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Sense of self-efficacy in cooperation with a group and in a pair of children at a younger school age

Abstract

The ability to cooperate in a group is one of the most valued and desirable attributes of a contemporary human. Teamwork requires the necessary skills. A child is obliged to consider the position of another person, even if it radically differs from its own views. It requires forming the capability of reaching a compromise and critical thinking, not only about the partner's actions but also their (Pawlak, 2009, p. 27). The self-efficacy of a student in cooperation with the group is an important educational challenge. It is a type of important skill that comprises the social competences, are included in the personal resources and seems indispensable not only from the point of view of teamwork (Orłowski, 2009, p. 13), but also about one's point of view. The paper aims at presenting the attitude of students towards working in groups and in pairs and the self-efficacy of the surveyed children in such work.

A picture verbal test and an interview were used in order to obtain answers to the questions. In total, 156 children at a younger school age were surveyed¹.

The results showed that a significant number of surveyed students feel efficient in cooperation with the group and in pairs; unfortunately, students sometimes prefer to withdraw from joint activities because they believe they are not as competent and the others, have poorer skills, negative assessment and capabilities, so they prefer to give up in order to avoid stress, ridicule, negative evaluation or exclusion from the next joint activity. Actions on the part of teachers aiming at mutual, effective cooperation, respect, rivalry in an atmosphere of dignity and agreement seem necessary here.

¹ Full results of the study are presented in: C. Grzywniak, B. Sufa, J. Vaškevič-Buš, *Kompetencje społeczne uczniów w młodszym wieku szkolnym*, Wyd. Naukowe UP, Kraków, 2019.

Keywords: Sense of self-efficacy, cooperation with a group, cooperation in a pair, children at a younger school age

Introduction

The ability to cooperate in a group is one of the most valued and desirable attributes of a contemporary human. The employers are seeking people who can cooperate with others, as it is a widespread belief that an effectively cooperating team has much greater potential than an individual.

According to W. Okoń, *cooperation* is the mutual effort of individuals or groups performing their partial tasks in order to achieve a common goal; it is based on mutual trust, loyalty and being subordinate to the purpose of which the individuals and groups are adequately aware” (Okoń, 1995, p. 443).

C. Kupisiewicz holds similar views. However, he points out that “a vital part of a correct cooperation is that individuals consider the goal important.” (Kupisiewicz, 2009, p. 192).

Teamwork requires the necessary skills. A child is obliged to consider the position of another person, even if it radically differs from their own views. It requires developing the capability of reaching a compromise and critical thinking, not only about the partner’s actions but also about one’s own (Pawlak, 2009, p. 27).

A. Szplit and Z. Zbróg claim that teamwork efficacy increases in a group when the teacher: 1) organizes adequate physical conditions for teamwork (e.g., now and then changes the criteria for selecting the children for the group); cares for the relation in the group, organizes the environment to promote free conversation; provides a sufficient amount of materials and access to them; 2) at the very start, specifies clear rules for discussion or work on the problem, formulates goals and establishes norms that facilitate effective cooperation; 3) clearly emphasizes that the group faces a task that needs to be solved together, by cooperating, which fosters the building of group identity and the pro-cooperation attitudes among the group members; 4) emphasizes and makes the group formally accept the following rule at the start of the debate: only one person speaks at a time; 5) teaches the children to listen carefully to others and listens himself/herself to what the children are saying; 6) shows the teamwork in a wider context, indicates the advantages that it may bring to others; 7) does not interfere in the discussion/ work on the project, and focuses only on the task or subject to be discussed. Tries not to be excessively interventional, even if the accepted bounds and rules are overstepped; 8) throughout the work, reduces antagonistic behaviors, eases tension, and restrains impulsive group members, motivates; 9) evaluates their teamwork (see Szplit, Zbróg, 2011, p. 589–590).

When conceptualizing the term *efficacy*, A. Bandura (1997) indicates the cognitive process in which the people form judgments about their own competences to fulfill the task at a given level. These judgments determine the scale of the effort, perseverance, as well as flexibility and resistance to stress (Tschannen-Moran, Woodfolk, Hoy, 1998, p. 2–4). Such an approach to efficacy results from the personality traits and depends on the applied techniques of conduct, situation and conditions. It also gives an insight into the level of individual functioning.

The self-efficacy of a student in cooperation with the group is an important educational challenge. It is a type of important skill that comprises the social competences, is included in the personal resources, and seems indispensable not only from the point of view of teamwork (Orłowski, 2009, p. 13), but also the individual's point of view. It should be emphasized that the social competences, which relate mostly to the ability of students to maintain favorable social interpersonal relations through cooperation and involvement, taking into consideration social responsibility and warmth in mutual relations are not always adequate, and a significant portion of students do not have such skills and require support in this area (Sugai, Horner, 2002).

Allowing the students to cooperate is a valuable method used in school practice. Applying this method in a manner that is reflective and adequately suited to the tasks undertaken, brings a lot of benefits.

The paper aims at presenting the attitude of students towards working in groups and pairs, and the self-efficacy of surveyed children in such work.

A picture-verbal test and an interview were used in order to obtain answers to the questions. In total, 156 children at a younger school age were surveyed.

Student's attitudes towards working in groups and pairs

The predominant majority, that is, 111 students, confirmed that they liked to work in groups and pairs. Only five children expressed a negative attitude towards this type of activity. More than half, that is, 72 students, stated that they preferred to perform a specific work with a benchmate; 45 said that they preferred to work with a parent; and 9 declared that it was better to work alone.

Students from grades 1–3 see many positive and negative aspects of working in pairs and groups: when I'm doing something in school with somebody else: *I'm more at ease* — answer given by 29 students; *tasks seem easier* — answer given by 24 students; *everything is more interesting* — an answer given by 23 people.

When I'm doing something with somebody else, I most often dislike: *the fact that I cannot concentrate* — 43; *the fact that we cannot communicate* — 17; *that fact that I cannot do it myself* — 16.

The majority of the answers expressed favorable feelings in relation to the activity in pairs and groups, for example:

- *I feel more cheerful, I feel joy, and I feel like I'm at home;*
- *I feel a bit better;*
- *It's cool being with a friend, I don't feel sad, I want to smile;*
- *I'm cheerful and happy;*
- *I feel nice;*
- *I feel cheerful, nice, and better;*
- *I feel more cheerful because everything seems more interesting;*
- *Everything is more fun and nicer;*
- *I don't feel lonely then.*

Working in pairs or groups increases the self-esteem and belief in one's capabilities. The child is then more willing to take action, and the level of stress and fear is reduced. Here are some of the statements of the surveyed students:

- *I'm always more at ease with my bench mate;*
- *It's great; it's easier to work together;*
- *I want to do everything; I want to share my thoughts;*
- *I feel great because my friend can help me;*
- *I'm more at ease; I feel liked;*
- *I feel better because it's more fun with a friend;*
- *I can get to know another person better;*
- *I'm more focused, and things come out better;*
- *I solve problems faster;*
- *It's better because not only I have to work;*
- *I feel like a master of exercise, and when I fail at something, my friend tries to help me.*

There were also negative feelings relating to the work in groups and pairs. The typical statements by the children are: *I feel very bad; I feel insecure with my bench mate; I feel annoyed and humiliated; nobody appreciates my work; I feel bad because my friends throw their weight around, which annoys me; I feel ignored and forgotten; my friend often disturbs my work.*

The next question was intended to show the preferences of students relating to the activities which they like to do with a friend. Sixty-seven respondents underlined the pragmatic aspect of working in groups and pairs. The following statements were the most frequent: *we like to paint the most; we like to do tasks together; we love reading books together; we like to solve crosswords and problems; we like to draw and color in together; we love to do different jobs together at school; we like to overcome difficult tasks.*

The next category of answers concerns the play aspect (75). The children said: *we like to play together; we like to play cards together the most; we like to exchange blocks; I really like to play with my friend, and the most important thing is to*

play football with him; I love to stack blocks with my friend; together with a friend, we like to jump, run and play cards, pick-up sticks and football; we love to sing together in the theater area; we like to play pranks on others.

The last single category of answers emphasizes the communication aspect, which relates to the interactions with a partner. The following statements were the most frequent: *we love to talk to each other; we like to call each other on the phone and talk about animals; we like to write notes to each other; we love to gossip on breaks; we like to tell funny stories.*

The play aspect relating to the cooperation with a friend was the most popular among the surveyed population. The largest part of the answers was included in this category — about 41%. The pragmatic aspect comes second — about 37%, and the communication category comes third — 27%.

Sense of self-efficacy among students in group and pair work

The survey for the third-grade students studying the self-efficacy in cooperation with group included questions intended to obtain answers and make the students think about they evaluate their own input and the input of others in the performance of a task. When attempting to determine the self-efficacy of cooperation with the group, we tried to establish, inter alia, how the students evaluate their involvement in the performance of a task, sharing the resources, task planning and time control, themselves in relations with others. On the other hand, when attempting to determine how the students evaluate the input of their own work and the work of others in the performance of the task, we tried to determine how the students see their involvement, team effectiveness, and input in the final result; how they evaluate their roles in the team (what activities they perform when solving a problem in the group), how they evaluate the difficulty of the task.

Involvement takes place when a person can make a choice concerning their activity, feeling that they can be the creator of the fulfillment of the task. In response to the question: *How do you get involved in the task? Working on the task together with others?* most students (124) indicated that their involvement in the performance of the task is very significant and directly affects the success of the group or the pair.

A few interrelated questions were asked in order to determine how the students evaluate their involvement in the performance of the task. The basic question was intended to determine whether and why he students get involved in the performance of the task in a group or pair.

Majority of the surveyed population (130) indicated that they get involved in the performance of the task in a group for personal reasons — the feeling of

work well done, eliminating defeats, desire to achieve a personal success, a win, and for the reasons related to the common goals for the group or pair, which also become their successes. The examples of the answers confirm also the positive attitude of the students toward the work in groups and pairs, and indicate their involvement in the performance of the task:

— *I get involved because I like to perform tasks while working in a group, even when it is difficult, we manage to solve the task together because everyone cares about it;*

— *I get involved to make sure that everything is well done; if you try, you will succeed;*

— *I get involved, because in order to win, you have to work hard; joint effort pays off;*

— *I am always involved in making the group successful;*

— *I get involved so that we can cope with the task;*

— *I get involved because I want to win with my team;*

— *I get involved because I don't like to lose;*

— *I get involved because I like to work with my friend in a pair, and then we will always find a solution together;*

— *I get very involved because I want to win; it's such a nice feeling when will complete the task as quickly as possible, and the teacher praises us.*

The students were also asked to indicate how they get involved in the performance of the task in a group. This question revealed that some students (26) are aware of the significance of the effort put into the performance of the task and its effects, and the achieving of the intended goal. The surveyed students emphasized that planning, joint effort and involvement in the performance of the task pays off, as the work can be performed faster and the group achieves a success:

— *I always prepare for group activities, I bring materials, and then I try very hard;*

— *I always plan what needs to be done to complete a task and suggest it to the group;*

— *When I work in a group, sometimes I control others, I suggest that you try to do the task better, the effort pays off; if we try harder, the group wins;*

— *When I work in a pair, I tell my friend what needs to be done, and I read the task carefully;*

— *If I try harder, I complete the task faster;*

— *If everyone in the group is involved, everyone does what they are assigned to, we can win faster.*

In order to test the self-efficacy of the group's cooperation, it was attempted to determine whether the surveyed students could be persistent in the performance of the task (are persistent in the performance of the task, they perform the task consistently from the beginning to the end, do not give up despite the difficulties they encounter, strive for completion of the task). We also

tried to determine the effort, expressed as involvement and use of resources to solve the task.

Some of the surveyed students (39) gave the following answers to the question: *Do you complete the task in a group or in a pair from the beginning to the end without giving up? Why?:*

— *Yes, I do the task from the beginning to the end because I don't like to give up, I always do easy and difficult tasks;*

— *Yes, I always try to complete the task, I don't give up because I want to win, no matter what the task is;*

— *In the group, they know how to use my skills, I have a lot of ideas, and I am persistent;*

— *I help in the group with all my strength, I'm good at calculations;*

— *I do not give up, when I decide something, I do it;*

— *I am myself, and I do my best in search;*

— *Even when we lose, I don't give up;*

— *I do the task, because then I have more time for something else;*

— *It depends, but I try, and I usually succeed;*

— *It depends, but not at school, others are better than me;*

— *I do the task and advise others to win;*

— *Even if I take a break, I go back to the task and finish it.*

The presented answers indicate the persistence and consistence of students in the performance of the task, not giving up the tasks, and the wish to complete them, in most cases, or going back to the interrupted activities in order to complete the tasks successfully.

Most of the surveyed students (122) also emphasized that each task has to be planned in order to strive consistently for the achievement of the expected goal, e.g.:

— *It's good to know what to do in sequence, because then it's easier and everyone knows what to do;*

— *When you plan what to do, it's easier to assign tasks, and you can get the work done faster.*

The next category of answers revealed how the students contributed to the work in groups or pairs. The surveyed students indicated that the roots of success include participation, sharing resources (knowledge, experience, and ideas), controlling the time of individual activities, eliminating conflicts, and encouraging teamwork. The answers to the questions about how they contributed the performance of the tasks in a group or pair were:

— *I was looking for solutions together with my friends;*

— *I share my ideas;*

— *I watched how others worked, and then I used it in various situations while working with another group;*

- *I encouraged others to speak and listen to others;*
- *I suggested how to solve the problem;*
- *I was taking care of the time so that we did not run out of time to complete the task;*
- *I checked and told the group how much time was left to complete the task;*
- *I rushed others so that they would not linger, and I didn't linger either;*
- *I tried to plan work on the task;*
- *When they were arguing, I told them that it was not worth it, because we would not make it on time;*
- *I tried my best to make it pay off, and I encouraged others to work.*

In practice, the self-efficacy in cooperation with the group means capability of effectively working together with other group members. Replying to the control question: *What do you do to make the group succeed?* The surveyed students showed how they get involved to achieve the intended results, simultaneously indicating that the greater effort in the achievement of the goal gives them satisfaction from the result:

- *I am involved in the performance of the task; I ask what else I can do, and I act;*
- *I am active; I plan and draw a project;*
- *I try my best because when we win, I am happier;*
- *I try to do it as nicely as possible;*
- *When the task is difficult, I say that we need to discuss what to do and in what order;*
- *I try to make sure we all work in the group; I admonish others when they linger; if we make a good effort, winning is more enjoyable;*
- *I brought a variety of materials, and I brought a lot of them, and they were certainly counting on me;*
- *I manage the work of others;*
- *I do what others want me to do;*
- *I help others and try very hard;*
- *I use the ideas of others and give suggestions;*
- *I discuss with others;*
- *I look for a solution to the problem together with others;*
- *I suggest what they should do;*
- *I make suggestions to others and motivate them to work;*
- *Everyone should be involved in choosing an idea, so I encourage others to speak up and listen to what others have to say;*
- *I can cope with any task, others can count on me;*
- *I try, but it is not me who has influence, others are better, but I help them;*
- *I try harder; the more effort others and I put in, the more we are happy if we succeed.*

The declared sense of self-efficacy in cooperation with the group results, *inter alia*, from the observation of one's proficiency when coping with a problem in the group, compared to other cooperating peers, as evidenced in the students' statements:

— *I am more active than others, I have a lot of ideas, and I like to share them with others;*

— *I complete tasks in a group easier than others, and I suggest what can be done;*

— *I cooperate more willingly than others; I give hints, I perform more tasks; I want the group to win.*

The ability to cooperate transforms into competence — a sense of efficacy — during the group work — and this leads to an increased sense of self-efficacy in cooperation with the group.

The students also emphasized that they share resources (knowledge and experience) during the group work. A few questions were formulated in order to determine whether the children share their knowledge, ideas, assessments and experience (*Do you share your ideas and knowledge with others? Do you give any hints on how to complete the task?*). This category of answers showed that a significant number of students (88) who share their resources willingly:

— *I like to suggest to others that I know what to do, and that ideas are good;*

— *I give my ideas, but you have to listen to others because they may have better ideas;*

— *I can distribute the work in the group, and I can tell what my plan is;*

— *My ideas are good, so I always share them;*

— *I bring materials and show what to use them for;*

— *I like to discuss because I know how to convince others;*

— *I share my knowledge because I like to help;*

— *I do not persuade, but I say what I would do in this situation.*

The results showed that a significant number of surveyed students feel efficient in cooperation with the group and pairs; unfortunately, students sometimes prefer to withdraw from joint activity because they believe they are not as competent, and the others have poorer skills and capabilities, so they prefer to give up in order to avoid stress, ridicule, negative evaluation or exclusion from the next joint activity. Actions on the part of teachers aiming at mutual, effective cooperation, respect, and rivalry in an atmosphere of dignity and agreement seems necessary here.

Finding ways for the students working in a group to be adequately motivated, to feel responsible for and involved in the performance of the tasks, to be convinced of their efficacy, and to believe that they can be improved through cooperation within the group is a real challenge for education and for an effective teacher. The teacher's style of work and sense of self-efficacy are important stimulators of the students' efficacy. To achieve this, the teachers must be con-

vinced of their own efficacy, improve this process through continuous education, and use their knowledge and experience to create educational situations that support students in building their awareness and their own and their team's efficacy.

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