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Perceived unfairness in teacher-student conflict situations: students' point of view

Streszczenie

Postrzeganie niesprawiedliwości w klasie koreluje z motywacją i indywidualnymi osiągnięciami ucznia oraz z jego destruktywnym zachowaniem (rezystancją, oszustwem, agresją). Niniejsza praca rozpatruje doświadczenie niesprawiedliwości ucznia postrzegane w sytuacji konfliktu z nauczycielem. Studenci (n = 99) opisali jeden z konfliktów, jaki doświadczyli w trakcie studiów. Doświadczenia postrzeganej niesprawiedliwości, opisane w konfliktach (n = 78) zostały pogrupowane według typu niesprawiedliwości (dystrybucyjna, proceduralna, interakcyjna) i 22 typów nieuczciwego zachowania (Mikula et al., 1990). Badanie wykazało, że niesprawiedliwe ocenianie, manifestacja władzy i zarzuty ze strony nauczycieli były najważniejszymi czynnikami konfliktu z nimi. Ponadto interakcyjna niesprawiedliwość okazała się najbardziej rozkorzeniona w sytuacji konfliktu uczeń-nauczyciel.

Słowa kluczowe

sprawiedliwość dystrybucyjna, sprawiedliwość proceduralna, sprawiedliwość interakcyjna, konflikt uczeń-nauczyciel

Abstract

Student perceptions of injustice in the classroom can evoke destructive behavior, resistance, deception, aggression, and conflict escalation. Our study explores student experiences of unjust teacher behavior in educational settings. Students (N=99) were asked to remember a conflict they experienced during their studies. The conflict descriptions (N=78) were analysed and grouped according to the type of perceived injustice (distributive, procedural, interactional) and 22 issues of unfair behaviour (Mikula et al.,

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1990). Our study revealed that perceived unfair grading, power demonstrations, and accusation were the most important predictors of teacher-student conflicts. Moreover students reported they experienced interactional injustice more frequently than they experienced distributive or procedural injustice.

Keywords

fairness, distributive justice, procedural justice, interactional justice, student-teacher conflict

Introduction

Educational settings are complex and faced with various challenges, and one such important issue deserving special attention is conflict. Conflict is an unavoidable part of human interaction; conflict parties at schools may be students, parents, and staff members. Conflicts among students and teachers also are a natural part of school life. They arise in the classroom, sport hall, lunchroom, library and any place where students and teachers gather, and can be managed and resolved in different ways. Constructively resolved conflict, when participants are satisfied with the process and the outcomes, may help to raise and address problems, deepen mutual understanding and improve and strengthen the relationship among the conflict parties. On the other hand, when conflicts are managed destructively, trying to win by forcing the other party to conceive or eliminate all conflicts from school life by suppressing or denying their existence, they may cause inappropriate behaviour or relationship break. One important aspect in perceived conflict destructiveness is unfairness and injustice.

(In)justice in educational settings has recently been more frequently examined. Fairness is set out to be a key issue in the school context (Donat et al., 2012). Positive justice cognitions positively predict student motivation and affective learning (Chory-Assad, 2002), and have a positive impact on achievement (Dalbert and Stoeber, 2006; Burns and DiPaola, 2013). Students who feel justly treated by their teachers are more likely to accept and adhere to school rules and norms (Gouveia-Pereira et al., 2003), giving higher teacher evaluations (Tata, 1999; Schmidt et al., 2003). Justice experience correlates strongly and positively to school climate and trust (Correia & Dalbert, 2007); it shapes the development of personal believe in a just world (BJW) (Dalbert & Stoeber, 2006).

Contrariwise, conflicts concerning distributive, procedural and interpersonal justice at school may be important in causing distress at school (Correia & Dalbert, 2007). Research in Italian schools indicated that perceived teacher unfairness can significantly predict frequent headaches among early adolescents (Santinello, Vieno, & De Vogli, 2008). Student perceptions of an instructor's injustice are related with students reporting the likelihood of engaging in indirect interpersonal aggression and hostility toward their

instructors (Chory-Assad, 2002; Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004a), also with the likelihood of resisting instructors' requests through revenge and deception (Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004b, Paulsel & Chory-Assad, 2005). Moreover, unjustly treated students are more likely to express bullying behavior (Donat et al., 2012).

Although the existing research is unambiguous in agreement on fairness as being important in the classroom, various studies indicate that felt injustice among school students is not rare (e.g. Israeshvili, 1997; Smith & Gorard, 2012). According to the National Agency for School Evaluation in Lithuania (2014), approximately 20 percent of students have experienced unfairness in school. In particular, they reported, their teachers were unfair in administering punishments and rewards. Since there is a scarcity of research about Lithuanian students' perceptions of unjust and unfair teachers, we have formulated the following research questions: what issues of injustice arise during teacher-student conflicts; what types of injustice do students perceive in various teacher-student conflict situations; and what kind of unjust events can be characterized as the most typical or noticeable in teacher-student conflicts? Studying student unfairness perceptions in different institutional practices and the extent to which students stress fairness might help to understand how they adjust to the demands in the surrounding world (Thorkildsen, 1989).

Theoretical and empirical background

Justice and Conflict. M. Deutsch (2014) stressed a few important aspects existing in relationship between justice and conflict: (a) perceived injustice can be seen as a frequent source of conflict, (b) if parties perceive conflict outcomes as unjust, the resolution is likely to be unstable and give rise to attempts to change situations and to escalate conflict, and (c) conflict may exist about what is „just“, and about which principle of justice should be applied or how a chosen principle should be implemented.

Morton Deutsch described six overlapping focuses of injustice (2014, p. 30): (1) *Distributive injustice* is concerned with the criteria that lead a party to feel they have received an unfair outcome. The equity principle asserts that participants should have benefits in proportion to their contribution; according to the equality principle all members of a group should share its benefits equally, regardless of their needs and individual inputs; the need principle directs that people who need more benefit should get more than those who need less. (2) *Procedural injustice* is concerned with unfair treatment in making and implementing decisions that determine outcome. (3) *The sense of injustice* centres on what factors determine whether an injustice is experienced as such. For people sense that a process is fair generally requires that they believe that it is not partial and stacked against them; that it is relevant to the conflict or complaint they have; that

it is managed credibly, in which they have some voice or otherwise participate; and that it has the capacity to deliver what they want (Mayer, 2012, p. 156). (4) *Retributive and reparative injustice* concerns responses to moral norms violations and to how to the moral community that has been violated may be repaired. (5) *Moral exclusion* is concerned with who is included in the moral community and who is thought to be entitled to fair outcomes and fair treatments. (6) *Cultural imperialism* occurs when a dominant group imposes its values, norms, and customs on subordinated groups so that those subordinated members find themselves defined by the dominant group, and feel pressure to conform to and internalize the dominant group's stereotypical images. All these themes can be identified in various teacher-student conflict situations.

One theoretical framework to understand an event as fair or unfair is fairness theory (Folger & Cropanzano, 2001). Fairness theory focuses on the mental processes by which individuals compare current circumstances to some other referential situation and hold other people accountable for events that have a negative impact on their own psychological or physical well-being. It stresses accountability judgments (attribution of another's control over outcomes) and counterfactual thinking (mental comparison of person's current state to possible alternatives) on fairness perceptions. According to fairness theory, accountability has three components: (a) harm or negative consequences; (b) discretionary action attributable to another person; and (c) violation of prevailing normative or ethical behavioural standards. These three accountability components are necessary for blame allocation and sense of unfairness. According to fairness theory, a student will perceive a situation as unfair if she or he gets an unsatisfactory grade and believes that the teacher acted unethically (this action violates some moral or ethical normative standard), and that grade was in the teacher's discretionary control. So, student perceived teacher unfairness can be seen as a source of conflict in this grading situation. In different educational situations the importance of negative outcomes for a student varies, and attributing responsibility to the teacher as well as in perceiving violated standards can lead to different understandings and different behavioural responses.

Recently, some authors point out that not only do legal justice and fairness refer to different ideas, but justice and fairness refer to related — but distinct — concepts. They state that “justice should be defined as adherence to rules of conduct, whereas fairness should be defined as individuals' moral evaluations of this conduct” (Goldman & Cropanzano, 2015). In such an understanding, classroom justice should refer to events in the classroom environment that are morally required and involve normative standards, whether rules of appropriate conduct are followed and obeyed. Fairness should refer to a subjective assessment or evaluation of these events and whether the events as implemented are morally praiseworthy. People usually equate fair processes with ones that reflect a clear set

of standards, that are transparent, and that are applied in an equitable manner. Adherence to rules of justice should promote fairness perceptions. According to such understanding, injustice and unfairness can be understood as distinct but related sources of conflict. In the conflict context, many researchers tend to treat as synonymous the terms “justice” and “fairness”, and these terms are often used interchangeably (Maiese, 2013). Students can frame justice issues in terms of fairness and invoke principles of justice and fairness to explain their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with teacher behaviour.

Prior studies on (in)justice in educational setting. One important issue is developmental differences in fairness perception. In a pioneer study, Thorkildsen (1989) identified five levels involving progressively differentiated conceptions of fairness in educational setting: 1) equality of rewards; 2) equality in completed schoolwork quantity; 3) learning equality; 4) equity learning as partially differentiated from learning equality; 5) equity learning. Students in upper grades favoured the ‘acceleration’ practice (which fits equity rules: each student progresses at his or her own rate, based on capability) more strongly than those in lower grades. But it was found that learners across age groups believed ‘peer-tutoring’ (after fast learners finish a given task, they help slow learners) and ‘enrichment’ (after fast learners finish their task, they enrich themselves through other activities) to be the most just; and the practice where ‘all move on, slow ones never finish’ (fast learners advance with no regard for slow ones) to be the least just.

The equality norm was found to be considered by students ranging in age from 14 to 19 as most just in Dalbert and colleagues’ study (2007). Researchers who investigated which grading system – criterion-referenced, norm-referenced or individual-referenced – school students considered to be just, reported that students evaluated criterion-referenced grading as the most just grading. The study provides empirical support for Thorkildsen’s notion (1989), revealing that from 10 years to about 18 years fairness means equal learning, and about 18 students favoured equity of learning. Chory- Assad and Paulsel (2004b) explored the dynamic of fairness perception noting that students may evaluate their grading fairness by comparing them both 1) to the grades they expected to receive, or to the grades they felt they deserved, 2) and to the grades received by their peers. Comparative judgements about teacher behaviour were also highlighted by Gouveia-Pereira and colleagues (2003). The authors claimed that comparisons with peers in adolescence take on a more significant role than in adulthood.

When considering teachers’ concern for fairness it was displayed that „fairness depends on a teacher’s knowledge and ability“ (Tierney, 2014, p. 62). Qualitatively studying teacher fairness revealed different attitudes when along with equal treatment the differentiation for individual needs („what is the best for the student“, p. 61) and opportunities („where the student is, what the student is capable of doing, what they can real-

istically demand“, p. 62) is underlined as well. Thus the evidence is in line with Thorkildsen, who drew the importance of balance between equality and equity.

Dalbert and Stoeber (2006) described school as a sphere in which students encounter important distribution decisions. Distributive justice arises in connection with who gets what grades and who gets the teacher's attention (Chory-Assad & Paulsel, 2004). According to Houston and Bettencourt (1999), fairness perceptions take evaluative feedback and recognition, opportunities for learning, access to information, distribution of workload, and the application of standards in the classroom. Horan et al. (2010) reported four categories in which students perceived that their instructors distributed unfairly: grades, opportunities to improve grades, instructor affect and punishments.

Procedural and interactional injustice are investigated in the educational setting as well. Chory-Assad (2007) identified three processes in the instructional context dealing with procedural justice. The first process includes ways assignments are graded, the second involves the instructor's methods for conducting class, and the third draws up policies for student behaviour. Fair methods in conducting class is expanded in Horan et al.'s study (2010) who developed a nine-category classification system concerning procedural injustice. Besides grading procedures it covers other issues such as makeup/late policies, scheduling/workload, information for exams, feedback, instructor error, not following through with promises, class procedures, and not enforcing policies. Houston and Bettencourt (1999) supported the notion that fairness deals with actions concerning the accuracy and clarity of information provided to students regarding the class and exams.

Researchers as well demonstrated that the opportunity to appeal a decision is seen as procedurally fair. In line with this evidence Schmidt with colleagues (2003) explored that allowing students to have a voice in classroom situations will increase their perceptions of their professor's fairness. The results suggest that the students viewed the voice condition as a process by which they could provide meaningful input that would actually be considered by the decision maker. According to Schmidt and colleagues' studies (2003), adequate justification leads to a higher perception of fairness than inadequate justification. It is interesting that students whose professor provided no justification rated the professor's fairness most highly. A no-justification procedure evokes a higher perception of fairness than when justification is included. Other important professorial actions in this category deal with mistakes and a professor's response to those mistakes. Mistakes are seen as procedurally unfair because the professors' actions have such a strong impact on grade outcomes (Houston and Bettencourt, 1999).

Interactional justice refers to the fairness and quality of interpersonal treatment that individuals receive when procedures are implemented. Some researchers include interactional fairness as procedural fairness type (e.g. Gouveia-Pereira et al., 2003), whereas

others consider it as a separate but related construct (e.g. Houston and Bettencourt, 1999). As Chory-Assad (2002) argued, interactional justice comprises two factors. Conveying information clearly and unambiguously is one, while interplaying with dignity and respect is the second. In the classroom, interactional justice deals with the extent to which students are communicated to respectfully and politely, and openly by their teachers. Evaluations of the instructor's interactional justice concerns whether the instructor considers students' opinions, listens to their concerns, and communicates in a non-condescending manner with them (Chory-Assad, Paulsel, 2004 a). Houston and Bettencourt (1999) have evidenced individual respect and impartiality to be important interactional fairness elements. Moreover, qualitative study results revealed that interactional fairness covers professorial conduct in interpersonal interactions, which are displayed by going beyond the call of duty to help students, and being interested in student learning. Results of Horan and colleagues' study revealed that interactional justice issues included insensitivity/rudeness, stating or implying stupidity, sexist/racist/prejudiced remarks, singling out students, accusing students of wrongdoing, and instructor affect.

As the above review reveals, distributive, procedural and interactional justice issues are complex constructs that may be represented by many different variables. One approach seeks to define descriptors and variable definitions, another investigates variables dealing with justice reasoning; still another examines fairness as a function of other variables. Our research examines fairness issues. It seeks to determine students' experiences of distributive, procedural, and interactional injustice.

Method

Participants

Participants were 99 students attending an optional course "Fundamentals of Conflict Studies" at Mykolas Romeris University. Participation in the study was voluntary, and students had time in class to complete the task. They were asked to remember a conflict they experienced during their studies. The conflict memories form included free space for describing the conflict and questions to collect the following information: who was involved in the conflict, when did it happen, what the conflict was about, what strategies were used to try to resolve the conflict, and how the conflict was solved. Students had the possibility to recollect any conflict they were involved in at an educational setting. Responses that did not provide a sufficient detail were eliminated. Ninety-nine descriptions of conflicts were collected; the student-teacher conflicts were under consideration (N=78; 79%) in the article. Remembered teacher-student conflicts were from primary school (N=3, 4%), institution of lower secondary education (N=17, 22%), insti-

tution of upper secondary education (N=17, 22%), and university (N=41, 53%). Most participants described recently occurring conflicts with university staff.

Procedure

Firstly, the conflict descriptions were analysed and grouped according to type of perceived injustice. The researchers classified conflict cases into three groups, according to the student's perceived injustice (distributive injustice, procedural injustice, interactional injustice). Secondly, remembered conflicts were classified according issues of unfair behaviour. Prototypical situations or events which elicit the sense of injustice were used for this analysis. The behaviour patterns occurring in conflict situations were classified according the classification system developed by Mikula, Petri and Tanzer (1990). Researchers defined 22 types of events-examples which had elicited a sense of injustice. All the issues describe the context within which injustice feelings arise: 1) Breaking agreements; 2) Disregarding others' feelings, needs and desires; 3) Taking advantage of other; not doing one's share; 4) Betraying confidences; 5) Talking behind somebody's back; 6) Lying; 7) Making fun of another person; 8) Reproach, accusation; 9) Putting one's interests first; 10) Meddling; leading a person on a string; 11) Punishment; 12) Cheating; 13) Stealing; 14) Unfriendly or impolite treatment; 15) Abusive or aggressive treatment; 16) Not admitting one's errors; 17) Arbitrariness and bureaucratic treatment by institutions, office holders, or authorities; 18) Examinations, grading; 19) Failure to recognize performance or effort; 20) Goods and benefits distribution; 21) Unbalanced judgemental behaviour; 22) Demonstrating power and superiority.

We two researchers (the first and the second author) first classified types and the events independently from each other. Where there was a difference between the researchers' interpretation of data, consensus was reached though discussion.

Results

Results indicate that students reported they experienced interactional injustice more frequently than they experienced distributive or procedural injustice. In addition, students reported both conflicts covered behaviour that violated a single type of justice, and conflicts covered behaviour that violated two or even three types of justice. Frequencies for injustice types are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Frequencies for types of justices violated in teacher-student conflict situations

Type of justice	Proc. (N)	Examples of descriptions
Distributive	15 (12)	The tasks of colloquium were different for the two groups. The second group received a more difficult task and had to analyse more complicated situations. My grade was low. The results for all groups were very disappointing (code 97).
Procedural	13 (10)	The teacher scolded me for being late to a lesson. I explained that the bus was late. She angrily shouted that I needed to get up early. Finally, the teacher allowed us to sit (code 3).
Interactional	23 (18)	I performed the task. But in the teacher's opinion, I did not understand the task properly. The teacher began to insult me. I asked her to clarify the task criteria. She ignored the request and did not explain the task (code 18)
Distributive + procedural	12 (9)	I received a very low grade for my homework. Other students did not receive such a low grade. The teacher threatened me and said that next time I would receive a low grade because of such homework (code 94).
Distributive + interactional	16 (12)	I asked the teacher to explain the issue once again as it was too difficult to understand. I did not receive the requested aid but only a reply with a promise that I would certainly fail the exam (code 32).
Procedural + interactional	14 (11)	Each lecture began with a checklist of questions from the earlier material. In my opinion it was the wrong start. It was very stressful for me. I said it. But the Professor did not listen to my opinion, just ignoring it (code 34).
Distributive + procedural + interactional	8 (6)	There was an examination. Sixty students wrote case analyses. The teacher came up to me and told me that for me the exam was over, and I would have to leave the room. The teacher said that my behaviour was not appropriate, because I was talking. I tried to explain that somebody else was talking, not me. The teacher did not listen, and made me leave the room (code 55).
Total	100 (78)	

Overall the interactional justice category was reported most frequently. There were 46 conflict situations (60%). In line with the study by Mikula et al. (1990), a considerable part of the unjust events did not concern distributional or procedural issues in the narrow sense but referred to the manner in which students were treated in interpersonal interactions. The researchers explained this tendency by concluding that interpersonal treatment is a subject of justice judgments in all kinds of relationships, while distributive and procedural matters are more typically justice judgments in (formal as well as informal) social relationships with unequal power. Our study questions this conclusion indicating that for students fair relations with teachers seem to be the most salient and important.

Figure 1. Frequencies of unfair teacher behaviors.

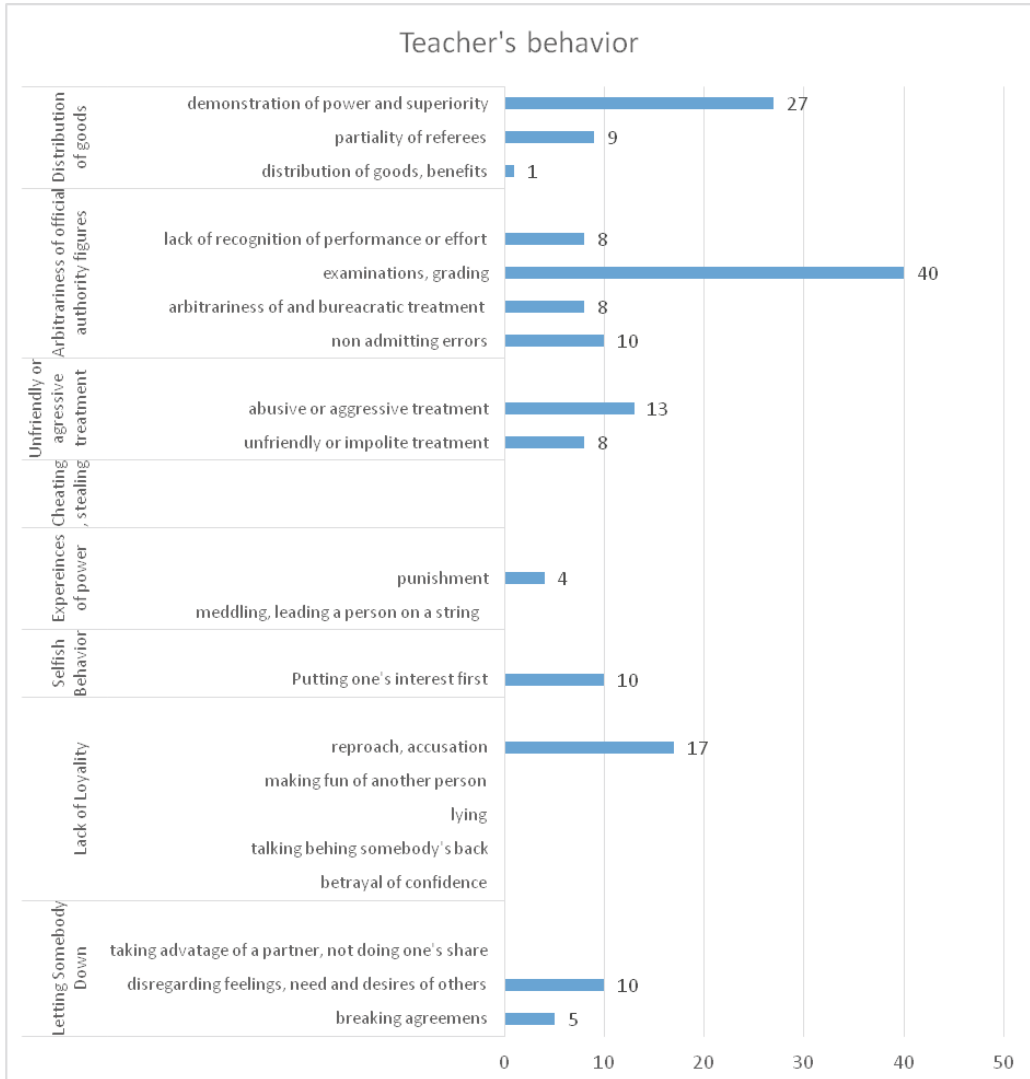


Figure 1 contains frequencies of certain unfair teacher behaviours. The most frequently reported unfair behaviour was in *examination, grading* situations (40% of teacher-student conflict cases). Teacher-student conflicts in grading situations, when students feel that they are the victims of unfair grading seem to be one of the most typical events in students' conflict memories. In line with prior studies (e.g. Israelashvili, 1997) the investigation indicates that improving the grade system may have meaningful positive implication on teacher-student conflict prevention. Findings in Sweden's schools indicated that when teachers failed to follow current grading system guidelines, used undependable information, allowed themselves to be influenced by personal notions and ex-

pectations, showed partiality in disagreement, or were ambiguous in their communication, students perceived the grading process as unfair (Alm & Colnerud, 2015).

Behavioural reaction labelled as '*demonstration of power and superiority*' was reported less frequently than grading. This action was mentioned in almost one fourth of reported conflicts. School was described by Resh and Sabbagh (2014) as one of the first institutions with which children begin to understand institutional authorities. On the other hand, unfair treatment, in particular, demonstrating power, may result in a losing legitimate authority (Santinello et al., 2011). Moreover, researchers have warned that inequality in power relations between teachers and students can cause inequality in power relations between students. The relationship between teacher unfairness and bullying can be described as a chain reaction moving downward in the hierarchy of power in class settings. It is also evidenced in prior studies that within asymmetric student-teacher relationships anger, helplessness, frustration, and dissatisfaction become more pronounced and stable (Umlauf & Dalbert, 2010, cited in Peter et al., 2013).

The teacher's unfair '*accusation*' was identified in almost a fifth of cases (17%). Almost every tenth teacher-student conflict referred to the teacher's actions, which were perceived by students as unjust or unfair whenever the teacher disregarded a student's feelings, needs, and desires, put his/her interest first, was unfriendly or aggressive toward the student, did not admit to student errors, was partial, lacked recognizing a student's performance or efforts, or treated a student arbitrarily. The findings are in line with those of prior studies. The most frequently experienced unjust events in Mikula et al.'s study (a sample comprising 280 students from Austria, Bulgaria, Finland and West Germany) were 'reproach, accusation' (12.1%), and 'putting one's interests first' (12.1%). With a sample comprising 233 students from 1st grade, 7th grade, and 9th grade from various school throughout Israel, Israelashvili (1997) reported 'experiences of parental power,' 'arbitrariness of official authority figures,' and 'distributions of goods and benefits' to be the most nominated unjust types.

It is worthwhile to note, that there were seven of 22 actions not cited in students' descriptions of teacher-student conflicts such as cheating, stealing, meddling, lying, talking behind somebody's back, betraying confidences, and taking advantage of a student. They as well were not underlined in Horal et al.'s study (2010). Similar to Horan and colleagues' study (2010) most indicated in this study teacher behaviours were related to how instructors graded classroom work/assignments.

Mikula et al. (1990: 140) suggested clustering the 22 categories into eight general types of unjust events. The clusters labelled as 'letting somebody down' contains 'breaking agreements' and 'disregarding others' feelings, needs and desires, and 'taking advantage of a partner; not doing one's share'. The cluster concerning 'lack of loyalty' includes vari-

ous insincerity forms ('betraying confidences', 'talking behind somebody's back', 'lying') and lacking acceptance ('poking fun at another person', 'reproaching, accusing'). The other cluster includes selfish behaviour. One more cluster relates to events where adults exercised or tried to exercise influence and power. This cluster is made up from 'meddling, leading a person on a string', or 'punishment'. One more cluster combines cheating and stealing. The next cluster includes all events relating to unfriendly, impolite and aggressive treatment of people. The cluster 'arbitrariness of office-holders and official authority figures' relates mainly to procedural and partly also to distributional issues, and combines 'arbitrariness of superiors', 'arbitrariness and bureaucratic treatment by authorities' and 'unfair examinations and grading' or 'failure to recognize performance or effort'. Finally, 'goods and benefits distributions, focusing more strongly on the social comparative feature than on events just mentioned, constituted an independent cluster. The eight-cluster solution depicts a meaningful grouping of lower level clusters and provides hints as to the main injustice types that occur in differing encounters and relationships. Each type's frequency in the present data is also presented in Figure 1. Data reveal that 'arbitrariness of official authority figures,' and 'goods and benefits distributions of' are the most nominated unjust event types in the 78 Lithuanian student-sample.

Discussion

The present study inquired into justice-related perceptions in educational settings by examining conflict issues. It was based upon the assertion that students describing their conflicts with teachers might provide an additional key to understanding how justice functions in the classroom. Our study investigated what issues arise during teacher-student conflicts; what types of injustice do students perceive in various teacher-student conflicts; what unjust events can be characterized as most typical or noticeable in teacher-student conflicts.

While discussing the findings, limitations need to be reported. The first limitation concerns the sample. It is small and very homogeneous in terms of age and educational background. Future research is needed to examine how generalized our study results can become. The second limitation relates to the research tool. Respondents were asked to describe the conflict situation, and in many cases they did not specify enough details to explain exactly how they felt and how they accepted injustice in their situations. Other study results show that there is an association between (in)justice and emotion. For example, attributing blame mediated the relationship between fairness perceptions and outward-focused negative emotions (e.g., anger and hostility), and outward-focused emotion mediated the relationship between fairness perceptions and retaliation (Barclay et al., 2005).

Our investigation provides information on main types and clusters unjust teacher-student conflicts based on of Mikula et al.'s conception (1990). Among the various teacher misbehaviours reported in students' narratives were actions interpreted as unjust: arbitrariness, unfair goods distribution, unfriendly or aggressive treatment, no loyalty, and letting students down. Our study indicated that students often perceived teachers' behaviour as a source of student-teacher conflicts. Students reported that perceived teacher unfairness was the cause for their behavioural response and conflict escalation. Our study supported the theoretical assumption that justice affects conflict behaviour. This study revealed that perceived unfair grading, demonstrations of power, and accusation were the most important predictors of teacher-student conflicts.

Moreover conflicts are argued to be related to more than one classroom (in)justice type. Conflicts arguably become complex experience complains of distributive, and/or procedural, and/or interactional justice issues. Although teacher-student conflicts demonstrate unique variance in all three classroom justice types, they contributed most to explaining the variance in perceived interactional justice.

The research highlighted the conflict resolution skills both for teachers and students to be critical for teacher-students justice conflict outcomes, which as prior research indicated affect students' school careers (e.g., Chory-Assad, 2002). Teacher conflict behaviour may be especially hurtful for students and experienced to be unjust as well. According to Chory-Assad and Paulsel (2004 a) students respond to teachers' unfair treatment with behaviour that inflicts a similar amount of harm on teachers as the students have experienced. In classroom practice, our findings suggest that in order to avoid destructive conflicts teachers should be alert to students' understanding of justice.

Investigating teacher behaviour affecting student outcomes is important in preparing and training teachers. If teachers want to act in a just manner, they must know which behaviour is experienced as just and as unjust by their students. This can be achieved (a) by considering the knowledge of the educational-psychological justice research for teacher training and self-improvement, (b) by applying this knowledge in the lessons and create, for example, an open-discussion climate which enables the students to express their opinions and feelings, and (c) by complementing their own perspective with the perspective of their students (Peter et al., 2013, p. 1232). A general conclusion that may be drawn from the above study is that according to students' viewpoints, teachers may promote justice perceptions in classes by being less arbitrary, equitable in assessing individual and group results, showing impartiality in interacting with students, and being more skilled in class conflict management.

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