Abstract

One of the most complex tasks faced by teachers is coping with conflicts with students, parents and staff (Kaluma, 2017; Saitis & Saiti, 2018; Scarparolo & Mayne, 2022; Wolff et al., 2021). This is an almost daily challenge (Manesis et al., 2019) that requires attention, awareness, broad knowledge and training (Corcoran & Tormey, 2013; Erturk, 2022). The research literature indicates that many teachers report a low sense of efficacy for coping with conflicts which they face during their routine work (Jensen et al., 2015). Indeed, it seems that many teachers' professional development programs do not equip teachers with knowledge and skills for optimal management of conflictual events (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017; Shank & Santiague, 2022), and that this is one of the most difficult things to learn (Elliott et al., 2011).

The numerous implications related to teachers' intensive coping with conflicts have also been researched. Studies describe a "reality shock" when beginner teachers meet the educational practice, which is characterized by coping with complex conflicts (Lasater, 2016) and with an emotional load that often leads to burnout (Puertas Molero, 2019), and even to dropout, at high rates, especially during the first years of work (den Brok et al., 2017; Kelly et al., 2019; Shanks, 2022). Senior teachers have experience and a broad range of responses which serve them in their encounter with conflicts, whereas new teachers have difficulties with coping and are in the critical stage of accumulating knowledge and adapting to the role, such that every encounter with a conflictual event gives them an advantage for the next coping (Wolff et al., 2021), since this coping skill is acquired optimally by actually revolving conflicts (Obraztsova, 2018).

One of the approaches that deals with the acquisition of skills through actual experience is the Experiential Learning theory, which includes four stages: concrete experience, a reflective process, the construction of knowledge and an active experience that includes the application of the newly learned knowledge (Kolb, 1984). This concept emphasizes the learner's competence to understand reality through his own experience, to maintain a reflective process and initiate behavioral changes (Bravender & Staub, 2018; McCarthy & McCarthy, 2006; Thelen et al., 2019) and is suitable for different types of learners (Kolb, 2014), in such a way that it perceives knowledge as learned through the transformation of experience (Kolb, 2015; Kolb et al., 2014), connects the learning from the new experience to previous experiences (Burch et al., 2019) and refers to the individual learning process of the experiencer with the understanding that it has a differential effect on different experiencers (Dantas & Cunha, 2020; Sudria et al., 2018).

The simulation experience, based on the theoretical framework of experiential learning (Landon-Hays et al., 2020; Levin, Frei-Landau, Flavian et al., 2023), has become in recent years, an integral part of teacher training and professional development processes (Dotger & Chandler- Olcott, 2022; Levin & Flavian, 2022) and was found to connect between theory and practice (Crownover & Jones, 2018; Resch & Schrittesser, 2023). This learning allows the participant to develop and learn through active experience the many skills required of the teacher, such as classroom management, identifying students at risk, and is accompanied by investigation, reflection and receiving feedback (Bradley & Kendall, 2014; Crookall, 2010). These are a basis for self-observation that aims to raise the awareness of the participants about themselves: to identify their values, attitudes and automatic behaviors, so that they can

increase the range of their possible responses in conflictual situations (Cil & Dotger, 2017; Kok et al., 2018; Zhang et al. al., 2011)

Various aspects of simulative learning have been studied in the research literature, for example: the effect of the simulation on experimenting participants versus its effect on observing participants (Levin, Frei-Landau, & Goldberg, 2023), its effect on learners in online workshops versus learners in face-to-face workshops (Kasperski & Hemi, 2022) , also, experimenting with a different number of simulations (Kasperski, 2023) and the effect of experimenting in different training stages (Iluz et al., 2022). This study poses the question of how the simulation experience affects participants with different social-emotional skills. A topic that has not yet received research attention and has both theoretical and applied implications.

The review of the research literature shows that the social-emotional skills, in which teaching and learning are intertwined (Korthagen, 2017), play a significant role in adapting and expanding the teacher's range of responses to the challenges he experiences on a daily basis (Abe, 2011; Aldrup et al., 2022; McLeskey et al., 2017; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017; von Suchodoletz et al., 2018). These skills play a central role in the experiences of beginner teachers, since the emotional world of the teacher may serve as a valuable psychological and social resource in coping with conflictual events, and because the reflexive tool which is very important for how a person experience and learns from the experience relies to a large extent on emotional skills (Levin & Paryente, 2021; Kok et al., 2008; Sweitzer & King, 2009).

The aim of the present study was to empirically test the influence of learning in education based on a simulation practice for development of beginner teachers' competencies for coping with conflicts. Furthermore, in accordance with the assumption of experiential learning, which places the learner in the center of the

learning, the main research hypothesis was that it will not be possible to understand the contribution of a simulation practice without reference to individual differences between the learners, and to different learning processes between learners with different social-emotional skills. The main aim of the present study was therefore to test the influence of the simulative learning processes on the coping style and sense of efficacy in conflict among beginner teachers, and the contribution of social-emotional competence as a moderator in the learning process. Characteristics of the simulation instrument and its learning-promoting components were also investigated.

The research was carried out using a mixed method design (Huynh, 2019), where the main channel is the quantitative channel. Qualitative data were also collected. The choice of a mixed method design stems from the desire to deepen the understanding of the findings (Dawadi et al., 2021), while the quantitative part was intended to test the effect of the simulation practice, including the contribution of social-emotional skills as a moderating factor, whereas the qualitative part was intended to test the learning processes themselves and in particular the simulation components that support this learning.

The study was carried out as an experimental intervention in a pre-post design. The quantitative part included 85 beginner teachers in their first year of teaching, within the framework of their internship workshop: 50 participants (58.8%) in the intervention group and 35 participants (41.2%) in the control group. The research included an intervention program where the participants in the intervention group participated in a simulation practice in collaboration with the simulation center of HaLev, The Center for Simulation in Education at the Bar-Ilan University Faculty of Education. The simulations simulated conflictual situations from school life and offered the participants an encounter with complex copings vis-à-vis professional actors, under laboratory

conditions, accompanied by a video-based reflexive inquiry that included multidimensional feedback. Within the framework of the intervention, each participant took part in a session of about 4 academic hours in which two scenarios were presented. Each time, the scenario was first presented to the participants, and a volunteer was chosen to participate as the teacher in that conflictual situation. The practice was filmed in closed circuit, and this was followed by reflection and a discussion with the group instructor.

In the quantitative channel of the study, a battery of questionnaires, comprised of six parts, was used: the NSI: Negotiation Strategy Inventory (Reisman, 2006), the ALAS: Active Listening Attitude Scale (Kourmousi et al., 2017), the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1983), the TMMS: Trait Meta Mood Scale (Salovey et al., 1995), the General Appraisals of Conflict Interaction (Peacock & Wong, 1990) and a demographic and professional characteristics questionnaire. The research questionnaires were administered twice, in the intervention group within one month before and after the intervention, and in the control group within one month, without intervention. The qualitative channel included interviews with ten beginner teachers from the intervention group.

The research findings indicate that learning based on simulation has a positive influence in **two domains.** First, it was found that the simulation practice led to an increase in an emotional coping style in conflicts, such that the teachers in the research groups reported on an **increase in expression of emotions** during conflict compared to teachers in the control group who did not report on a change. Second, it was found that the simulation practice led to an **increase in the sense of competence to cope with conflict**, such that teachers in the research group reported a higher sense of competence to cope with conflict after the interventions, whereas no change was found among the

control group. The research group demonstrated a differential effect of increase in the emotional coping style in conflict such that those with low emotional awareness and active listening competence – a high listening approach – expressed a significantly greater increase after the simulation practice.

The quantitative part of the study yielded three important characteristics of simulation learning that support learning: First, it was found that the simulation practice led to an increase in the use of an emotional coping style in conflicts, such that teachers in the intervention group reported on an **increase in the expression of emotions** during the conflict, compared to the teachers in the control group who did not report on a change. Second, it was found that the simulation practice led to **an increase in the sense of efficacy for coping with conflict**, such that the teachers in the intervention group reported a higher competence to cope with a conflict after the practice, while the teachers in the control group did not report on a change.

The research findings make both a theoretical and a practical contribution. Alongside evidence for the effectiveness of experiential learning in the field of education, the research findings support the understanding of differential learning in simulative learning, and the moderating role of active listening, empathy and emotional awareness as social-emotional competencies that influence the extent of learning in the workshop. Furthermore, the research findings expose the components of the simulation that support learning and indicate the uniqueness of the simulation workshop that connects between the content and the process in the simulation practices as significant components that promotes experiential learning. The research findings may also comprise the basis for the development of academic and professional training workshops, in heterogenous groups, that enable connecting between theoretical

learning and development of the skills necessary for work in the field in general and in coping with conflicts in particular.

Since teachers shape their professional identity during the first years, and decide whether to stay in this profession (Karlberg & Bezzina, 2022), the simulation enables unique and meaningful practice for beginner teachers, and has the power to improve their confidence for coping with complex conflictual situations (Barr et al., 2020), reduce the emotional load and the burnout that characterize these years (Puertas Molero, 2019) and perhaps even afford a solution to the disturbing issue of beginner teachers' dropout (Kelly et al., 2019; Shanks, 2022).