, according to Kokchavor (2015: 313-318), the stages of social skills development are formulated into hierarchical framework as follows:



Kokchavor 2015: 313-318

According to Yogev & Ronen (1999: 261-268), in the overall effort for the development and growing "social skills" in the learning process, contributes a range of teaching and socializing techniques, which include:

- ✓ Using experiential and interactive learning methods and communication, such as: field studies, role playing, simulations.
- ✓ Involvement of students in small workgroups.
- ✓ Cooperative forms of learning (collaborative learning), which are organized by various criteria.
- ✓ Intergenerational learning programs (cross-age programs) and peer learning process (peer tutoring).

3. The development and growing of social skills within the teaching and learning process

Teaching social skills seems to reach in a more accurate way his goals, when organized in small working groups, where there is the possibility of observing each other. Teaching in groups brings positive results because the students can learn to cooperate, to develop a sense of responsibility and, therefore, form social consciousness.

The joint effort made by the students to achieve this objective, creates strong emotional ties between them, while simultaneously grows interdependence, mutual understanding and companionship (Trilianos, 2008; Matsagouras, 2000). According to Shapiro (2004), effective communication is the basic precondition for acquiring social skills. This means that the teacher (transmitter) transmits the message clearly and adapts it the mental and linguistic level of the students (receivers), attaching as well a personal touch to his messages. On the other hand, the students (receivers) must be able to decode this message, seek clarification and, of course, want to accept it. The teacher should initially use activities that will help his students learn to communicate. It is essential that the students learn to understand and express themselves to convey their basic thoughts and principles -even their problems- and through them to increase self-acceptance, self-esteem and self-confidence. At the next stage, the students acquire skills related to establishing relationships with peers. It is often observed that some students try to attract the attention of the others in a way that may lead to rejection by the group. Other students can only observe the group, which results to be ignored by other members. Therefore, they must learn how to engage themselves, how to develop a personal dialogue with a classmate and then how to maintain their connection with the other individuals in the group. Then, there is the learning of the proper use of non-verbal communication. Some children intuitively know how to convey their emotions in non-verbal ways of communication and how to “read” other people's emotions. Other children are too poor to non-verbal communication, with serious deficiencies in both expressive and receptive elements of non-verbal language. These children may seem inadequate or strange, even to a casual observer. This is why they should be helped to understand non-verbal communication (Shapiro, 2004).

Creative problem solving is a result of the development of social skills. Many children face difficulty supporting their rights in appropriate means, in particular when they show low self-esteem and confidence, are timid or particularly vulnerable to teasing or to bullying. On the other hand, aggressive children may not realize that there are various ways to meet their needs and they must take into account the needs and the desires of the others.

The ability for an individual to claim respect and courtesy is a skill of great importance for the development of each child's personality. The sense of personal power and the positive attitude, even when a child faces problems, are key-elements to building self-confidence, which requires different skills in different situations. The children should learn that they have rights, as well as that they must respect and protect the rights of others.

4. Techniques and activities for the development and growing of social skills in the teaching and learning processes

The main teaching technique used for learning “social skills” is “role-play”, which provides the possibility of stress limitation and allows the expression of self-confirmatory behavior. According to Stefanoudakis (1991: 4238-4239) the concept of the role is connected to the psychodrama theory, which first developed Moreno at 1923, in an effort to explain the phenomena and the mental processes that take place in psychodrama. In evolution, Mead developed this concept in terms of Social Psychology, making it a key-factor of the individual's behavior. Especially in psychodrama, the roles are invented, improvised and externalized in situations similar to reality, where the individual is asked to represent as better as it gets himself, unlike the theatrical role, where the actor tires to play a prescribed part, just imitating someone else (Stefanoudakis, 1991: 4238-4239; Avdi & Hadjigeorgiou, 2007).

The “role-play” contributes to the catharsis, having more socio-cognitive orientation. It is learning by doing, an action that illustrates the true recognition of social roles by the students. It takes a simulation of a social reality character and, therefore, differs from psychodrama, whose orientation is therapeutic (Avdi & Hadjigeorgiou, 2007). Through “role-play” the students are led to discover how to resolve everyday life problems, by knowing better themselves and the social reality. Specifically, the dramatization of real life situation leads to the emergence of disputes and conflicts, to the expression of opinions and feelings, but also to an effort of resolving contradictions and conflicts (Avdi & Hadjigeorgiou, 2007). What is perceived by the students is that the contradictions and the conflicts can be resolved, when they realize and adequately evaluate their basic needs: the effort to satisfy all these, finally leads to a conflict (Katz & Chard, 1998). In “role-play”, the goal is not focused on the student's acting, i.e. in his behavior, most like an actor who represents realistically the behavior of someone else. Instead of this, the students are asked to behave in a way the consequence dictates, in order to manage it through an experiential engagement, seeking ways of resolving contradictions and conflicts along with understanding behaviors, actions and activities.

It is basically a condition of achieving empathy as social role of the acting persons, which leads to a self-understanding and an understanding of his potentials (Katz & Chard, 1998). Also, in the “role-playing” theatrical skills are not of interest. What is most significant is the creation of the necessary contexts, in order the student to understand the experience of a situation, in which is actively involved. Through this process, the student understands the complexity of the problems, distinguishes the conflicts and the confrontations between different social groups, finds that it is not always easy to find solutions, and learns that it needs to take into account the views of the others and to converse in order to find socially acceptable solutions (Georgopoulos & Tsaliki, 1993: 75-78; Tielemans, 2013).

Except the use of the “role-play” technique, literature identifies (Rogers, 2014) more other activities that involve the dynamic development and growth of “social skills” within the context of formal education. Overviewing this data, one can point out to activities, with the appropriate adaptation, can be used to grow social skills. Some examples are shown below:

The game without words

The teacher shows a part of silent film and asks from the students to describe the meaning. The goal for children is to realize that they can communicate without words.

Matching emotions and faces

The students, starting from visual stimuli (paintings, puppets, etc.) are invited to present and recognize their emotions and their peers' emotions.

Feeling through music

The students are sensitized through a musical sound. Then, listening to the same piece of music, they are invited to paint their feelings on a cardboard. The logic of this activity is based on Praxiteles thought, according to which when I have a piece of marble, I envisage the form and remove this unnecessary information to reveal the form I want (Chisholm, 1911: 256): “*When I have a piece of marble, first try to imagine God ... then remove excess from the marble until this God revealed*”.

Respecting my peer

The objective is to teach students to respect the thoughts and feelings of their peers. The activity begins with the question: “*What does the word respect means?*”. Then follows a discussion about the respect they should be show by their actions at school and at home. Thereafter, the students are motivated to construct a carton of a tree with extending branches on which they record words denoting respect, thereby forming the “tree respect» (Shapiro, 2004).

The value of people

The students are given small bags with a total value of €5 with different denominations. It is explained to them that although they have different coins -in weight, color and amount- in each bag, they possess a total of the same value. Then the children are motivated to think about what they would buy with that money and explain their choice. Then becomes clear that the one who sells the object does not care about the color or the size but for its value. This thought shall be connected to people: They may differ in their external characteristics but they have the same needs and the same value. The following discussion focuses on the search for the issues and similarities that people have in common. Thus, the students realize that the differences between people are not so significant to create conflicts in their relationships (Georgiadou, 2015).

Same but different

The students are asked to form a circle with their chairs. Then, only the students in jeans are called to change positions. The basic term of the game is that nobody should seat again in his prior position. The game continues with a call to the students in glasses, to “everybody with blonde hair”, to “everybody who hates Maths”, to “those who were born in the same place”, etc. Instructions may be provided at different rates, that the changes show mobility and speed. Then, a chair is removed from the circle. A student will be left standing at the center of the circle, trying to instruct the others to stand up, so he can take a place. It is important that all students take the role of the coordinator: the game concludes when all students have played this role. Then, a group discussion follows, based on the following questions: What are the common characteristics of our team? (e.g. in which directive al stood up?). What people might look like? What are our common features? What kind of differences can people show? (physical characteristics, language, age, gender etc.).

All human differences are apparent? (e.g. views, feelings, etc.). How people treat diversity? (e.g. it scares us? It angers us? Do we have prejudices?). The activity ends with a call to each student to right in paper similar and different things liked by him and his peer. Thus, it is inserted in a dialectic way the definition of “diversity”, taking into account that diversity does not exclude similarities, does not mean inequality and that is useful, because it adds knowledge and experiences. The objective focuses on the recognition of differences and on the respect for diversity, without inclusive or discharges (E.P.S.Y.P.E, 2010).

Learn something about the other

The objective of this activity is for students to recognize the relationship building process and get to know each other. One of the first steps is to acquaint another person at a time. They are given a sheet with information for someone else who would like to build a relationship with him. Then the children sit in a circle. A child is named as a secretary. The first turns his face and gives his hand to his neighbor and says something about himself, e.g. "My name is ..." On the sheet he only writes the information on that person without the person's name. In turn, each person does the same. When the cycle is complete, the children present what they revealed about themselves by choosing random classmates. For example, the "X" student watching the "Y," says: "Your name is ... and you love chocolate". All the students' reports can be hung on the wall or the bulletin board in order to provide the opportunity for the information to be found and to reveal the person to whom the information relates. After all students' talking a discussion follows within the group to draw conclusions about how the students see each other as different, but also as a person with whom they can talk, work and live harmoniously together (Shapiro, 2004).

In conclusion, it is shown that social skills can be developed and grow through certain activities within the context of formal education and during the teaching and learning processes. They include a wide range of options, starting from the effective communication between teacher-student. In addition, their development is appropriate, in order the children to gain self-confidence and self-image, that later renders them capable to enter into healthy relationships with other members of their community. On this basis, the school and especially the teachers are required to prepare properly, creating favorable conditions for the provision of opportunities, so that the school and the classroom environment could work constructively to towards synchronic engagement, understanding and utilization of the students' social skills, thus providing a timeless and evolutionary perspective.

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