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The Gmuend Model for teacher-parent conferences – Application and evaluation of a teacher communication training

Abstract

Teachers require strong communication skills for their everyday work, especially when communicating with parents while trying to establish a relationship between families and schools. A number of scholars acknowledge and support this requirement and outline benefits students may derive from a good parent-school relationship. To address this topic, a four day communication training for educational scholars was designed and evaluated. It aims to enhance basic client-centered counseling skills including empathic responses, congruent communication and unconditional positive regard. A training group of 26 teacher students received 35 hours of training and blind raters scored their communication skills. The study, designed as a within-subject-design study, was replicated with three later groups, achieving a Pn of 93. In the third replication an additional follow up measurement was added which suggested that the training effect is stable. The pre/post training measures suggest high effect sizes on all three variables while a theoretical instruction only yielded a baseline without significant differences between pre-post measures. The study has sufficient reliability. Internal validity is limited, as a control group is missing, and external validity is limited, as only students participated and only theory-based variables were used.

Keywords

School; Client-centered; Teacher-parent conferences; Communication; Training

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Das Gmünder Modell zur Gesprächsführung mit Eltern (GMG) – Anwendung und Evaluation eines Kommunikationstrainings für Lehrkräfte

Zusammenfassung

Lehrkräfte benötigen gute Kommunikationstechniken für ihren Arbeitsalltag, vor allem, wenn sie mit Eltern reden und Familien mit der Schule zusammenbringen möchten. Viele Experten betonen diese Notwendigkeit und berichten, wie sehr Kinder und Jugendliche von einer guten Beziehung zwischen Elternhaus und Schule profitieren. Darum wurde ein viertägiges Kommunikationstraining für pädagogische Fachkräfte entwickelt und evaluiert. Es will die grundlegenden klienten-zentrierten Beratungstechniken wie empathische Reaktion, kongruente Kommunikation und bedingungsfreie Wertschätzung verbessern. In einem within-subjects-design erhielt eine Trainingsgruppe mit 26 Lehramtsstudierenden ein 35-stündiges Training und zwei unabhängige, blinde Rater beurteilten ihre Kommunikationsfähigkeiten. Die Studie wurde drei Mal repliziert mit insgesamt 93 Tn. Bei der dritten Replikation wurde ein Follow up erhoben, das die Stabilität der Trainingseffekte zeigte. Die Pre-post-Messung beim Training erbrachte hohe Effektstärken, während eine nur theoretische Instruktion zwischen den ersten beiden Messzeitpunkte eine Baseline ohne signifikante Unterschiede zeigte. Die Studie weist hinreichende Reliabilität auf; die interne Validität ist durch das Fehlen einer Kontrollgruppe limitiert, die externe Validität ist limitiert, weil ausschließlich Studierende teilnahmen und ausschließlich theoriebasierte Variablen erhoben wurden.

Schlagworte

Schule; klientenzentriert; Lehrer-Eltern Gespräch; Kommunikation; Training

1. Introduction

There is strong evidence that a well-functioning cooperation between teachers and parents is an important predictor for children's education and student's success (Barnard, 2004; Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012; Fan & Chen, 2001; Hornby, 2011; Jeynes, 2003, 2007; Kratochvil, Carkhuff, & Berenson, 1969). To facilitate such a cooperation teachers are required to possess strong communication skills, and utilize these in their everyday work (Gartmeier & Wegner, in press; Gartmeier, Gebhardt, & Dotger, 2016; Sacher, 2008; Walker & Dotger, 2012).

Parent-teacher conferences are a centerpiece of facilitating the cooperation between teachers and parents (Textor, 2009), but can be challenging to teachers for various reasons, including the following (Graham-Clay, 2005; Ramirez, 2002):

- In many cases it is not really clear who is responsible for problems with the student's academic performance, e.g. classroom disturbances or learning disability, which makes the conversation demanding.
- The teacher is not as neutral as a professional counselor. The teacher is part of the school system and therefore bound to the rules of the organization, and parents may consider the teacher being part of the problem.
- The parents are obliged to come to the conferences (Aich & Behr, 2015; Schnebel, 2007).

It would be easy to continue the list but in the context of this article we just want to give a short impression of the difficulties teacher face in parent-teacher conferences. If we take these factors into account, one can conclude that the circumstances for parent-teacher conferences are very challenging. Therefore, teachers should be comprehensively prepared to act in a conversation and to avoid or resolve conflicts (Hertel, 2009). Some counselling skills are especially useful for this: Empathic responses and positive regard take negative energy out of a conflict, congruence induces credibility, transactional understanding helps teachers to understand the conflicts core and solution focused questions yield surprising new ideas. Empirical evidence of person-centered counselling's effects are referred to later. However, Baumert and Kunter (2006, 2011) indicate that counseling is a major task for teachers in their everyday work. Inappropriately, such skills are seldom provided within the basic teacher training at universities or during the on-the-job-training period. This lack of training has several negative effects for parent-teacher conferences (Bauer & Brunner, 2006; Behr, 2005; Epstein, 2010; Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2010; Dotger, 2010, 2013; Terhart, Lohmann, & Seidel, 2010). Behr and Franta (2003) found that teachers are often unable to positively influence the outcome of a conversation. Teachers rather responded to parental communication patterns, e.g. if parents were helpless teachers gave advice, or if parents were dominant the teachers responded in a dominant fashion. There is also evidence that teachers who received a comprehensive training for acting in conferences with parents, seek the contact with parents more often than teachers who did not receive such a training (Hertel, 2009; Wild, 2003). Moreover, parent-teacher conferences are a source of stress and strain for untrained teachers (Unterbrink et al., 2008). In this respect the communication skills training for teacher students is also a health prevention program (Schaarschmidt, 2010; Schaarschmidt & Kieschke, 1999). To improve future parent-teacher communication outcomes, to improve teacher wellbeing and to professionalize teacher student's education at the University of Education in Schwaebisch Gmuend, we developed a training for conducting parent-teacher conferences.

Teacher trainings tend to be developed without evaluation, therefore the focus of this study is to evaluate the impact of the training on teacher students. The evaluation focuses on how trainees may better utilize the Rogerian core conditions empathy, positive regard and congruence. The Rogerian core conditions are not only pivotal for successful counseling, but also for relationship building processes in

many social and educational settings (Aspy, 1972; Aspy & Roebuck, 1988; Aspy, Roebuck, & Aspy, 1984; Cornelius-White, 2007; Wentzel, 1998)

1.1 The Gmuend Model for conducting parent-teacher conferences

The development of the Gmuend Model for conducting parent-teacher conferences started in 2003 at the University of Education in Schwaebisch Gmuend, by analyzing which theoretical background and which counseling concepts are suitable for parent-teacher conferences. The model has its origin in humanistic psychology, as it connects to the idea of personal actualization and growth, by fostering clients' self-agency through a supportive interpersonal relationship without imposing power and intrusive guidance (Aich & Behr, 2015). Out of numerous counseling theories (Hertel, 2009) three concepts were chosen, because of their matching ratio to the requirements of parent-teacher conferences according to Sacher (2008) and Neuenschwander et al. (2004). A further selection criteria was the assumption that three different aspects are relevant for successful parent teacher conferences: Building a reliable relationship to the conversational partner, structuring the conversational progress and finding solutions for upcoming problems. The validity of this assumption was subsequently confirmed by a theoretical model of parent-teacher conferences (Gartmeier, Bauer, Fischer, Karsten, & Prenzel, 2011). Following these considerations the chosen approaches were the person-centered approach (Rogers, 1959; Mearns & Thorne, 2007), transactional analysis (Berne, 1961, 1963, 1964, 1966) and the solutions-focused approach (de Shazer, 1985, 1991). The person-centered approach was selected because of its possibility to establish a trustful relationship and foster self-agency (Behr, 2005; Cooper, Watson, & Hölldampf, 2010; Elliott, Watson, Greenberg, Timulak, & Freire, 2013). The transactional analysis was chosen due to the fact that it establishes structure in a conversation and the solution focus approach was chosen because it helps to create consented solutions in parent-teacher-conferences. From each of the different approaches the adequate concepts for parent-teacher conferences were selected and tested for their viability (Hölldampf, Aich, Jakob, & Behr, 2008). Since then the Gmuend Model has been evaluated (Aich 2015; Aich & Behr, 2010; Mühlhäuser-Link, Aich, Wetzels, Kormann, & Behr, 2008) and adapted to the difficult setting of parent-teacher conferences in order to optimize the model (Aich & Behr, 2015).

The Gmuend Model consists of six modules with six different communication strategies (see below), each in one module. The duration of the training is 35 hours. The different strategies are linked together in order to form an overall communication model which meets the requirements of parent teacher conferences.

Each module includes theoretical input, a reflection how to use the concept in parent teacher conferences, experiential exercises e.g. role plays and a reflection.

- The Life Positions of Transactional Analysis. This model helps to identify if there is hierarchy between the conversational partners, or if the interaction is

based on equal power between the parent and the teacher (Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1969). In case of maladjustments the Life Positions help to influence the conversation in a positive way. Furthermore, it can be diagnosed if one of the partners is passive, too active or takes too much responsibility for solving the problem.

- The person-centered core-conditions. Empathy, congruence and unconditional positive regard are commonly known as the basics of counseling (Mearns & Thorne, 2007; Cooper, O'Hara, Schmid & Wyatt, 2013; Rogers, 1969). In parent-teacher conferences the core conditions are a useful way to facilitate the relationship between parents and teachers. Parents shall feel understood, build up confidence to the teacher, clarify motivations and develop self-agency.
- The Ego States of Transactional Analysis gives an understanding of the difficulties and traps in the communication process between parents and teachers. It also helps to influence the communication process in a positive way by asking appropriate questions. Therefore the solution focused approach and its technique of asking questions will be used.
- The Communication Model of Transactional Analysis shows if the type of communication is functional and/or unproductive or even a dead end street. Here the solution focused approach helps to create alternative strategies to the unproductive communication patterns.
- Discounting of problems and successful problem solving. The aim of this module is to give teachers a tool to avoid unproductive patterns in problem solving and learn how to find constructive ways to solve problems in cooperation with parents.
- Transactional Games, a particular type of conflict leading to misunderstanding. In this module the teacher learns how to avoid transactional Games and how to build up more successful strategies in conflict resolution.

Empathy, unconditional positive regard (UPR) and congruence can be regarded to be a meta concept for all modes of a helping relationship and thus, are somehow connected to the interventions of almost all other counseling concepts, e.g. the Life Positions Model of Transactional Analysis. The positive attitude towards the behavior of the conversation partner can be well captured with measures for UPR; and in case of maladjustments the Life Positions help to influence the conversation in a positive way. However, one of the main interventions for this are empathic responses. This is also true in order to regulate Ego States, a model basically embedded in transactional analysis, but also in some variations of person-centered thinking. In addition, solution focused interventions can hardly work without a clear and unambiguous relationship. Thus, when the solution-focused array of questions are used, empathic and congruent responses are needed to make sure that the relationship is not damaged. Using the core conditions in parent-teacher conferences is generally a useful way to facilitate the relationship between parents and teachers. As a result the different modules and the concepts within the modules are inter-

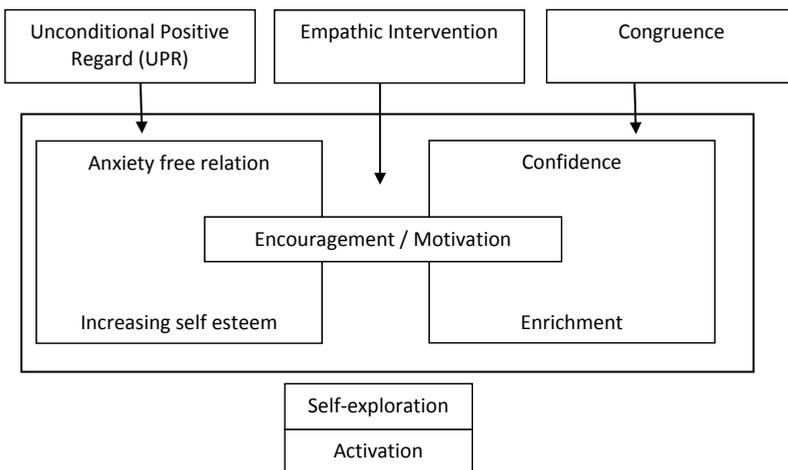
locked and related to each other, which is of relevance for trainees to receive coherent and concerted curricula.

1.2 Effectiveness of empathy, congruence and unconditional positive regard for counseling and for the cooperation between parents and teachers

In two independent research projects Neuenschwander et al. (2004) and Sacher (2008) found conditions for an effective cooperation between parents and teachers. Sacher (2011) summarized the findings and concludes: “Mutual respect is the cardinal point of successful collaboration with parents: Parents, who are treated without respect, decrease their contact to school.” (Sacher, 2011, p. 14). Regarding to communication Hölldampf et al. (2008) found in a qualitative study similar aspects: “Both parents and teachers spoke of the importance of relationship and the need for straightforward and uncomplicated communication” (Hölldampf et al., 2008, p. 172). Based on these findings the pivotal concepts of the Gmuend training model are the core conditions of the person centered approach: empathy, congruence and unconditional positive regard.

In scientific context these three core conditions are well established and often evaluated as influential factors for successful counseling (Behr, 2005; Cooper et al., 2010; Elliot et al., 2013; Hackney & Cormier, 1998; Nußbeck, 2006; Sachse, 1999; Warschburger, 2009). McLeod (2004) points out that in addition to the counselor’s personal beliefs and basic attitude, interpersonal skills such as empathy and unconditional positive regard are crucial qualities, which enable the counselor to establish a reliable and anxiety free relation between the counselor and the client (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Rogers’ model of the three core conditions (Warschburger, 2009, p. 14)



The diagram shows how the core conditions help to establish a respectful and anxiety free atmosphere, and how they help to build up trust and confidence between the conversational partners. According to Sacher (2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2008, 2011) and Neuenschwander et al. (2004) this is the most important factor to improve the collaboration of teachers and parents.

The relation between counselor and client is well examined in other contexts of counseling, and all findings suggest, that the relation between the two conversational partners is very important for the success of the counseling process (Behr, 2012; Fröhlich-Gildhoff, 2008; Grawe, 1998; Norcross, 2002). Nußbeck (2006) declares: “Without a confiding relation between the counselor and the client counseling is absolutely impossible.” (Nußbeck, 2006, p. 110, translated by the authors). This finding can be transferred to the setting of parent-teacher conferences. Therefore, while three interconnected concepts of counseling are the basis of the training, we choose rating measures for the person-centered core conditions.

Further evidence is derived from effectiveness studies about the Gordon Trainings. Nearly 30 primary studies and two meta-analyses (Cedar & Levant, 1990; Müller, Hager, & Heise, 2001) suggest that, both teacher-student and parent-child relationships, can improve and that adults can significantly improve Rogerian counseling skills. Although the Gordon Trainings do not focus directly on teacher-parent relationships, they suggest a pivotal role of Rogerian counseling skills in successful relationship building.

Based on various studies on empathy, congruence and unconditional positive regard it can be concluded that

- the relation between the counselor and the client stabilizes and gets more trustfully,
- the atmosphere between the conversational partners improves and gets more open,
- the client gets a feeling of security,
- the client uses the counselor as a model for problem solving,
- although no hints were given the client experiences the interests of the counselor,
- notions of the counselor are more accepted by the client.

All these factors are essential to parent-teacher conferences and they fulfill requirements of Neuenschwander et al. (2004) and Sacher (2008) to a high degree. They are also helpful to establish the relationship between parents and teachers required for a good conversation/counseling basis (Hölldampf et al., 2008; Sacher, 2008, 2009, 2011; Warschburger, 2009). While improving the person centered counseling skills of teachers in parent-teacher conferences is a pivotal way to improve the collaboration between parents and teachers (Neuenschwander et al., 2004; Sacher, 2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2008; Wild, 2003), it is a challenge to provide the relevant training to teachers, in a much shorter time and bigger group compared to regular counseling trainings.

2. Method

2.1 Research questions

The study examines three research questions:

- Will the person-centered counseling skills empathy, congruence and positive regard improve through a compact training in groups of 20 or more participants? The hypothesis is that there is a significant and meaningful increase.
- Will waiting control groups which receive only theoretical education as intervention, but no training, show an increase of person-centered counseling skills? The hypothesis is that there is no significant and no meaningful difference.
- Will the training effect be sustainable? The hypothesis is that there is no significant and no meaningful difference between a follow up test and the effect observed right after the training.

2.2 Design

In this study a quasi-experimental univariate design with a waiting control group and repeated measurements is used: Three groups with three points of measurement (base line (t1 to t2) and training effect (t3)) and one group with four points of measurement (base line (t1 to t2), training effect (t3) and follow up (t4)). The participants of the study could not be assigned to the groups in a randomized way (see below) and therefore, we decided to use a within-subject design (Hertel, Klug, & Schmitz, 2010).

2.3 Sample

The participants were teacher students of the University of Education Schwaebisch Gmuend in their third year of training. They enrolled by a “first come, first serve” approach on a voluntary basis. As students who were too late were excluded, the selection of participants basically represents typical teacher students, but is biased towards individuals who were especially motivated to undergo a parent counselling training.

In total the sample consists of 151 teacher students. The students were on average 23.2 years old ($SD = 3.5$), 83.4 % female and 16.6 % male. 49.7 % studied to become a teacher for primary school (Grundschule (GS)), 12.6 % for secondary modern school (Hauptschule (HS)), 34.3 % for secondary technical school (Realschule (RS)) and 3.5 % studied for special needs school (Sonderschule (SS)). For the training the total sample was divided into four training groups. An overview of the descriptive statistics of the groups is given in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive statistic of the 4 treatment groups

Treatment group	n	Age	Gender		Specialization of school type			
		M (SD)	female	male	GS	HS	RS	SS
Group S1	33	23.8 (3.5)	72.7 %	27.3 %	46.9 %	15.9 %	37.2 %	0 %
Group S2	40	22.7 (2.6)	73.7 %	26.3 %	51.4 %	16.2 %	29.7 %	2.7 %
Group S3	40	23.9 (5.1)	89.7 %	10.3 %	41.0 %	12.8 %	41.0 %	5.1 %
Group S4	38	22.2 (1.5)	97.7 %	2.3 %	60.0 %	5.7 %	31.4 %	2.9 %

GS = primary school; HS = secondary modern school; RS = secondary technical school; SS = special needs school

2.4 Intervention

The Gmuend Model for conducting parent-teacher conferences was taught to students of the University of Education Schwaebisch Gmuend in 35 hours over four days.

2.5 Measures

The three Rogerian core conditions were measured by approved rating scales of Carkuff (1969a, 1969b) adapted by Pfeiffer (1977) and Tausch and Tausch (1990). A further adaptation to parent-teacher conferences was made by Mühlhäuser-Link and Behr (2007). The interrater reliability for all three conditions was measured in Cohen's Kappa (Bortz & Döring, 2006; Wirtz & Caspar, 2002). The raters were undergraduate students, who were advanced in their teacher education and close to their exam. They were blind at the point of measurement and whether the training had occurred or not. They had received a 10 hour training, more see below.

Empathy was measured by a 5-point rating scale anchored by (1) "no verbalization of the parent's feelings, thoughts or behavior by the teacher" to (5) "precise verbalization of the parent's feelings, thoughts or behavior by the teacher". The interrater agreement was moderate (Kappa = 0.53) for valid 93 cases (Wirtz & Caspar, 2002).

The variable congruence was also measured using a 5-point scale anchored by (1) "there is an obvious contradiction between how the teacher experiences the situation and his behavior" and (5) "the teacher provides consequently insight into his feelings, thoughts and behavior and acts spontaneously". The inter rater agreement was moderate (Kappa = 0.45) also with 93 valid cases.

The third core condition – unconditional positive regard – was also carried out using a 5-point scale anchored by (1) “the emotional relation between the teacher and the parent is dominated by distance and denial. The teacher sees himself as the responsible decision maker and denies the ability of the parent to solve problems” and (5) “the teacher shows continuously deep mindfulness and respects the contributions of the parent. The relation is stable even if the parent shows undesirable behavior”. The interrater agreement is also moderate ($Kappa = 0.56$) in 93 valid cases.

2.6 Drop-out analysis

Due to the quasi experimental design of the survey, only cases with full data sets over all points of measurements could be used. In Group S1 22 % of the cases dropped out and 26 cases were used for the evaluation. In Group S2 24 cases were used with full data sets. This equates a drop-out rate of 40 %. In Group 3 20 cases were useable which is a drop-out rate of 50 %. In Group 4 the drop-out rate was 39 % so that 23 cases could be used for the evaluation. These relative high rates arose because between t_1 and t_2 many of the participants decided not to start with the training. Some of them missed one role play because of illness or had other obligations. Another source of missing data was that some students had problems with the technical equipment and therefore the role plays were not recorded.

2.7 Data analysis

All analyses were conducted using SPSS version 18. The cut-off for statistical significant was set at $< .05$. According to Bortz and Döring (2006) rating scales can be treated as interval scaled. Therefore, the analysis of the depended variables „empathic interventions of the teacher“, “congruence of the teacher” and “interventions with unconditional positive regard by the teacher” was made by the single factor analysis with repeated measurement. For a post hoc test the Bonferroni method was applied. This type of test was chosen because of its conservative features (Bortz, 2005; Rasch, Friese, Hofmann, & Naumann, 2014). The effect size was computed with the *partial Eta square* and also with Cohen’s *d*. Due to the design of the survey the pooled version of Cohen’s *d* was used (Sedlmeier & Renkewitz, 2008). The magnitude of effect size was described by the standardized criteria from Cohen (1992). The classifications (Cohen’s *d*) are: up to .2 the effect can be considered as small, up to .5 as medium and to .8, and above, as large.

According to Wirtz and Caspar (2002) the interrater reliability is given as Cohen’s Kappa. To describe the magnitude of the interrater reliability the categories of Landis and Koch (1977) are used. Kappa values of .21 to .4 count as adequate; between .41 and .6 as moderate, between .61 and .8 as very considerable and between .81 and 1.0 as full conformity.

2.8 The training of the raters

The raters were undergraduate students, who were advanced in their teacher education and close to their exam. The rating was done by six students in three different teams. The rater's training took ten hours and was designed to improve the interrater agreement. The training included knowledge about the theoretical background of the three core conditions and the different rating instruments. The different scores of the scales were explained by sample situations. Afterwards three different audio tapes were presented to the raters. After each tape the raters judged the tape according to the rating scales together. Problems and differences were discussed in order to develop a common understanding of the different levels and constructs of the instruments. Thereafter three new audio tapes were presented. This time the raters had to score independently and blind. Then the raters discussed their decisions. This procedure was repeated five times till the interrater agreement was acceptable.

2.9 Implementation of the role plays

The students used three role play scenarios with typical topics of parent-teacher conferences:

- 1. Scenario: Parents are accusing a teacher of inadequate support for their son in Mathematics.
- 2. Scenario: Parents are accusing a teacher of not understanding their daughter's difficult situation due to her adolescence.
- 3. Scenario: Parents are afraid of their son's school situation due to drugs and violence at school.

Each scenario includes a briefing for the teachers' and parents' role. They had been tested and approved in earlier trainings (Mühlhäuser-Link et al., 2008). This kind of approach is common in therapy and counseling research and in communication skill trainings. Behr (2005) indicates that the trainees' functioning adheres to the real situation, because in role plays the same emotional and interactional patterns are activated. The length of the role plays were limited to a maximum of 15 minutes and were audio recorded. Because of missing technical equipment and reluctant participants we refrained from video recording the role plays. Between t1 and t2 no intervention was made and the period between t1 and t2 differ from four to twelve weeks according to the university timetables. The intervention was made between t2 and t3 and the role plays were carried out right after the training period. In group four there was another role play (t4) four weeks after the end of the training. Table 2 gives an overview.

Table 2: Overview of the experiential design

	t1		t2		t3		t4
Group S1 (n = 33)	Role Play 1	no treatment	Role Play 2	treatment: Gmuend Model for conducting parent- teacher con- ferences	Role Play 3	no treatment	–
Group S2 (n = 40)	Role Play 1	no treatment	Role Play 2		Role Play 3	no treatment	–
Group S3 (n = 40)	Role Play 1	no treatment	Role Play 2		Role Play 3	no treatment	–
Group S4 (n = 38)	Role Play 1	no treatment	Role Play 2		Role Play 3	no treatment	Role Play 4

3. Results

3.1 Empathic teacher interventions in role play scenarios

Table 3 describes the size of treatment groups, the means and standard deviations for the variable “empathic teacher intervention”

Table 3: Mean rating scores for „empathic teacher intervention “ for treatment groups S1, S2, S3 und S4 at points of measurement t1, t2, t3 und t4

“empathic teacher intervention”	N	t1 M (SD)	t2 M (SD)	t3 M (SD)	t4 M (SD)
Group S1	26	1.63 (0.54)	1.69 (0.49)	3.46 (0.74)	–
Group S2	24	1.77 (0.78)	2.19 (0.69)	3.88 (0.65)	–
Group S3	20	1.8 (0.49)	1.8 (0.62)	3.05 (0.69)	–
Group S4	23	2.11 (0.45)	2.21 (0.78)	3.61 (0.52)	4.0 (0.37)

The results of the single factor analysis with repeated measurement for Group S1 shows a highly significant rise of the dependent variable “empathic intervention of the teacher” ($F(2, 50) = 80.5, p < .001, \eta^2_{part.} = .76$). The pair-by-pair comparison of the values to the different points of measurement with the Bonferroni post hoc test showed no significant change between t1 and t2. In the treatment period between t2 and t3 a significant change could be verified ($p < .001$) with a Cohen’s $d = 2.81$.

For Group S2 similar data can be reported. The results of the single factor analysis with repeated measurement for Group S2 shows a highly significant change for the dependent variable ($F(2, 46) = 65.03, p < .001, \eta^2_{part} = .76$). In the period without treatment between t1 and t2 the calculation with the Bonferroni post hoc test showed no significant change. Between t2 and t3 a highly significant rise ($p < .001$) could be detected. The calculation of Cohen's d between t2 and t3 also shows a large effect ($d = 2.81$).

The single factor analysis with repeated measurement for Group S3 presented a highly significant change of the dependent variable "empathic intervention of the teacher" ($F(2, 38) = 28,61, p < .001, \eta^2_{part} = 0.6$). The post hoc test showed no significant change between t1 and t2. Between t2 and t3 a highly significant effect of the training was observed ($p < .001$) with Cohen's $d = 1.91$.

For Group S4 the single factor analysis with repeated measurement for Group S3 presented a highly significant change of the dependent variable "empathic intervention of the teacher" ($F(3, 66) = 87.36, p < .001, \eta^2_{part} = .8$). The post hoc analysis by Bonferroni showed no significant difference between t1 and t2 but a highly significant change between t2 and t3 ($p < .001$). The examination of the period t3 to t4 (follow up) indicates also a positive significant change ($p = .004$) of the dependent variable. The calculation of Cohen's d in the period of the interventions shows also a large effect ($d = 2.1$).

3.2 Congruence of the teacher in role play scenarios

The size of the different treatment groups, means and the standard deviation can be found in Table 4.

Table 4: Descriptive figures of the dependent variable „congruence of the teacher“ for treatment groups S1, S2, S3 und S4 at the points of measurement t1, t2, t3 und t4

"congruence of the teacher"	n	t1	t2	t3	t4
		M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
Group S1	26	1.79 (0.35)	1.96 (0.49)	3.42 (0.79)	–
Group S2	24	2.06 (0.47)	2.33 (0.72)	3.89 (0.61)	–
Group S3	20	1.98 (0.41)	1.95 (0.56)	3.0 (0.78)	–
Group S4	23	(2.15) (0.38)	2.28 (0.45)	3.43 (0.51)	3.87 (0.46)

The examination of the raters' verdicts for the variable "congruence of the teacher" by the single factor analysis with repeated measurement for Group S1 shows a highly significant change ($(F(2, 50) = 66.6, p < .001, \eta^2_{\text{part}} = .73)$). The post hoc test indicates no significant change between t1 and t2 without treatment. Between t2 and t3 with the treatment a highly significant increase is observed ($p < .001$). The calculation of Cohen's d for the period of intervention indicates a large effect ($d = 2.17$).

For Group S2 the single factor analysis with repeated measurement shows also a highly significant change for the variable "congruence of the teacher" ($(F(2, 46) = 72.92, p < .001, \eta^2_{\text{part}} = .76)$). The post hoc test shows no significant change between t1 and t2 without treatment. For the intervention period between t2 and t3 a highly significant change was found ($p < .001$). The effect size Cohen's d shows a large effect ($d = 2.35$) for the period between t2 and t3.

The examination of Group S3 with the single factor analysis also shows a highly significant change for the variable "congruence of the teacher" ($(F(2, 38) = 21.58, p < .001, \eta^2_{\text{part}} = .53)$). The post hoc test shows no significant change in the period between t1 and t2 but a highly significant change between t2 and t3 ($p < .001$). Cohen's d demonstrates a large effect between t2 and t3 ($d = 1.55$).

Group S4 with the follow up (t4) shows very similar results. The single factor analysis also shows a highly significant change for the variable "congruence of the teacher" ($(F(3, 66) = 113.26, p < .001, \eta^2_{\text{part}} = .84)$). The post hoc test demonstrates no significant change between t1 and t2. Between t2 and t3 a highly significant change can be found ($p = .001$) and in the period between t3 and t4 no significant change can be found. The calculation of Cohen's d for the period of the intervention between t2 and t3 indicates a large effect ($d = 2.4$).

3.3 "Teachers unconditional positive regard (UPR) in role play scenarios"

The size of the different treatment groups, means and the standard deviation can be found in Table 5.

For Group S1 the single factor analysis with repeated measurement shows a highly significant rise for the dependent variable "*interventions with unconditional positive regard by the teacher*" ($(F(2, 50) = 36.28, p < .001, \eta^2_{\text{part}} = .59)$). The post hoc test by Bonferroni indicates no significant change between t1 and t2. In the period of the treatment between t2 and t3 a highly significant increase ($p < .001$) was measured. The calculation of Cohen's d between t2 and t3 indicates a large effect ($d = 1.73$).

Group S2 shows also highly significant change ($(F(2, 46) = 66.97, p < .001, \eta^2_{\text{part}} = .74)$) with respect to the dependent variable "*interventions with unconditional positive regard by the teacher*". Applying the post hoc test demonstrates that there is already a significant change between t1 and t2 ($p = .018$). The testing of the period between t2 and t3 displays a highly significant rise ($p < .001$).

Table 5: Descriptive figures of the dependent variable „interventions with unconditional positive regard by the teacher“ for treatment groups S1, S2, S3 und S4 at the points of measurement t1, t2, t3 und t4.

“interventions with unconditional positive regard by the teacher”	n	t1	t2	t3	t4
		M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
Group S1	26	2.01 (0.76)	2.17 (0.86)	3.6 (0.82)	–
Group S2	24	1.79 (0.59)	2.39 (0.78)	3.85 (0.67)	–
Group S3	20	2.25 (0.69)	2.55 (0.81)	3.12 (0.67)	–
Group S4	23	2.5 (0.64)	2.5 (0.71)	3.24 (0.49)	3.74 (0.39)

for the dependent variable. Cohen’s d shows a large effect for the period t2 to t3 ($d = 2.01$).

The analysis of Group S3 with regard to the variable “interventions with unconditional positive regard by the teacher” by the single factor analysis with repeated measurement demonstrates a significant change ($F(2, 38) = 6.37, p = .010, \eta^2_{\text{part.}} = .25$). The post hoc test by the Bonferroni method shows no significant differences between t1 and t2 and also no significant change between t2 and t3 ($p = .130$). The calculation of the effect size of Cohen’s d still shows a medium effect ($d = 0.78$) for the period between t2 and t3.

The single factor analysis with repeated measurement for Group S4 concerning the variable “interventions with unconditional positive regard by the teacher” shows a highly significant increase ($F(3, 66) = 35.88, p < .001, \eta^2_{\text{part.}} = .62$). The post hoc test between t1 and t2 shows no significant differences. For the period of the intervention a highly significant change can be found ($p < .001$). Furthermore, a highly significant rise can be measured between t3 and t4 in the follow up period. For the intervention period a large effect could be calculated with a Cohen’s d of $d = 1.21$.

4. Discussion

The trainings were effective with Cohen’s d outcome scores bigger than 1.00 and thus beyond of what researchers would mostly expect when evaluating trainings, counseling or therapeutic interventions. While this may be due to the specifics of rating procedures of neutral observers, some points can be stated suggesting internal validity of this study. The raters were blind and they consistently rated no differences between both base-line measures. The interrater reliability was satisfactory. Four different groups received the training, and the training experiment was

supported by three follow up studies which all yielded similar outcomes. In addition, one of the training groups received a follow up check with clear evidence that the training effects are stable.

Outcome research on counseling trainings is a neglected field. Counseling outcome research focusses on counseling methods and their benefit for clients. This may be due to health care issues and the need for economical procedures. It seems to be regarded as part of the method that the counselors are well trained and not to be a question in itself. At its best papers on counseling training provide sort of a qualitative look on personal experiences of trainees (Mearns, 1997; Bayne & Jinks, 2010), and give much more consideration around issues on how trainings can be organized on a well-established scholarly and experiential level.

Thus, our study represents a comparatively seldom and simple quantitative research about what can be expected from a counseling skills training program. The design of the training is rather short, linking it into the requirements for a university class, or for a compact on-the-job-training for young teachers. Hence, the training concept meets practical needs and makes it usable. Given that teachers need more communication skills, as has been argued earlier in this paper, the training offers a realistic procedure to enhance teacher wellbeing and parent involvement in educational settings.

While a significant practical effect of the training concept can be stated, the external validity of the study is limited. Although, we have no doubts that role play scenarios yield the same social-emotional-interactional schemas compared to real situations, the trainees were students with only marginal experiences from real parent conversations. Yielding training effects with experienced educational scholars would be more convincing. In addition, the outcome measures were derived from theory, and thus did not focus on direct experiences of teachers or parents. Using practical outcome measures based on experiences would be valuable to better suggest external validity.

The lack of a control group is another limitation. From a strict experimental viewpoint, based on methodological standards of laboratory research, only a between-subject design with at least two groups, one of which would receive an alternative or non-relevant intervention, would give evidence for a causal effect. However, a number of features still suggest the training effectiveness. The number of 93 participants is high compared to other studies, and the study had three replications. Both significance and effect sizes are convincing in each of the four studies. The duration of the treatment with 35 hours over 4 days represents a long and intensive intervention. The methodological limitations of the present study address a basic tension between the standards of laboratory research and a curricular validity of school and practice related interventions, sometimes discussed as the difference of efficacy and effectiveness. Experimental laboratory standards, especially the RCT criterion, cannot easily be transferred to school practice research. Such a transference would exclude a lot of research which aim to address practical questions. To determine causality of interventions further arguments like the above mentioned need to be considered. In addition the methodological discussion

is not consistent. While a mainstream of methodologists in econometric literature on treatment effects claim a control group to identify causal effects, views like the one from Sedlmeier and Renkewitz (2008) see a within-subject-design as a good method to analyze training effects, because the improvement of the training skills can easily be measured and “the personal confounding variables are parallelized perfectly” (p. 53).

Thus we argue that a beneficial and practical communication skills training program has successfully been evaluated, providing internal validity, albeit a missing control group, – good reliability; in that three replications took place, albeit only moderate interrater reliability, and – limited external validity, due to student participants and only theory-based outcome measures, which leave it open whether parents would perceive a qualitative shift in a conversation in which the trained counseling skills are utilized.

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