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TRAINING TEACHERS IN THE PREVENTION AND RESOLUTION OF CONFLICTS BY STUDYING TV SERIES

T. Coma (a)*, P. Palomero (b)
*Corresponding author

(a) Department of Educational Sciences. University of Zaragoza, Spain, tcoma@unizar.es
(b) Department of Psychology and Sociology, University of Zaragoza, Spain, pabpalom@unizar.es

Abstract

Within the framework of the Master's Degree in Secondary School Teaching, one of the challenges arising in the training of secondary school teachers is to ensure that the future teachers experience teaching from a systemic perspective, grasping the full complexity of the educational phenomena and the conflict processes. The students in the three groups studying the course on Conflict Prevention and Resolution at the University of Zaragoza (2018-2019) were trained in conflict analysis and resolution skills. 171 students took part, grouped into 31 teams. Each team performed a task involving the analysis of the conflicts that arose in an episode of a current television series. The data obtained in the group discussion were categorised inductively with the support of Atlas ti. software and five categories were obtained: learning, weaknesses, difficulties, challenges and value of the experience. The most relevant categories were learning and value of the experience. The participants highlighted the usefulness of the series for acquiring a systemic perspective of the conflict, distinguishing between types of conflict and the monitoring and handling of conflict situations in their future professional lives as teachers. They emphasized that the realistic educational situations presented in the series were highly motivating and encouraged critical and reflective learning. On the basis of the qualitative analysis a pilot questionnaire was designed to evaluate students' experience in a more systematic way in future courses.

Keywords: Conflict prevention and resolution, case study, active methodologies, secondary education, teacher training.

1. Introduction

As made clear by Esteve (2002), teacher training programmes must adapt to the social, economic and political transformations that have taken place in recent decades. One of these changes is the widespread dissemination of television series and their increasing popularity, especially amongst the young. TV series offer role models with which young people can identify and are therefore an attractive way of approaching certain subjects from a didactic perspective. There is a long tradition of using audiovisual resources in secondary education, especially documentaries and films. Little by little, TV series have also begun to be used as an educational resource in both secondary (García, 2005) and further education (Rovira-Collado, Llorens-García, & Fernández-Tarí, 2016). Paradoxically, the use of fictional TV series in teacher training has only begun quite recently, with pioneering work by Saiz-Serrano and Parra, (2017) who train future secondary school teachers to use the most recent, historical TV series for teaching purposes.

Nowadays there is a broad consensus about the benefits of using active methodologies such as case resolution or cooperative learning in teacher training (Arregi, Bilbatua, & Sagasta, 2004). For his part, Korthagen (2010) insisted on the importance of basing teacher training on reflexive processes, which stimulate the creativity and critical thinking of future teachers.

From a socio-critical perspective, the prevention and resolution of conflicts in secondary schools requires an understanding of their systemic complexity (Farré, 2004), so as to better comprehend the conflict process. This requires the development of transversal skills. On this question, the European Council Recommendation for Lifelong Learning (2018) sets out the key competences in university learning, which include the following skills: critical thinking, problem solving, teamwork, communication and negotiation skills, analytical skills, creativity, and intercultural skills. Learning to resolve conflicts is a skill (Torrecilla Sánchez, Martínez Abad, Olmos Migueláñez, & Rodríguez Conde, 2014) that involves identifying the different elements that make up the conflict (Torrego, 2007), managing emotions (Redorta, 2007), developing relationship skills and knowing how to use cooperative methodologies and conflict resolution strategies (Lederach, 2000).

2. Problem Statement

The aim is that in reflection and decision-making processes, the future teachers can broaden their perspective to include other actors, taking the social context into account, and can come up with creative solutions as active members of a team.

Students in the three groups taking the optional subject of Conflict Prevention and Resolution in academic year 2018-2019 were trained in the skills required for the analysis and resolution of conflicts in educational contexts from a theoretical and practical perspective. In their analysis, the students were asked to apply the theoretical and practical contents they had learnt about during the course. Each team was given a task in which they had to analyse the conflicts that appeared in an episode of their choice from a current television series. The series is set in a secondary school and the interaction between teachers, students and families can be easily observed, along with the various conflicts that arise during the course of each episode.

3. Research Questions

The following research questions were analysed:

- To what extent do students view teamwork on case studies using videos as a facilitator of learning?

- What aspects of watching the series were considered by the students to be of value in the learning process?

- To what extent did watching the series help visualize aspects that might otherwise have gone unnoticed?

- What difficulties did they encounter in this methodological approach? And which aspects do they see as challenges in their learning process?

4. Purpose of the Study

The objective of the study was to analyse the views of the students after finishing the course on Conflict Prevention and Resolution, as regards the lessons they had learnt by resolving cases of conflict in teams using examples from a current TV series set in a Secondary School. The analysis of the data obtained also enabled us to design a questionnaire for use on subsequent courses.

5. Research Methods

A qualitative study was conducted by means of a group assessment survey with open questions about the value of using television series for learning conflict analysis and resolution skills. The questionnaire was conducted after the students had presented their findings in the practical work project to the class.

5.1. Participants

The participants in this study were students on the "Conflict Prevention and Resolution" course of the Master's Degree in the Teaching of Compulsory Secondary Education, Baccalaureate, Vocational Training and Language, Arts and Sports at the Faculty of Education at the University of Zaragoza. All 171 students of this optional subject, grouped into three classes, took part in the research study (45.6% women and 54.4% men), for which they were divided into 31 teams. As this subject was optional, there were students from all 12 specialist fields. The teams were therefore made up of a varied mixture of students who had studied different degree courses.

5.2. Information gathering procedure

The questionnaire completed by each group after a process of group discussion, was based on three blocks: block I Learning (Question 1. What lessons have we learnt from this experience regarding the analysis of cases for conflict prevention and resolution?), block II Value (Question 2. In what ways has this teamwork process proved beneficial? Question 3. What benefits did watching the series have in the work process? and block III. Challenges (Question 4. What challenges did you face in the work process?).

5.3. Data analysis

The data obtained from their written reflection was characterized inductively with the support of the Atlas ti.8.0 programme via a thematic analysis, according to the phases proposed by Braun & Clarke (2006). After the reading and transcription of the records, the initial codes were generated, moving from the data to the codes and then back to the data again and later comparing them with existing research findings. All of this was done through a triangulation process involving three experts, which enabled us to define the categories. At the end of this process five categories were obtained: learning, weaknesses, difficulties, challenges and value of the experience.

6. Findings

The results show the analysis of the data through the narratives, and the pilot questionnaire which was designed for use on subsequent courses on the basis of this analysis.

6.1. Analysis of the narratives: perception of the students

At the end of the process in which the teams discussed the cases appearing in the TV series, the students were asked to offer their opinions about this experience. The narratives were analysed and displayed in the five categories obtained: learning, value of the methodology, weaknesses, difficulties and challenges.

6.1.1. The students' views about the lessons they had learnt

This category, lessons learned, is made up of 11 subcategories in which the students expressed their opinions regarding the lessons they had learnt during this process in relation to different aspects, as can be seen in Table 01.

Table 01. Views of the students: subcategories about lessons learnt

Category:	Description	Extract
A1. Connection betwee theory and practice	Practical application of the theoretical contents of conflict prevention and resolution.	"… It proved rewarding for laying the foundations of the theories relating to conflict prevention and resolution" G1.8
A.2. Importance of coordination between educational stakeholders	Appreciate the importance for conflicto prevention and resolution of the coordination of the entire educational community	"The education of the pupils depends on the joint action of all the different socio-educational agents … The coordinated action of schools and families is necessary …" G1.2
A.3. Awareness of the complexity and importance of the role of the teacher as a mediator	Know how to act as mediators, bearing in mind the complexity and importance of the mediation role, the need to acquire the relevant skills, need for self-awareness and training.	"In our role as future teachers, we will have to deal with the conflicts that arise. We must always be aware of the complexity and multiple causes (of these conflicts) to be able to resolve them as well as possible." G2.4
A.4 Awareness of diversity	Understand the diversity of opinions from a situational perspective and in connection with needs.	"… The degree of threat and concern that each one of the characters feels varies according to the type of needs … that are put at risk … This is observed in the intrapersonal conflict that they suffer … and in the intergroup." G2.1
A.5. Conflict: process and reality	Understand that conflict is part of the teachers' experience. It is a process	"Conflict management will be part of our daily work. Rather than avoid it, we should make the most of it as an opportunity for growth and for

	that evolves and an opportunity for improvement.	creating an atmosphere of communication and understanding in our group …" G2.7
A.6 Teacher as a model of values	Realize how important it is for teachers to behave ethically and consistently as this has direct and indirect influences on conflicts.	"To know how to pass on a series of values … to the students to ensure that they learn and develop well during their time at school." G1.7
A.7. Balance between person, possibilities and rules.	Keep an open mind in the search for solutions, bearing in mind the people involved, the limits established by the rules and the structure of the school.	"In order to be able to resolve conflicts … There is a set of regulations which every teacher must know and apply. The administrations have … systematized procedures to improve the general atmosphere … The most important things cannot be regulated: personal involvement, the motivation of each member of the educational community and the little things that we can do each day to improve the climate in the school." G2.5
A.8. Conflict prevention and resolution actions in secondary schools.	Understand that harmonious coexistence is approached from a preventive perspective moving from a general framework to specific contextualized actions and taking into account the organizational structure of the school.	"Schools must try to regulate conflicts by taking a step further to create innovative programmes adapted to the individual characteristics of their environment, and since 2011 Living in Harmony Plans have been implemented in schools... In the last year they have also begun to introduce and implement equality plans." G2.8
A.9. Keys to conflict in adolescence.	Including the stage of development, in this case adolescence, in the conflicto analysis.	"In secondary schools, disputes … are normally more significant than at primary level, not only because of the seriousness of the problem but also because of the stage of life of the students. Adolescents believe that everything revolves around them, without realizing that the real world is often quite different from the way they see it." G2.5
A.10. Importance of discovering the conflict	Investigating the nature of the conflicto and distinguishing between its structural elements: needs, interest, position, emotions … as well as the types of conflict (on the basis of who is taking part or the particular setting) so as to be able to mediate according to the situation.	"We observed that problems not only arise between students, and instead are present in all relationships: between students and teachers, students and parents, between teachers, teachers and parents etc." G3.2
A.11. Importance of developing conflict prevention and resolution skills	Develop the necessary skills for conflict prevention and resolution: assertiveness, listening, empathy …	"… they teach techniques such as active listening and assertiveness which are useful in the resolution of conflicts." G1.2
A.12. Usefulness of the systemic approach to conflict.	Approach conflict from different perspectives so as to gain an insight into the interrelation between the different agents and contexts involved, as well as a global overview of the same.	"Any conflict, whether there are two or more people involved or even just one, affects all of them and must be dealt with in such a way as to resolve it satisfactorily for all concerned." G1.7

6.1.2. Value of the methodology used

This category is made up of nine subcategories (Table 02) in which we present the opinions of the students regarding the value of using a method in which in teams they study the cases of conflict that arise in a TV series.

Table 02. Subcategories: value of the methodology of studying cases through a TV series

Category:	Description	Extract
Connection with reality	Watching the series makes it easier to approach conflicts as if they were a real experience, as it offers present-day issues, a variety of conflicts, conflicts between different agents and school bodies, a systemic perspective of conflicts …	"We should also bear in mind that in spite of it being a theoretical exercise and not a real conflict, it is perhaps the most similar to direct experimentation conducted through critical study." G1.7
Innovation	It is valued as an innovative method for tackling the complexity of conflicts.	"Dealing with a subject as complex as conflict prevention and resolution through a television series seemed like an innovative approach to us." G1.2
Suitability for the group discussion process aimed at resolving the case.	It has great potential for the analysis of cases in teams, as it can be watched as many times as necessary and helps focus attention in different ways so as to enable the team to reflect on the issues together and build solutions from a preventive perspective.	"Having the chance to watch the scenes as often as we wanted enabled us to pay special attention to body language (gestures, facial expressions, etc.), a very important aspect when it comes to identifying the characters' emotions." G2.5
Improvement in mediation skills.	Become aware of the skills required as mediators in the dynamic of working with the group.	"Put our own group work skills into practice." G1.3
Construction in teams from practice to theory	The experience gained from interaction in groups can help understand the theory.	"Doing the work in teams has enabled us to notice small subtle aspects of the conflicts, of the interpersonal relationships. Debating in a group, sometimes about a single scene … has shown us how different our perspectives can be …. It is gratifying to reach an opinion as a group." G2.5
Development of critical thinking	Comparing and defending the ideas of each person has enabled them to increase their personal resources for resolution in the future (more open minds) and the critical capacity to identify the information relevant to this situation.	"Reflecting about our actions and their consequences broadens our range of options when it comes to choosing how to manage a conflict, because other emotions also appear, which you have to learn to control correctly." G2.12
Detection of non-inclusive ideas or actions	Watching the series enables students to observe non-inclusive situations and ways of preventing and intervening in them.	"This series is full of stereotypes, above all sexist, in which in some cases the woman is treated as inferior." G2
Cooperation	Resolving and taking decisions about the cases selected by the team has brought about an improvement in relations.	"Strengthen the bonds between us as teammates." G1.10
Awareness of the learning process	Become aware of the progress made in learning.	"As we went further into the contents for this course and while doing the work itself, we noticed that we were getting better all the time." G1.1

6.1.3. Value of the methodology used

As regards the issues perceived by the students as difficulties, these centred above all on the question of teamwork. This can be observed in the *joint construction* subcategory, defined as: contrasting different opinions to enable decisions to be agreed jointly as a team on issues in which there are new contents, as observed in the following comment: *"Inherent difficulty in presenting the tasks completed by each*

participant to the group, with the interests and the need to accept the work done by each person as the best" G1.1

6.1.4. Challenges

Two main challenges were highlighted: firstly, having to defend ideas and decide as a team, and secondly, the fact that the contents of this course were new to the students. The name of this subcategory is: taking decisions as a team with new contents, as is reflected in the following record, *"the challenge involved in doing group work on a course whose syllabus content had until recently been totally unfamiliar to us" G.1.1.*

6.1.5. Weaknesses

This category refers to the *perceived weaknesses of using TV series,* i.e. the limits to using a series, and is made up of two subcategories, as can be seen in Table 03.

Table 03. Subcategories: Weaknesses

Category:	Description	Extract
Fiction	Realize that some aspects of the series may not be realistic.	"We should not forget that this is a television series and that some of the situations may have little to do with real life." G1.2
Some issues missing	Realize that some everyday aspects of life in secondary schools are not covered in the series.	"This aspect is practically ignored in the series. The way gender equality between men and women is dealt with in schools seemed to us to be an important issue." G1.2

6.2. Design of the questionnaire on attitudes

On the basis of the information categorized by groups, we drew up a questionnaire of 33 statements arising from their experience. These were grouped into six thematic blocks which coincided with the categories analysed in the results above: lessons learnt (18 items), weaknesses of the methodology (2 items), difficulties (2 items) and value of the methodology, which is divided into two parts, depending on whether the value is related to watching the series (6 items) or to relations within the team (3 items). The students were asked to score the degree to which they agreed with each statement on a Likert scale (1. Completely disagree; 2-disagree, 3-Neutral, 4-agree, 5-completely agree), there was also an open field in which they could make other observations. As a pilot experience, this questionnaire was given to a small group to assess its suitability as an assessment tool for this course in the coming academic year.

7. Conclusion

The description of the "learning" category covers a wide range of lessons learnt, which show that the students have been able to connect theory and practice in order to use theoretical models (conflict, stage of development …), or to better interpret reality from them, and to understand the approach of social harmony models in the current context. Additional lessons learnt include those relating to increasing awareness of existential aspects (complexity, conflict as an inherent part of life and teachers as models) and those that balance our way of thinking and doing to enable us to become skilful at conflict resolution,

(diversity, possibilities taking different approaches into account, skills and systemic perspective). In addition, all these learning items are related with the nine key skills for the 21st century set out within the framework of Lifelong Education (Lamb, Maire, & Doecke, 2017): critical thinking, creativity, metacognition, problem solving, collaboration, motivation, self-efficacy, conscientiousness, and grit or perseverance.

When asked about the fundamental values of the methodology based on analysing the cases that arise in a TV series, the students cited the ability to adjust the viewing of the series in line with the needs of the team, being able to watch it again focusing on different specific aspects or taking a global perspective over time. All of this enabled them to take a critical approach to reality in which they could observe real situations and build as a team the analysis connecting the theoretical models, the skills required for mediation in the conflict and the possibilities for resolution, both those implemented and other possible solutions. In this case, the weaknesses they identified in terms of methodology are a strong indication of critical thinking in that they go beyond what was initially proposed.

It is important to emphasise that students valued being able to take stock, to become aware of the lessons learnt. In this sense, the process of learning to learn is very closely related to the difficulties and challenges they identified, in which the contrasting of opposing ideas was also a source of real conflicts which had to be resolved from direct experience.

This cooperative form of studying cases by watching and analysing a TV series in teams has proved to be a motivating methodology, which has enabled students to connect theory and practice from the collective construction of knowledge in which the student plays the lead role in the learning process, a vital factor in acquiring the skills required for the prevention and resolution of conflicts.

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