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The Teacher's Educational Psychological Game Sense (EPGS) as the Foundation of a Student's Positive Self-Conception

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Abstract

This research analyzed how university students of education perceive the formation of self-conception in classroom situations. The following questions were asked: (1) Which factors have positive and negative impact on students' self-conception? and (2) How does the teacher's action appear in this regard? This study applied the narrative research approach. Altogether 70 students participated in the study. The data collection method used empathy-based frame stories. The data was analyzed first with the method of the analysis of narratives. In the second round of analysis, the variation between the students' narratives were compared following the idea of the method of empathy-based stories in research. Group-related factors influencing on students' self-conception, student-related factors influencing on self-conception and the teacher-related factors influencing the student's self-conception are introduced as findings. According to the findings it seemed that the teacher's educational psychological game sense (EPGS) could be named as the defining factor that lies in the intersection of the student-related factors, the group-related factors, and the teacher-related factors.

Introduction

Recent positive psychology research has brought to our attention the importance of how students perceive themselves, how they analyze their performance and how confident they are as learners (Bandura, 2011; Määttä & Uusiautti, 2018; Tuominen et al., 2020). Students' belief in their success can be boosted or shattered in numerous ways at school. Even the smallest encounters with peers, teachers, and other school staff can have a bigger impact that one could ever imagine—in good and in bad. The key to positive self-conception, in the form of beliefs about students' academic abilities, is the teacher in the classroom (Cherng, 2017).

During the past decades, research on students' self-conception has been extensive. Self-conception is formed in daily activities and encounters with other people: it is natural to a human-being to evaluate his or her own performance in various situations (Shavelson, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976). The outcome of such evaluations adds to one's self-conception, forming it to a specific direction. Eventually, self-conception can be defined as an attitude toward oneself (Rosenberg, 1979; 1989) or a picture one has of oneself (Marsh, 2007). However, the attitude is not always positive or correct but, due to various reasons, can become skewed and fixed.

Indeed, self-conception can cover one's actual, social, or ideal self-conception describing one's actual, perceived self, one's self as perceived by others, or one's self of how one would like to be or become. The general self-concept can also be defined as academic, social, emotional, and physical self-conceptions (Marsh & Craven, 2006). To sum up, self-conception is multidimensional (Marsh & O'Mara, 2008) and comprises self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-crystallization (Rosenberg & Kaplan, 1982). In addition, Goorin and Bonanno (2009) include self-enhancement and Alicke and Sedikes (2009) self-protection under the concept of self-conception.

A positive self-conception is built through positive experiences of oneself. If one gets positive feedback, feels appreciated, and is treated fairly, one's self-conception gets positive building blocks. At its best, one starts to believe in one's abilities, adopts an optimistic attitude, and perceives other people positively. A positive self-conception can even be compared to a positive psychological capital (Luthans, Luthans, & Luthans, 2004). It becomes materialized when we think about how students can benefit from a positive self-conception. According to Bong and Skaalvik (2003), positive self-concept leads students to set meaningful academic goals, cope well in achievement settings, thrive in their academic work, and work hard and persistently—in other words, they show good self-esteem in studies (Judge, Erez, & Bono, 1998; Patrick, Hicks, & Ryan, 1997; Trautwein & Möller, 2016). In general, they perceive themselves as capable learners and members of the school community (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003).

In Ng's (2020) research, students with positive, average and negative schematics held contrasting goals, strategies, and grade aspirations that were congruent with their self- conceptions when dealing with challenging science tasks. Findings suggest that a negative self-conception is harmful in many ways. Students who think poorly about themselves, seem to overgeneralize their negative traits and expect the worse to happen (Brown & Dutton, 1995; Hamm et al., 2018). Decrease in self-appreciation is one predictor of depression as well (e.g., Elphinstone, Whitehead, & Bates, 2020; Ojanen, 2007). Therefore, failures are likely to affect their future performances, which is not the case with students who have a positive self-conception. They regard failures temporal or accidental. In this way, positive self-conception also can be viewed in the light of realistic optimism (Manka, Larjovuori, & Heikkilä-Tammi, 2014).

The purpose of this research was to find out how university students of education science perceive the formation of self-conception in classroom situations. The special interest was to investigate how, in their descriptions, the teacher's action could support or crumble students' self-conception. On one hand, we were interested in finding out what kinds of situations the students of education would bring out as positive and negative impacts to self-conception and on the other hand, how students were able to analyze the situations from the perspective of the teacher's action.

Building a Positive Self-conception at School

Self-concept means one's knowledge about oneself physically, emotionally, socially, spiritually and in other aspects of life (Neill, 2005), to know one's strengths and weaknesses. It is a multidimensional and complex

concept (Bong & Clark, 1999), that focuses on the personality of an individual, his or her attributes towards life and on who and what the self is (Baumeister, 1999). It consists of the totality of an individual's thoughts and feelings with special reference to himself or herself as an object (Rosenberg, 1979). It has been further defined by Carl Rogers as an overarching construct having self-esteem or self-worth, self-image as the components of it (McLeod, 2008) with strong focus of the cognitive and affective judgments (Bong & Clark, 1999).

The self-concept theory is mainly focusing on two areas: self-concept clarity (SCC) and self-concept differentiation (SCD). The theory provides a detailed explanation about SCC, which refers to how individuals are clear, confident and consistent about themselves (Diehl, Hay, & Berg, 2011) and SCD, which refers to how individuals' self-representation varies from the contexts or social roles performed by them in the society. Self-concept does not always align with reality (Cherry, 2018b; Gecas, 1982). The processes of the self-concept theory maintain the general concerns, for example, our evaluations of ourselves; our comparison of our actual selves with our ideal selves; and our actions taken to move closer to our ideal selves to be a successful individual (Muñoz, Palacio, & Escobar, 2012; see also Mazar, Amir, & Ariely, 2008).

Furthermore, some primary dimensions must be understood by the researchers before going for any study i.e. self-esteem, self-worth, self-image (physical), ideal self, identities or roles (social), personal traits and qualities (Elliot, 1984; Gecas, 1982). The main characteristics of self-concept of Berk (2001) are worthwhile to study (i.e. balanced descriptions; development of the ideal and real self; descriptions of the self by competencies instead of specific behaviors; and development of a personal sense of self). All the aforementioned elements of self can be influenced by the friends, either physically or through social networking sites—having a circle of friends' affects positively on the feeling of self-concept of an individual (Sponcil & Gitimu, 2012). This finding has also been supported by Marsh (1990), according to whom students with more positive academic self-concept achieve greater academic success. Likewise, Muijs (1997) confirmed that the achievement affects self-concept more than self-concept inherently influences the achievement success.

Self-conception does not therefore refer only to the individual's own evaluation of himself or herself. It also contains the perception of the environment: how do people around the person perceive him or her? In childhood and adolescence, the opinions of other people can have a great impact on how one thinks about oneself (see also Fathi, 2020). In particular, the parents' impact on the child's self-conception has been studied abundantly (see e.g., Fan & Williams, 2010; Flykt et al., 2010). There is a huge positive and negative impact of parents' interaction on their children's self-conception (Fan & Williams, 2010; Fathi, 2020; Flykt et al., 20109. Furthermore, other peoples' opinions have an excessive impact on the thinking processes of oneself (Fathi, 2020). This tendency can be seen in a group where a student with weak study skills in a group with members possessing similar capacity start to support and improve themselves through their same level of self-concept (Arens et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2021), being strongly connected with their shared self-efficacy conceptions (Gunzenhauser & Saalbach, 2020).

In addition, one can see oneself differently in different settings. For example, in Wigfield et al. 's (1991) study, when a student with excellent academic skills was moved from a heterogenous student group to a group

corresponding the student's skill level, the student started to perform worse. On the other hand, when a student with weak skills joined a group with similar students, the student's self-conception improved (see also Arens, Helm, Wolff, & Möller, 2020; Liu et al., 2021). Indeed, self-conception also has a clear connection with one's self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; see also Bong & Skaalvik, 2003). The difference in these concepts is that self-efficacy tells about how one thinks about one's abilities to handle a certain situation or perform a task. While self-conception is a wider perception of oneself, self-efficacy is merely a situation-specific belief of one's capability (Gunzenhauser & Saalbach, 2020; Schunk, 1991).

In the school environment, the teacher's role can be seen as crucial. Teachers can use various pedagogical methods that are to support students' positive self-conception (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003): they can provide students with proximal goals, employ peers who share similar attributes to their students as teaching and learning models, provide positive feedback for students' progress, and prompt students to self-evaluate. However, while there are numerous pedagogical models of how teachers can support the formation of students' positive self-conception (e.g., Lakkala et al., 2020; Määttä & Uusiautti, 2011; Ranta, Uusiautti, & Hyvärinen, 2020), less studies have focused on the educational psychological perspective of the teacher's ability to analyze a student's self-concept and changes in it (e.g., Itskowitz, Navon, & Strauss, 1988) and on the way teachers' and students' perceptions may differ from each other (e.g., Petrus, 2018).

The relationship between students and teachers is, indeed, reciprocal and multidimensional. It has been noted that the way students interpret their teacher's behaviors can vary based on how high self-esteem students have (Schrodt, 2009). On the other hand, teachers can vary according to their willingness to pay attention to students' emotions and familiarize themselves with them. For example, Newberry and Davis (2008) asked teachers to evaluate their feelings of closeness for each of the students in their class and describe what it means to be close to students. The conclusion was that the students were privileged or marginalized by their teacher relationships.

The ability to interpret situations inevitably necessitates certain basic skills of pedagogical tact (van Manen, 1991; Määttä & Uusiautti, 2012) and emotional intelligence (e.g. Äärelä, Määttä, & Uusiautti, 2016). In this article, we analyze data gathered among students of education. They are prospective educators and specialists in education, and therefore, the educational psychological ability to analyze educational settings and how the settings may affect students' self-conception should be one of their core professional competence areas.

Method

The purpose of this research was to analyze which factors have influence students' self-conception according to the perceptions of university students in education. We were also interested in investigating how the teacher's action and teacher behaviors were present in these factors. The following research questions were set for this research:

(1) Which factors have positive and negative impact on students' self-conception?

(2) How does the teacher's action appear in this regard?

The narrative research approach was chosen (see e.g., Heikkinen, 2010; Minichiello, 2018; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998; Polkinghorne, 1995; Riessman, 2008) because the purpose was to obtain data in the form of university students' narratives. Narrative research can refer to the information process as such, way of knowing, and the nature of information when it represents constructivism (Bruner, 1986; Heikkinen, 2010; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998; Riessman, 2008). In this research, the narrative approach covered the data collection method, the data itself, and the analyzing method (Heikkinen, 2010). In addition, the nature of producing information and knowing can be seen to represent the constructivist worldview (see also Creswell, 2009).

In this study, the research data were collected among university students of education sciences who participated in a course aimed for the first-year students of teacher training, general education, media education, and adult education in 2016. Altogether 70 students participated in the research.

The data collection method was the method of empathy-based stories (MEBS) (Särkelä & Suoranta, 2020; Wallin, Koro-Ljungberg, & Eskola, 2019). In MEBS, the researcher composes a frame story that illustrates a short and imaginary situation that the research participants should continue. It is called a passive role-play through which information is obtained as narratives produced by research participants (Ginsburg, 1979; Eskola, 2010). The original purpose of this method was to study the research participant's interpretations of situations.

In this research, the frame story was an orientation to the topic, and the university students were to write a small story based on the images they had (see also Posti-Ahokas, 2013). In these stories, the students continue the frame story or describe what had happened before the situation described in the frame story. Usually, there are two or more frame stories in which one or two items have changed (e.g., a positive and a negative event), and this was the case in this research as well. The interest was in the variation between stories (Eskola, 2010; Wallin et al., 2019; see also Sarivaara, Määttä, & Uusiautti, 2014).

The frame stories used in this research were the following: (A) Describe an imaginary or real-life-based classroom episode that has a positive or supportive impact on a student's self-conception. You have 15 minutes to write. Return the anonymous paper to the teacher after that. (B) Describe an imaginary or real-life-based classroom episode that has a negative or shattering impact on a student's self-conception. You have 15 minutes to write. Return the anonymous paper to the teacher after that.

The frame stories were distributed to the students so that those sitting in the left-hand-side of the auditorium received the frame story A and those sitting in the right-hand-side of the auditorium received the frame story B. The purpose was to get a somewhat equal number of narratives based on both stories. The distribution resulted in 30 positive and 40 negative narratives, which was considered equal. The students were informed about the use of narratives as research data and by writing the stories they gave the consent to participate in the research.

Positive narratives were randomly coded with numbers P1 to P30 and negative narratives with N1-N40. To ensure anonymity of the data, any implications to gender and other possible identifying items were removed

when transcribing the data. This was considered important because students could choose whether they wrote about an imaginary or an actual event. The researchers could not know which ones had really happened. When introducing the findings, excerpts from the stories are included to illustrate how students wrote about self-conception and positive learning experiences. We have used the aforementioned coding that reveals whether the story was positive or negative in nature and random numbers given to each story. For example, "Student P1" means student number 1 writing a positive story and "Student N2" means student number 2 writing a negative story.

The data were analyzed first with the method of the analysis of narratives (Polkinghorne, 1995). Similar categories could be found in the data, and therefore, the analysis was strongly data-based. In the second round of analysis, the variation between the two kinds of stories were analyzed according to the idea of MEBS (Eskola, 2010). In addition, attention was paid to how the teacher's action appeared in the data.

When it comes to the reliability of this research, the pros and cons of MEBS should be acknowledged (Särkelä & Suoranta, 2020; Wallin et al., 2019). In this research, the reliability criteria of narrative research were considered (Heikkinen et al., 2012; Salmela & Uusiautti, 2017). According to the criteria, MEBS can produce narratives that describe the multiformity of research participants' perceptions. Although the truth base of these narratives cannot, however, be confirmed in any way, the evocativeness of narratives was evident in this data.

The advantage of MEBS is that it allows the research participants to describe freely their own perceptions and assumptions. As the narratives can also be imaginary, the participants can choose their viewpoint and perspective they include in the narratives. At the same time, the freedom of writing whatever is a challenge: it is possible that the narratives written do not represent truthfully the research participant's experiences or perceptions. However, the interest in this research was to find out what kinds of events the students would include in narratives and how they describe the teacher's action if a teacher was included in the narratives.

It is also worth noticing that the data was obtained during a course of educational psychology in which the students were learning about the concept of self-conception. They were therefore oriented in the topic, which was also evident in the data. For example, some students applied the concepts of "ideal self" or "normative self" in the narratives that were taught at the course. However, since the narratives were concrete in nature and described specific events in the classroom setting, it was concluded that students' familiarity with the concepts did not have a major effect on the data.

Results

Group-related Factors Influencing on Students' Self-Conception

The analysis of which factors influenced positively on students' self-conception in the Finnish university students' stories first brought up the meaning of peers' roles. Peers in the group provided students with positive feedback. This was mentioned in 17 stories by describing the situations that included spurring, admiring, or reciprocal encouraging.

> "Everyone could experience successes and receive good feedback from the teacher and other students too. In times of failure, other students are often spurred." (Student P4)

> "A student who is not very athletic succeeds in hitting the ball and the ball flies faraway. The student gets an experience of success but likely others give positive feedback as well (encouragement, admiration, etc.). This success can strengthen the student's sense of belonging in the team, sense of togetherness..." (Student P12)

> "In elementary school, a student was quite poor in math. - - The student was afraid of failing in front of the class. Another, not so talented student accompanied the student at the whiteboard. Together they managed to solve the math problem and everyone commended how well they did. After that, they both became more courageous to e.g. put up their hands during math lessons." (Student P19)

The notion of the significance of getting positive feedback from peers was evident also in the negative stories. Negative feedback, bad behaviors, and especially bullying were mentioned in stories that highlighted how peers can have an undesired impact on someone's self-conception.

> "Person A enters the classroom alone. There are already plenty of people talking vividly in the classroom. A group of about 8 people stares at Person A and seems to forget their earlier conversation totally. They just look, in that specific manner, like always. Even though they would not say anything, their look tells enough. Person A sits down, and someone in the group starts talking. Someone snickers silently but audibly enough. - - The same continues during the lesson. Little, momentary, almost invisible bullying. - - Person A tries to focus on teaching but thoughts are actually straying on bullying that takes place every day. - -Person A does not want to believe that these strangers' stupid behavior would influence his/her self-conception and self-esteem." (Student N33)

Another finding from the data included descriptions of public humiliation and exclusion. Public humiliation happened mostly in classroom situations in which students were obliged to give presentations or reply to teachers' questions in front of the peers.

> "A student had prepared a presentation carefully and meticulously and practiced presenting at home. However, the student was nervous about presenting and was not able to perform. The student could not say a word while a peer yelled 'would you start already'. Other students started to laugh, and this made the student even more embarrassed. - - The event had a negative influence on the student's self-esteem and the situation felt embarrassing and humiliating." (Student N26)

Those stories that included situations of exclusion or feelings of an outsider concerned mostly working in pairs or teamwork in lessons. Although becoming excluded happens by peers' activities, it is worth noticing that the teacher is one who makes the pedagogical choice of using these types of tasks as a part of teaching.

> "A PE lesson in which two students are selected to build teams. Those who are chosen last are quite definitely feeling inferior. If the same happens repeatedly, their self-esteem as athletes will be ruined." (Student N3)

> "It is time to do teamwork in the class. Student A is excited because the topic pleases him/her. The teacher asks students to form groups of four, and Student A looks around enthusiastically to find peers to complete the task. However, others ignore Student A and soon groups have been formed but Student A is still alone. When asking others if he/she could join the group, Student A gets an answer that 'this group is already full'. The sense of being an outsider fades the joy of learning and makes Student A think what is wrong with him/her. The event has a negative influence on Student A's self-esteem and learning." (Student N14)

Student-related Factors Influencing on Self-Conception

The data revealed that it was not only the peers whose action could influence students' self-conception but also the way the student himself or herself behaved or acted. The influence could be both positive and negative.

Actually, altogether 19 stories included notes about positive actions. Experiences of successes and exceeding expectations provided students with positive feelings of themselves as learners and team members or peers.

> "In the classroom, the student answers right to the teacher's question or for example possesses IT skills that the student uses to help others. --> The experience of success and expertise." (Student M12)

Sometimes students need help for discovering the good in themselves and finding self-fulfillment. The teacher has a great role in pointing out and acknowledging a student's enthusiasm. This kind of positive cycle was described in the following excerpt. The teacher's and other students' behavior supported the student's own perceptions of his or her interests and skills:

> "A student who is not especially good in anything is however very interested in nature. Suddenly the student notices that he/she is doing better than most of the grade. Even though math is not going so well, the student has devoured plenty of information about nature. When the Biology/Math lesson comes, the student answers questions and adds even more details. Other students are amazed and admire the student's knowledge. The teacher notices this too. The student becomes aware of being good at something and is thinking whether the same thing could happen in math, too." (Student P25)

Student-related factors could also have a negative impact. In this data, 14 stories included descriptions of situations in which students felt a lack of abilities or made mistakes. Feelings of shame and frustration are present in these stories. It was also noteworthy that these stories included also students with good grades, showing that self-conception can be threatened among them as well.

> "The student felt confident and did not concentrate on teaching as much as needed. The teacher asks a question, and no one puts their hand up. Trusting that this straight-A student always knows the right answers, the teacher selects the student. Being confident the student answers but it is wrong. The student is ashamed as the teacher is surprised, and peers laugh a bit. The student's self-esteem is shattered." (Student N31)

> "The student's face turns red, and the student gives a wrong answer. Other students in the classroom are giggling and whispering. Then the school bell rings and half of the grade runs out before the teacher has a chance to get them back to their seats. The teacher consoles the student with encouraging words but the student leaves the classroom for the break feeling humiliated and sad." (Student N34)

In addition to one's knowledge and performance at school, there were some stories (n=4) that described a personal feature that makes the student face intolerable situations and experiences of failure. In these stories, others' actions also played a significant role, boosting the negative chain of events and influence on self-conception.

> "Student A had prepared a presentation for a history lesson about WWII. Student A was nervous about presenting but stepped courageously in front of the class. The presentation begins. The class is listening silently. In the middle of the presentation, Student A's stuttering gets worse. - - Soon the whole class laughs. The teacher tries to intervene but does not succeed. Student A runs out from the classroom." (Student N4)

The Teacher-related Factors Influencing the Student's Self-Conception

One of the main themes in the university students' stories was the teacher's activity in the situations that could influence the student's self-conception. Mainly, the teacher's action was related to feedback, disregard, and pedagogical choices.

Altogether 21 stories included notions about positive feedback provided by the teacher. Situations in which the teacher spurred, encouraged, complemented and pointed out good performances were described as extremely significant to the development of positive self-conception.

> "The student does not usually dare to put up their hand or participate during lessons. Once, the student becomes encouraged. - - The teacher compliments the student for a fine answer and participation, in other words putting up hand. Also other students agree. The student's self-esteem becomes strengthened due to the positive feedback." (Student P20)

Instead, the teacher's negative feedback and behaviors were present in stories that described actual negative language, bullying, or unfair or biased treatment of students.

> "As the teacher comes close, Student U panics because has not had time to answer any questions and writes quickly the first numbers that come into mind. - - The teacher stops and points out the book and says in a loud voice. 'No, no, no. Not like this Student U. This is just totally wrong. You have not tried at all. You cannot get answers like this in any way.' Student U felt like crying and would cry if everyone was not staring. The teacher checks the assignments with a red pen in the Student's workbook. Student U does not want to continue doing math assignments. Student U becomes bullied during the break." (Student N35)

> "The presentation ends, and others applaud. The student is satisfied with himself/herself. After the applause ends, the teacher provides feedback. The teacher said that it was impossible to understand what the student said because of the student's speech defect with the letter S. Other students laugh and the student who held the presentation turns to his/her desk perplexed." (Student N2)

In six stories, the teacher's activity appears as mere disregard. This was shown in the stories as the manner of ignoring certain students or their attempts to participate, or as unwillingness to help, encourage, or guide the students.

> "Students put their hands up and tell their opinions, and the teacher and other students respond with positive feedback. Student Q ponders for a long time whether to dare to participate in the conversation. Student Q decides to put up hand and give his opinion. The teacher does not respond positively or negatively, but just passes. Other students sneer, no one comments. This shakes Student Q's self-esteem and self-conception because the student felt telling a relevant point, but the response was devastating." (Student N19)

> "The teacher told the student to come in front of the classroom and find out what was written in the chapter. The student could not do it; other students started to laugh. The teacher did not help the student. The student thought that he/she was bad at English for the rest of his/her life!" (Student N9)

The teacher's pedagogical actions were present in stories that described positive situations in which the teacher acts tactfully and in which the teacher's pedagogical choices were not so successful or were even harmful. Tactful activities illustrated anticipation, flexibility, and courage to do things differently. The teacher's pedagogical skill came forward in these stories clearly.

> "Students share experiences about something that the student finds important but does not dare to share his/her own. The teacher encourages the student carefully to share in a way that is not too pressuring. Eventually, the student tells his/her experience, which is thanked by the teacher. Also, other students provide support and thus boost the student's self-esteem." (Student P18)

> "The normally quiet introvert student is interested in a topic and took some responsibility in the group more than what is typical of the student normally. The teacher notices this when observing teamwork and

supports the student's presentation with questions and makes the student's participation in the presentation thus easier." (Student P23)

Ten stories included descriptions of the teacher's negative pedagogical choices. Mostly the events in these stories included presentations in front of the class and negative attention from the teacher to the student. Some stories also pointed out poor instructions given by the teacher leading to students' inability to perform the tasks well and thus feeling incapable or unskilled.

"The grade is practicing multiplication. The teacher tells everyone to stand up. In turns, the teacher asks multiplications from students who have to answer aloud within 10 seconds. If a student answers correctly, he or she may sit down. Student X is the last one standing. He/she cannot answer correctly even once." (Student N36)

Discussion

This research analyzed how university students of education perceive the formation of self-conception in classroom situations. Based on the analysis, we introduced group-related factors influencing on students' self-conception, student-related factors influencing on self-conception, and the teacher-related factors influencing the student's self-conception. It seemed that the teacher's educational psychological game sense (EPGS) could be named as the defining factor that lies in the intersection of the student-related factors, the group-related factors, and the teacher-related factors (see Figure 1). The teacher has a central role in either supporting or devastating the student's self-conception as the teacher observes his or her own behaviors as well as that of the student and the peers in the classroom or other teaching situations. It appeared in the data as a sort of game sense that was based on educational psychological tact in teaching.

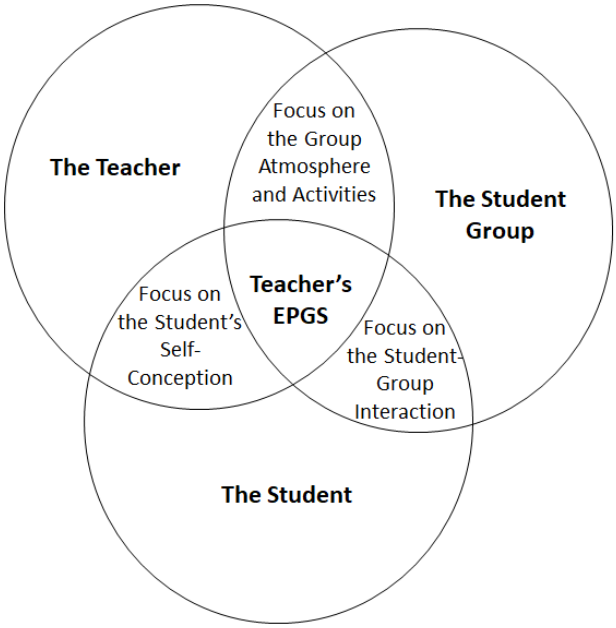

Figure 1. The teacher's Educational Psychological Game Sense (EPGS)

Teachers with EPGS support, encourage, and spur students by noticing their individual strengths and responding to their needs of support. The ability to foresee the students' and the whole grade's needs and choose pedagogically clever and flexible methods provide the foundation for this kind of reflective practice. Zembylas (2007) calls this kind of ability "emotional ecology" which refers to the intersection between emotional intelligence and pedagogical content knowledge.

School environment, teacher's role and teachers' pedagogical skills (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003), overall goals, peer support, teaching-learning models, positive and constructive feedback and self-evaluation impacts and supports students' positive self-conception (Lakkala et al., 2020; Ranta, Uusiautti & Hyvärinen, 2020) even the situation of different perceptions of teachers and students (Petrus, 2018). Because the relationship between students and teachers may remain reciprocal and multidimensional depending on high self-esteem (Schrodt, 2009) and students were privileged by their relationship with their teachers (Newberry & Davis, 2008). Students deal with the situations based on their self-concept depending on their ability to interpret the situation concern with pedagogical insights and skills (Määttä & Uusiautti, 2012) and emotional intelligence (Äärelä, Määttä, & Uusiautti, 2016).

Teamwork was found to positively enforce and strengthen the students' sense of belonging in the team and sense of togetherness and being friends (see also Huppert, 2017). Students' own behavior and actions influence their self-concept both positively and negatively especially on their experience of success and expertise, as they thought and learned that they are unique individuals and analyze their own behavior as looking and judging others (see also Doherty, 2009). Students' discovering and self-fulfillment habits; enthusiasm; disciplined actions; teacher and peer encouragement support the student's own perceptions of how to increase their interests to learn skills (see also Camp, 2011; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

The teacher-related factors influencing the student's self-conception (i.e. teacher's action, feedback, disregard, teachers' positive feedback and pedagogical choices, see also Darling-Hammond et al., 2020) were found to be the prime activities to support, strengthen and enhance student's self-esteem to improve their self-concept and happiness. This finding is supported also by Blazar and Kraft's (2017) study. Teachers' illustration, flexibility, and courage appreciate students to do things differently as they want to increase and enhance their self-efficacy and self-concept depending on academic performance (see also Vasalampi et al., 2020).

Negative feedback, unwanted behaviors, and bullying were found to have a negative impact on health and self-conception of students (see also Lereya et al., 2015; Reijntjes et al., 2010; Swann, et al., 2009; Ttofi et al., 2011). In this research, it was not however possible to analyze possible cultural, socioeconomic, socio-demographic, gender-equality, and cultural value indicators and differences (Bleidorn et al., 2016; Freedman et al., 2016). Public humiliation happened mostly in classroom situations in which students were obliged to give presentations or reply to teachers' questions in front of the peers.

Humiliation is often reported as a very concentrated, painful and negative emotion (Mann et al., 2017). Lack of confidence and peer pressure make the students embarrassed, which negatively affects the student's self-esteem

and self-confidence and leads them towards the feelings of inferiority and ignorance, and fade the joy of learning (see also Mujiyati & Adiputra, 2018). Use of negative language, speaking loudly, inappropriate pedagogical choice, unfair or biased treatment, and bullying by teachers and making laugh of peers discourage students and effects negatively on their self-esteem and self-concept (see also Agir, 2019; Mann et al., 2017; Sedikides & Gregg, 2008). In addition, our findings were in line with Ghazi et al. 's (2016) notions about how miscommunication, ignorance, and criticism from the teacher shake student's self-esteem and self-conception.

Conclusions

In this research, we introduced the teacher's educational psychological game sense (EPGS) and named it as the defining factor that lies in the intersection of the student-related factors, the group-related factors, and the teacher-related factors. In sports, the concept of Game Sense pedagogy (see e.g., Light & Robert, 2010) has been used as a part of coaching. Although game sense per se refers to the understanding about social situations and ability to read others and one's own behaviors and intentions, in a classroom situation we perceive this as a more comprehensive educational psychological phenomenon. EPGS includes the ideas of pedagogical love (e.g., FitzSimmons & Uusiautti, 2013; Määttä & Uusiautti, 2012), pedagogical well-being (see e.g., Lappalainen, Kuittinen, & Meriläinen, 2008; Soini, Pietarinen, & Pyhältö, 2008), and pedagogical tact (see van Manen, 1991). However, it is not just about pedagogy but wider and deeper understanding about the psycho-social tensions and their consequences as a part of teaching activities.

University students understand the importance and relationship of self-expression, self-understanding and self-accommodation to enhance their communication capability depending on their ability to define self-conception (Park, Kim, & Bang, 2016). Successful and intelligent students identify their performance and confidence themselves as learners (Määttä & Uusiautti, 2018; Tuominen et al., 2020) to overcome their deficiencies as a positive and strong indicator depending on their belief about their self-conception, academic abilities and teacher support (Cherng, 2017). Because the positive self-concept of sensible students works in different directions and domains (Marsh & Craven, 2006) which has been explained as a multidimensional (Marsh & O'Mara, 2008) comprises of self-enhancement (Goorin & Bonanno, 2009) and self-protected (Alicke & Sedikes, 2009) entity and phenomena connected with good self-esteem (Trautwein & Möller, 2016). Whereas, the negative self-conception is destructive in many ways (Ng, 2020) and boost pessimistic and negative thinking (Hamm et al., 2018). One outcome of negative thinking is that the chances of failure increase through stress and anxiety connected with negative self-connection (Elphinstone et al., 2020).

This research helps to understand the holistic meaning of positive self-conception. The study introduced a new concept to educational psychological research: teacher's educational psychological game sense (EPGS). It provides new perspectives to the discussion, and also shows that more research is needed on the different dimensions of the concept in order to understand the holistic meaning of self-conception for the positive development of the individual.

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