



## Research paper

# Creative Drama and Forum Theatre in initial teacher education: Fostering students' empathy and awareness of professional conflicts



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## ABSTRACT

Two studies examined the impact of a programme that used Creative Drama and Forum Theatre on the social, emotional, and ethical skills of student teachers. The first study qualitatively analysed 49 teaching conflict situations devised by 280 students. The second analysed the programme's effect on 626 students' empathy and perception of their teaching-learning processes. The types of conflicts, contexts, and ethical dilemmas involved were categorised. Pedagogical tools and their effect on self-knowledge, perspective-taking, and socio-moral sensitivity and reflection were favourably assessed. The emotional understanding component of empathy significantly improved. The results support a more comprehensive training of future teachers.

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## 1. Introduction

Conflict is part of school interpersonal relationships, which are essential in the teaching profession, and often affects the quality of teaching and relationships and the well-being of the entire educational community (Newland et al., 2019; Rodríguez-Mantilla & Fernández-Díaz, 2017; Rudasill et al., 2018). However, interpersonal conflicts are not the only types of conflicts that can be distressing; internal moral imperatives in conflict with one another can also cause moral stress, with the ensuing consequences for teaching practice and associated feelings such as burnout (Colnerud, 2015).

Social, Emotional, and Ethical (SEE) learning provides an opportunity for student teachers in Higher Education (HE) to seek self-improvement and prepare for coping with the conflicts inherent in teaching (Buxarraís et al., 2015; Escámez et al., 2008; Malm, 2009; Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2011).

The contribution of empathy to responsible decision-making has been extensively studied within the context of social and emotional skills training (Hoffman, 1992, 2002). Despite the various existing controversies (Prinz, 2011), there seems to be a consensus that empathy (or empathic concern) is a source of other moral emotions that have a great motivational force and consequent

positive actions (Etxebarria, 2020; Read, 2019; Stocks et al., 2009). Bouton (2016) reviewed some studies on the role that empathy plays in teaching (2016) and concluded it should be part of initial teacher training programmes to enable student teachers to learn to manage pupil diversity and develop their social and moral skills. Thus, there is a need to reinforce empathy as an important part of SEE education, given its usefulness in coping with the conflicts typically found in the teaching profession (Fernández Domínguez et al., 2009; Murphy et al., 2018; Whitford & Emerson, 2019).

Drama-based strategies are increasingly used to do this. These strategies include Creative Drama (CD) (García-García et al., 2017) and Forum Theatre (FT), both of which are based on the Theatre of the Oppressed (Boal, 2006). In CD students fully engage in emotional, intellectual, verbal, and social processes, as it involves their taking on other people's roles and deepening their perception of the world; and in doing so, they become aware of different human values and problems (Gonen & Veziroglu, 2010). For Zillman (1994) and Slade (1998), empathy is an essential part of drama, as it involves putting ourselves in the situation of others, comparing their moods, motives, and character. Drama also compels people to communicate with the group, thus developing interpersonal intelligence (Gardner, 1999). The methodology of the Theatre of the Oppressed has been used to cultivate empathy through dramatic experimentation, where the spectator becomes a spect-actor and explores different alternatives for understanding and solving issues (Corsa, 2021). Neuroscientists have found new links between the imagination, high-quality learning, high-quality thinking processes

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and drama (Baldwin, 2004). Along the same lines, novel biological evidence has been provided for the impact of drama-based improvisation (Seppänen et al., 2021). Despite cognitive awareness of fictionality, dramatised social rejections elicited psychophysiological reactivity, indicating emotional arousal and negative valence.

The research question in this paper is focused on assessing the impact that a CD and FT based programme would have on SEE learning among student teachers. The first hypothesis is that the programme will raise student teachers' awareness about the conflicts in their profession. The second hypothesis is that the programme will have a positive effect on student teachers' empathy and on their assessment of the teaching-learning process itself.

The theoretical framework for this article builds on several key concepts and provides an overview of the conflicts faced by practising teachers. It then goes on to identify the importance of SEE learning for student teachers by using various pedagogical resources, in particular, CD and FT.

## 2. Theoretical background

### 2.1. Conflicts in the teaching profession

Conflict has been defined as a situation in which an interaction system has two incompatible goals (Galtung, 1965). In intrapersonal conflict, a person has two or more incompatible goals, that is, they have a dilemma. An ethical dilemma involves a choice between two or more courses of action, when obstacles on either side make it difficult to decide which course to follow (Berlak & Berlak, 1981; cited in Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2011). In contrast, interpersonal conflict entails an opposition between the constituent parts of an interactive system (Barrios, 2016), and can be understood either as something negative, or as a process in the individual's socialisation, development, and moral education. Fransson and Grannäs (2013) conceptualised this situation as a dilemmatic space in the context of teaching practice and the interpersonal relationships that ensue.

Therefore, there may be ethical implications for the events that are part of intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts. We can speak of an ethical conflict or a 'critical ethical incident' when a situation involves a need for reflection on its underlying ethical meaning and can be deemed to be a turning point (Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2016).

Conflicts in the teaching profession have attracted a great deal of research interest, as shown by the efforts to discern and categorise them (Berkowitz, 1995; Colnerud, 1997; Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2011; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005; Veugelers & Vedder, 2003; Windschitl, 2002; Yin, 2015; Zhu et al., 2019).

Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) used multiple paradigms to approach educational dilemmas: (1) the ethic of justice; (2) the ethic of critique; (3) the ethic of care; and (4) the ethic of the profession. This model provides a broad perspective for dealing with conflicts caused by complex ethical dilemmas. Along these lines, Escudero (2011) added a fifth type of ethic to these four, namely, the ethic of community, developed by Furman (2004). He defined them as follows: (1) the ethic linked to the value of justice involves the recognition of, and commitment to, the right to education, and leads teachers to combat school dropout, and social and educational inequalities; and to make organisational and pedagogical decisions that encourage cognitive, personal and social learning; (2) social and critical educational awareness involves critically analysing the aspects that are conducive to education as a locus for reproducing or transforming inequalities; (3) care, support, responsibility and personalised education derive from the cultivation of values emanating from the ethic of care; (4) training and professional development entails constantly developing teaching skills and pedagogical renovation projects; and (5)

involvement in, and commitment to, the community refers to values such as real participation, an open institutional dialogue which includes the families and the community. The ethic of community makes the entire paradigm possible, as it concerns the active involvement of teachers through projects that facilitate the participation of students, families, and other community agents.

Shapira-Lishchinsky (2011) identified five main categories of ethical dilemmas by analysing teachers' critical incidents: (1) caring climate and formal climate, when the teacher's dilemma lies in choosing between personal needs and obeying school rules; (2) distributive justice—rewards appropriate for effort—and school standards which follow clear criteria regarding decision-making at school; (3) confidentiality versus school rules, which depicts the dilemma between teachers' desire to be discreet and their obligation to obey school rules; (4) loyalty to colleagues and school norms; and (5) the educational agenda of the pupil's family versus the school's educational standards. In this classification the formal aspect of schools was a component of all ethical dilemma categories (school rules, school norms, school standards, educational standards), denoting its importance in teachers' decision-making.

Several studies on conflicts faced by teachers have identified the relationships between influential agents in work placement education (mainly in teacher-student and teacher-teacher relationships) that often experience conflict situations, specifying their main controversies (e.g., Aultman et al., 2009; Levin, 2002; Lindqvist et al., 2020; Tahull & Montero, 2015).

Previous studies have shown a consensus that initial teacher training should help prepare student teachers so that, when faced with conflicts, they can choose a course of action that enhances their work and their well-being (e.g., Colnerud, 2015; Davies & Heyward, 2019; Ehrich et al., 2011; Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2011).

### 2.2. Social, emotional, and ethical (SEE) skills in initial teacher training to deal with conflicts in the teaching profession

Literature reviews of initial teacher education have identified some gaps regarding the moral character of education and the professional ethics of teachers (Bolívar, 2005). They have also found that unequal attention has been paid to social and emotional skills education (López-Goñi & Goñi, 2012). Although it is a requirement for initial teacher training curricula, this has not resulted into the development of specific socio-emotional skills subjects and content (Ávila Francés, 2016). Additionally, SEE education in teacher training curricula in different European countries (Germany, Spain, France, England, and Portugal) gives priority to interpersonal and communication skills, followed by professional development skills. On the contrary, intrapersonal skills receive minimal attention and are practically non-existent in the curricula in some countries (López-Goñi & Goñi, 2012). This contrasts with findings that personal growth and balance foster healthy and lasting professional development (Palomera et al., 2008; Mérida-López et al., 2017; Mérida-López & Extremera, 2017).

SEE education for teachers comprises contents, methodological principles, and effective techniques to promote SEE skills and an interest in ongoing training. The SEE skills that have been identified as being essential for teachers can be based around intrapersonal, interpersonal, decision-making, and responsible behaviour skills (e.g., Collaborative for Academic, Social, & Emotional Learning, CASEL, 2005; Bisquerra, 2005; Buxarrais et al., 2015; Fernández Domínguez et al., 2009). Intrapersonal skills lead to self-knowledge and involve self-awareness and self-management abilities related to learning to be and become a balanced role model both at school and in life. Interpersonal skills to establish and maintain satisfactory relationships include competences related to being and living together, such as empathy. Finally, decision-

making skills and responsible behaviour in personal and professional contexts foster a successful adaptation to the environment and promote the well-being of teachers and pupils. They concern the ability to take action and master how to be and live together. The capacity for socio-moral reflection enables a critical understanding of reality and a commitment to ethical and moral reasoning, which are essential for dealing with ethical conflicts.

Several principles are used in the design of interventions to effectively strengthen SEE skills. These are characterised by their sequential contents and the use of active methodologies, which are focused on distinct constructs and specifically linked to each social and emotional skill (Durlak et al., 2011). The intervention model based on the framework of adult emotional intelligence proposes various good practices aimed at fostering assessment and reflection, guided experience, transfer, ongoing support, and follow-up evaluation (Kornacki & Caruso, 2007). The specific proposals made for teacher training include personal experiential training, theoretical education about the conceptual framework of emotions, and the acquisition and teaching of socio-emotional skills (e.g., Bisquerra, 2005; Fernández Domínguez et al., 2009).

Approaches to values education have emphasised the need to provide university students with a solid ethical foundation, both as individuals and as group members (Buxarrais et al., 2015). Dialogue has been identified as an essential part of ethics education, not only as a procedure but also as a value in itself, since it is a means of promoting one's autonomy and respect for the other (Veugelers, 2008; Veugelers & Vedder, 2003). Students are therefore invited to practise and optimise their argumentation and critical thinking skills in order to apply them to life decisions, construct their own sense of morality, make ethical decisions, and participate in a democratic society as citizens (Buxarrais et al., 2015; González-Geraldo et al., 2017; Puig et al., 2011). Furthermore, promoting moral sensitivity and self-knowledge seeks to provide an understanding of values, and encourage the ability to identify, be aware of, and feel those situations where values are at stake (Buxarrais et al., 2015).

Evidence from SEE skills education notably draws on programmes based on ethical dilemmas, Problem-Based Learning (PBL), and teachers' critical incidents, as they contribute to solving professional conflicts. The use of moral dilemmas as a didactic strategy in HE leads students to reflect on and analyse different perspectives in depth, respecting and evaluating arguments that differ from their views, and therefore mobilises critical thinking skills (Aalberts et al., 2012; Briones and Lara, 2016). Some studies have shown their potential even for moving towards a post-conventional morality (Lozano et al., 2006; Meza, 2008; Suárez & Meza, 2008) and for forming the identity of student teachers, thanks to the emotional and ethical experiences they give rise to (Zhu et al., 2019). These approaches based on moral dilemmas, or an educational treatment of conflict, are usually accompanied by a socio-emotional approach that employs other methodologies (e.g., cooperation dynamics, dialogic literary gatherings). These methodologies foster awareness and an understanding of the global situation (Torrego et al., 2018), self-esteem, and (the fantasy and empathic concern components of) empathy (Palomera et al., 2017).

Using PBL in HE has also helped develop critical thinking (Hincapié Parra et al., 2018; Núñez-López et al., 2017; Quintero et al., 2017). Four central learning processes are involved here, namely, learning to learn (associative memory and critical thinking); learning to do (conflict resolution); learning to live together (group work); and learning to be (fostering autonomy, judgement, social and personal responsibility, respect) (Di Bernardo et al., 2004; cited in Núñez-López et al., 2017). Teachers' critical incident-based education programmes contribute to awareness and understanding of the ethical dilemmas faced in

teaching. This may be useful for student teachers to better cope with critical incidents in the future (Levin, 2002; Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2011). Richards and Farrell (2010, cited in Joshi, 2018) pointed out that this analysis contributes to increased self-awareness, poses critical questions about teaching, and brings beliefs to the level of awareness, among other forms of learning. Therefore, some in-depth research has been conducted on the specific actions needed for critical incident analysis to lead to successful teacher professional development (Joshi, 2018).

The research reviewed highlights the need for initial teacher training education to ensure that student teachers can find their own authentic ethical voice. This can be done by examining ethical conflicts and dilemmas via critical thinking and conducting a broader analysis of the political, historical, and social contexts that lead to dilemmas, as these are strongly contextualised (e.g., Davies & Heyward, 2019).

### 2.3. Creative Drama and Forum Theatre: pedagogical resources to work on conflicts faced by teachers

Davies and Heyward (2019) encouraged further examination of the use of the problem-based, unscripted theatre scenarios explored by students. They argued that these techniques could unravel the fears and uncertainties that they are likely to encounter in their placements and future professional practice.

Within the pedagogical potential of the performing arts, CD is a way of using drama that is not focused on delivering an outcome. CD is centred on the educational process and is aimed at having learners gradually create a play in a light-hearted way. Improvisation is appraised and interpreted to look at contemporary problems analytically and creatively, thus reflecting and constructing meaning (Navarro, 2009). One tool to complement CD is FT, a technique used within Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed (2006). It is aligned with Freirean pedagogy in that it empowers spectators and transforms them into spect-actors (people who both see the play and act in it). In FT, a facilitator (joker) discusses the play after the performance, and then invites spect-actors to act out their proposals for improving the situation, replacing the character of their choice in the performance space, thus changing the events in the script.

Evidence of the usefulness of CD to enhance SEE skills among trainee teachers includes improved dialogue and listening skills, by engaging in clear, effective verbal and non-verbal communication. This promotes collaboration and empathy; greater understanding of human behaviour, its motivations and school situations; greater ability and confidence to handle complex situations involving anxiety and uncertainty; improved self-confidence, self-esteem, self-respect, and self-awareness; and a more meaningful and rewarding view of teaching, which generates greater motivation and well-being for teachers, thus facilitating their pedagogical competence (for a thorough review, see García-García et al., 2017).

Moreover, the use of FT in initial teacher training has resulted in positive evaluations by participants, due to its great potential to stimulate discussion and criticism by promoting complex analyses (Briones et al., 2019; Calvo et al., 2015). The effectiveness of FT in in-service teacher training has also been proven. Studies have shown that it fosters the understanding of, and the search for solutions to social, interpersonal, and individual problems. Other findings have been that FT encourages reflection on action and a positive classroom climate (Motos-Teruel & Navarro-Amorós, 2012, 2015). Studies focused on initial teacher training have agreed that the effectiveness of these techniques depends on their ability to meet participants' needs and to use these experiences as a reference for transfer to real-life situations. Both CD and FT were used in SEE skills education in this study.

### 3. Overview of the studies

The University of Cantabria runs a one-semester course entitled 'Training in Values and Personal Competences for Teachers' (TVPCT), which is part of the Basic Training Module for the degrees in Early Childhood Education (ECE) and in Primary Education (PE).

This course uses CASEL's (2005) Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) approach by promoting the development of five interrelated competences for its SEE education: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Values education is an integral part of this course (Buxarraís, 2016; Buxarraís & Martínez, 2009; Centre for Contemplative Science and Compassion-Based Ethics (CCSCBE), 2019) as it strengthens ethical competence, which is considered to be the backbone of teacher preparation (CCSCBE, 2019; Fernández Domínguez et al., 2009). It aims to foster competencies such as introspection and self-knowledge; emotional and interpersonal skills that are essential to understand others and communicate with them; and decision-making skills and responsible, ethical behaviour in both personal and professional contexts. In line with the studies mentioned above, this methodology prioritises active, cooperative, reflective, introspective, dialogical, and specific procedures to train student teachers in basic SEE skills for their personal development. This approach therefore intends to support trainees to develop well-founded, clear personal values by using dialogical methods in specific situations.

The TVPCT programme provides SEE skills training by adapting Heathcote's Mantle of the Expert approach to HE (Heathcote & Bolton, 1994). Students are distributed into small expert groups and work through perceived professional conflicts in a holistic way in two phases. Firstly, they implement CD to write a conflict-based play; and secondly, students perform their conflicts using FT, while their peers analyse and resolve them by applying SEE skills.

During the CD phase, students were placed into small groups (4–7 members in each group) and followed these steps:

**Step 1.** Each group was asked to identify three conflicts related to social interaction, emotions, and values in the teaching profession. Tutorials and guidance were offered to facilitate the description of the conflict.

**Step 2.** The lecturer selected one of the conflicts proposed by each group and ensured that it met the requirements and was representative of the diversity of conflicts presented in the class.

**Step 3.** Each group of students worked on the selected conflict in detail. Specifically, student teachers were invited to: (a) Think about the three temporal stages of the conflict issue (background, conflict development, and conflict consequences, without providing a resolution to the conflict). (b) Create images of the three key moments, contextualise them, and focus on the consequences of the situation/issue for the character(s) involved. (c) Answer these questions: What do the characters say? (dialogue texts) What do the characters think and feel, and how do they behave? (subtext, description) (Motos-Teruel & Navarro-Amorós, 2015). This is how students constructed the conflict script.

**Step 4.** Students analysed the conflict by identifying possible ethical dilemmas and the status of teachers' social and emotional skills. They then proposed improvements, thus internalising, and transferring the course learning outcomes. Resources displayed in an online platform (reading list, videos, rubrics, exercises with key, etc.) and participation in class were essential in completing this task. Concepts and strategies linked to SEE learning were explained in class. Students carried out practical analytical exercises, debates, and role-playing tasks to promote understanding and grasp of the

above concepts and strategies. This led to the second phase, where students first engaged in improvised rehearsals of their conflicts in each group, in order to perform the conflict in the classroom using FT techniques.

**Step 5.** Once a team acted out their conflict, the facilitator asked the spect-actors (the rest of the students) 'What happened there?' and guided the group discussion to analyse the conflict in terms of social, emotional competencies and ethical values (or lack of them). Then, the team resumed their performance but in the second round any spect-actor could interrupt the play by saying: Stop! At this point, actors and actresses used freeze frames or body sculptures. Spect-actors employed drama resources such as hot seating (asking a character a question regarding their life or situation to find out more about the context, for example) and thought tracking (tapping into the mind of a character of interest to listen to their thoughts or emotions). After the second round, the facilitator asked: Does anyone have any ideas on how to apply SEE skills to improve the situation? One by one students could enter the scene as spect-actors on a voluntary basis and test their thoughts, wishes, strategies and solutions; they could replace a character that they believed could change the course of action in the conflict, thus preventing or solving it. The spect-actor took the prop or object used by the character and decided at which point in the story they wanted to try a new action. Spect-actors could stop the play to use drama tools in the new scenes again at any time. In this way, they practised SEE skills while they could also see the positive outcomes of applying them. The rest of actors in the play were asked to 'listen' to the new character using SEE skills and provide an organic response. Therefore, drama encouraged students to recognise that what they mean and how they say it is determined by the situation they have created; they 'role played' language and actions in response to their imagined position within the situation that was improvised (Neelands, 1996).

The facilitator and all the students could help to model the competencies by providing external feedback after each new performance. Approximately 1 h was allocated to each conflict.

**Step 6.** Finally, students submitted a report that analysed and argued proposals for improving the conflict they had acted out. As mentioned in Step 5, they were able to use references made available in the online platform and were invited to find additional references and provide some theoretical grounding for their proposals.

This paper presents two studies aimed at analysing the impact that the TVPCT programme, implemented via CD and FT, had on the development of SEE skills among student teachers. The first study deals with teacher trainees' awareness of conflicts in their profession. The second study analyses the effect of SEE training on the students' degree of empathy. It also shows how the participating students assessed the usefulness of the drama tools employed for promoting SEE skills and transferring what they learnt to their lives.

## 4. Study 1. Student teachers' awareness of professional conflicts resulting from the TVPCT programme

### 4.1. Method

#### 4.1.1. Design

A cross-sectional, qualitative design was used to analyse the conflicts in the teaching profession identified by the participating student teachers.

#### 4.1.2. Participants

The sample consisted of all first-year students ( $N = 280$ ) from the teaching degree in PE ( $n = 188$ ) and from the degree in ECE

( $n = 92$ ) during the 2019–2020 academic year. It was composed of 75.7% women, a percentage that is representative of these degrees.

4.1.3. Procedure

Students were divided into 49 working groups (32 from the PE degree and 17 from the ECE degree), with 4–7 members per group ( $M = 5.6$ ). Each group worked on a perceived conflict in the teaching profession (Steps 1 to 3). This study used ethical research practices to protect participants' safety, privacy, and confidentiality, which included both design and implementation.

4.1.4. Analysis of conflicts faced by teachers

The content of the conflicts that the students focused on in Step 3 was analysed by the three module leaders (all of them holders of a PhD in Psychology) by following Grounded Theory guidelines (Glaser & Strauss, 2017). Researcher triangulation ensured the validity and consistency of the results obtained (Ruiz, 2003).

Following Gibbs (2012), a qualitative analysis of the data was carried out using inductive and deductive processes for coding purposes. After a comprehensive reading of the conflict analyses, the categories were constructed by considering the researchers' notes and the theoretical review. This enabled the researchers to use technical terminology and to provide an exhaustive definition of each category. They then examined conflicts independently,

while remaining sensitive to other possible categories, and/or changes to their definitions. Finally, the categories were pooled for analysis and disagreements were resolved by consensus.

4.2. Findings

A triple classification was chosen for the content analysis of the conflicts. The next section outlines, firstly, the categories created based on the (intra- and interpersonal) nature and the situation or theme that contextualised the conflicts; and secondly, the categories related to the dilemmas identified in the conflicts, according to the sets of values encountered.

4.2.1. Professional conflicts: types and contexts

The categories relating to the Type of Conflict (TC) faced by teachers were intrapersonal (TC\_A) and interpersonal (TC\_B). Of the total number of conflicts, 69.4% fell into both categories. Each conflict was linked to a situation or theme that contextualised it (CC). This was categorised and is shown in Table 1, along with the correspondence between the two category systems.

A description of the TCs and their frequency is provided below. It is worth noting that different TCs could be identified within the same conflict (some examples are shown in Table 2).

Intrapersonal conflicts (TC\_A) ( $n = 59$ ) involving the tensions,

**Table 1**  
Classification of situations in which conflicts are contextualised.

Context of the Conflict (CC)	Description	f	Type of Conflict (TC)
CC_A. Focus on pupil diversity:		7	
CC_A.1. Abilities	When pupils have a disability (e.g., a hearing disability).	1	TC_A.2.1.; TC_A.2.5.; TC_B.2.
CC_A.2. Transsexuality	Issues related to transsexual pupils addressed by the educational community.	2	TC_A.1.; TC_A.2.1.; TC_A.2.3.; TC_A.2.5.; TC_B.2.
CC_A.3. Cultural	Reception of pupils from other cultures, or diverse schooling backgrounds of pupils from abroad.	3	TC_A.2.1.; TC_B.1.4.; TC_B.2.
CC_A.4. Economic	Pupils' financial problems that hinder their participation in school activities.	1	TC_A.2.1.; TC_A.2.3.; TC_A.2.5.; TC_B.1.4.
CC_B. Tolerance of:		2	
CC_B.1. Transgender teachers	Discriminatory attitudes towards teachers regarding diversity in gender identity or gender expression	1	TC_A.1.; TC_B.1.1.; TC_B.2.
CC_B.2. Transgender pupils	Discriminatory attitudes towards pupils regarding diversity in gender identity or gender expression	1	TC_A.2.1.; TC_A.2.3.
CC_C. Violence or negligence:		16	
CC_C.1. Bullying and/or social exclusion	Frequent and intentional violence occurring among pupils in the school context; and acts of discrimination and rejection.	8	TC_A.2.1.; TC_A.2.3.; TC_A.2.5.; TC_B.1.4.
CC_C.2. School violence (towards teachers)	Intentional conduct on the part of pupils or their families that causes harm or damage to teachers.	5	TC_A.1.; TC_A.2.5.; TC_B.1.1.; TC_B.2.; TC_B.3.
CC_C.3. School violence (between pupils)	Occasional intentional conduct that causes damage or harm to pupils.	1	TC_A.2.3.; TC_A.2.5.; TC_B.1.4.; TC_B.2.
CC_C.4. Neglect or abuse by the family.	The teacher detects and deals with possible child neglect or abuse in the family environment.	2	TC_A.2.3.; TC_A.2.5.; TC_B.1.1.; TC_B.2.
CC_D. Teacher burnout (origins and/or consequences)	Emotional fatigue, depersonalisation, and low sense of fulfilment among teachers for different reasons (poor relationships with colleagues, overwork, perception of low self-efficacy).	3	TC_A.1.; TC_B.1.1.; TC_B.1.2.
CC_E. Emotional and life problems:		11	
CC_E.1. Among pupils	Students' emotional problems or family situations that interfere with the academic environment (alcoholism, dysfunctional families).	1	TC_A.2.3.; TC_A.2.5.; TC_B.1.4.
CC_E.2. Among teachers	Emotional problems or family situations that interfere with teaching (anxiety, separation/divorce, work-life balance, poor health of family members, or out-of-work problematic situations).	10	TC_A.1.; TC_A.3.; TC_B.1.1.; TC_B.2.
CC_F. Difficulties encountered by teachers in the face of:		7	
CC_F.1. Communication with families	The teacher's communication with families.	1	TC_A.1.; TC_A.2.4.; TC_B.2.
CC_F.2. Lack of motivation among pupils	When the teacher is expected to motivate pupils to be interested and disciplined in academic tasks.	1	TC_A.1.; TC_B.1.1.
CC_F.3. School dropout	Poor results achieved by pupils with respect to the objectives proposed for their level, age, and development.	3	TC_A.2.3.; TC_A.2.5.; TC_B.1.1.; TC_B.1.3.; TC_B.1.4.; TC_B.2.
CC_F.4. Participation	Collaboration and involvement of teachers in school activities.	1	TC_B.1.1.; TC_B.1.3.; TC_B.1.5.
CC_F.5. Bereavement	Informing the other pupils that one of their peers is experiencing a bereavement process	1	TC_A.1.; TC_A.2.3.; TC_B.1.4.
	Difficulties derived from conflicts related to roles and family relationships that interfere with teaching performance and well-being in the school.	2	TC_A.3.; TC_B.1.1.; TC_B.1.2.; TC_B.1.4.

(continued on next page)

**Table 1** (continued)

Context of the Conflict (CC)	Description	f	Type of Conflict (TC)
CC_G. Relationships with partner and family affecting professional performance.			
CC_H. New technologies, educational innovation, and social media.	Difficulties for teachers arising from the use of new curricular materials and technologies.	3	TC_A.2.1.; TC_A.2.2.; TC_A.2.4.; TC_B.1.1.; TC_B.1.3.; TC_B.1.4.

Note. The frequency corresponds to the number of conflicts that were contextualised within the thematic areas indicated. There is no coincidence with the number of TCs, as one conflict may encompass different TCs.

**Table 2**

Examples of conflicts and categories according to three criteria: Type of Conflict (TC), Context of Conflict (CC) and Ethical Dilemma (ED).

Examples of conflicts	Type of Conflict & Context of Conflict	Ethical Dilemma
No. 1: 'I didn't go to university to do this'. A teacher starts her first job at a small school, where she is the youngest teacher. Her colleagues give her secretarial and janitorial duties to do. Because she is shy and scared of being rejected, she agrees to do these tasks. As a result, she starts to show some symptoms of burnout.	TC_A.1. TC_B.1.2. CC_D.	ED_A1 ED_A2
No. 47: 'Trapped by circumstances'. Valentina and her family have to go to Argentina due to a family matter at the beginning of the school year and cannot return until five months later. Valentina then joins her class again and is well-integrated, but the faculty members have different views as to whether she should move up to the next year. Her parents refuse to accept that she should retake the same year.	TC_A.2.1. TC_B.1.4. TC_B.2. CC_A.3.	ED_A3
No. 24: 'Back to school'. Paula, a new mother, after returning from maternity leave, faces a situation of stress and physical and psychological fatigue, given her professional and family duties. This situation begins to affect her performance, and she receives an official warning from management.	TC_A.3. TC_B.1.1. CC_E.2.	ED_A1
No. 32: 'In trouble'. Polly is an English assistant who is very excited about starting to work in a bilingual school. As support demands related to her tasks exceed the scope of the contract, her enthusiasm as a teacher fades away. Polly can no longer cope with this feeling of injustice.	TC_B.1.1. TC_B.1.2. CC_D.	ED_A2
No. 18: 'United by difficulty'. A teacher is worried because a boy is bullying one of his classmates, but she does not know how to deal with it. At the meeting with the parents, she is faced with a conflict: each of the parents has a different view on the matter.	TC_A.2.3. TC_B.2. CC_C.1.	ED_A3
No. 42: 'Dodging the issue'. Carlos has a pupil who behaves badly towards him in class. He talks to the pupil's parents, but they do not believe him. Their son behaves very well at home. They believe that the teacher is to blame for their child's behaviour.	TC_A.2.5. TC_B.2. TC_B.3. CC_C2	ED_A3

dilemmas and decisions that come into play in a situation, which demand taking a stance personally and/or professionally. This category comprised the following subcategories:

*Perception of vulnerability or insecurity* (TC\_A.1.) (n = 8). This included fear of being rejected by fellow teachers and insecurity about one's ability to correctly deal with situations faced in teaching, such as motivating pupils, communicating with families, and supporting grieving pupils, aggression among themselves, or in the process of developing their gender identity.

*Professional ethics* (TC\_A.2.), which were put to the test by conflicts related to these types of ethics (Escudero, 2011):

Recognition of, and commitment to, the right to education (TC\_A.2.1.) (n = 8). This ethic was linked to the value of justice. It was identified in cases where the teacher had to take a stance on how to approach the educational and economic differences between pupils, and the tolerance of non-normative identities.

Social awareness and educational criticism (TC\_A.2.2.) (n = 1). Criticism as a value manifested itself in a case where a teacher took a stance regarding whether to question the work of a colleague, in response to well-founded complaints made by her pupils.

Care, support, responsibility, and personalised education (TC\_A.2.3.) (n = 17). The ethic of care had a strong role in the conflicts that involved teachers facing the diverse needs of pupils in difficult situations (school bullying and social exclusion, family abuse, bereavement, economic difficulties, school dropout, and intolerance of transsexuality).

Training and professional development (TC\_A.2.4.) (n = 3). The ethic of the profession was evident in conflicts that portrayed teachers with poor skills related to communication, new technologies, or in dealing with social exclusion in the classroom. These required them to engage in ongoing professional development to

ensure that they performed their role successfully.

Community involvement and engagement (TC\_A.2.5.) (n = 11). Values such as genuine participation and an open institutional dialogue with families and the community were implemented when there were issues that made it difficult to involve all the agents in the school (teaching staff, pupils, families, community). This was either due to the lack of involvement of teachers, or to opposition from the parents' association, other teachers, or other pupils' families.

*Personal, family and work balance* (TC\_A.3.) (n = 11), which caused tension between the responsibilities of one's psychological, social, and family experiences and the responsibilities arising from teaching. This category was identified in conflicts that revealed teachers' difficulties in carrying out their work in demanding situations, as a result of emotional and life issues (anxiety, depression, adjustment problems, bereavement, addictions, childhood trauma, family overload).

Interpersonal conflicts (TC\_B.) (n = 62) in situations in which there was disagreement between parties forming an interactive system (Barrios, 2016), which involved perceptions of incompatible goals by at least two individuals (Infante, 1998). These were identified among three of the core agents: fellow teachers, pupils, and families.

*Interpersonal conflicts with colleagues* (TC\_B.1.) (n = 39) for the following reasons, which accounted for the subcategories outlined below:

Need for closeness and support (TC\_B.1.1.) (n = 20). Tensions caused by the need for, or perceived lack of, support, trust, identity, or group cohesion. These tensions could cause feelings of isolation and loneliness among teachers, which could give rise to some subgroups. This was identified both among teachers, and among

teachers and the management team, and was linked to the teaching staff's emotional and life issues (anxiety, adaptation problems). Challenging situations were also identified when dealing with violence and school bullying, pupils' sense of failure and demotivation, relationship problems, burnout, or intolerance of their transsexuality.

Role confusion (TC\_B.1.2.) ( $n = 4$ ). Teachers' boundaries and roles were not clearly defined, so they had to negotiate and renegotiate the rules. These conflicts were related to situations that fuelled confusion, such as the presence of family relationships in schools or major differences between teachers in terms of job seniority or decision-making power. They were also linked to the origin and consequences of burnout.

Negative reciprocity (TC\_B.1.3.) ( $n = 4$ ). In a team of teachers, each member may either feel supported by the others to achieve their goals (positive reciprocity), or find that their colleagues are an obstacle (negative reciprocity) (Bonals, 1996). This TC was identified when teachers' aspirations for educational innovation were restricted by the reaction of the educational community.

Divergent attitudes (TC\_B.1.4.) ( $n = 10$ ) to educational or professional issues (e.g., focus on diversity, school dropout, child bereavement, family neglect, educational methodologies), sometimes exacerbated by emotional issues. They could lead to confrontation rather than dialogue, fostered by reduced permeability and rigidity of the individual or group.

Inability to participate in the school (TC\_B.1.5.) ( $n = 1$ ). This was linked to whether leaders sought to facilitate or hinder dialogue and the participation of educational agents, mainly teachers.

*Interpersonal conflicts with families* (TC\_B.2.) ( $n = 18$ ). Confrontations between teachers and/or school management, on the one hand, and families, on the other. These could result from different concerns about and views on various issues, such as tolerance of and focus on diversity, school dropout, and various types of school violence, caused by emotional and life difficulties and poor skills of those involved.

*Interpersonal conflicts with pupils* (TC\_B.3.) ( $n = 5$ ). Confrontations between teachers and pupils characterised by violence towards teachers. The context involved complex situations where there was child abuse or the need to support dysfunctional families.

#### 4.2.2. Ethical dilemmas

All teaching conflicts raised at least one Ethical Dilemma (ED); some of them posed up to three dilemmas. These dilemmas were categorised according to the dimensional proposal made by Veugelers and Vedder (2003). Each category describes the dimensions along which some sets of values vary, as shown below:

*Person vs. society-oriented care* (ED\_A.1.) ( $n = 8$ ). This includes values linked to personal care and well-being, as opposed to orientation towards and care for others. 'Others' could be people (students, families, peers), a school, or society as a whole. Conflicts numbered 1 and 24 outlined in Table 2 show the dilemma derived from attention to emotional balance. This dilemma could lead an individual to leave their job or ask for support if the situation did not improve, in opposition to the value of job responsibility, which may result in a constant self-demand to remain in the job.

*Independence vs. conformity* (ED\_A.2.) ( $n = 37$ ). Privacy and autonomy (and taking one's personal stance) are placed in opposition to receptiveness to others, which sometimes leads to conformity. In this dimension, independence entails freedom, autonomy, personal coherence, integrity, resilience, and personal strength. Having an honest, internal acquiescence that is close to acceptance is often accompanied (or even inspired) by values such as harmony, cooperation, adaptation, and community awareness. For example, in conflict number 1 and in conflict number 32 (Table 2), the protagonist could be oriented towards justice, self-care, self-

protection, and therefore, strictly comply with the provisions in their contract, or alternatively, move towards values such as service, collaboration, and empathy, engaging in behaviours that somewhat involve performing the tasks that are requested of them.

*Acceptance of values vs. critical reflection on values* (ED\_A.3.) ( $n = 18$ ). This dimension spans from the acceptance of one's and others' set values (to which one feels committed) to questioning and expanding these values by opening up to reflection, criticism, and dialogue. For example, in conflicts numbers 18, 42 and 47 (Table 2), two avenues could be taken. One entails affirming the school's values of discipline and justice in order to make a decision, which probably means maintaining the institutional position and taking measures in line with the school's regulations. The other avenue would involve reflecting on and contextualising those values, while moving closer to others and resorting to flexibility, dialogue, and trust. This would require engaging in discussion to reach consensus and being willing to accept mistakes.

#### 4.3. Discussion

The categorisation of the conflicts produced by student teachers in this learning experience provides an overview of the potential of CD for real-life based teaching.

The participating student teachers identified these conflicts and demonstrated their awareness of their complexity, given their twofold intrapersonal nature (perception of vulnerability, professional ethics, and personal, family and work-life balance) and interpersonal nature (involving teachers, school management, families, and pupils). Most of the conflicts encompassed both intrapersonal and interpersonal categories. All of them entailed at least one ethical dilemma and were contextualised within a broad range of issues. This complexity reflects their dilemmatic spaces, as defined by Fransson and Grannäs (2013), which make it possible to view conflicts and their ethical dilemmas in the context of teaching practice and in the ensuing interpersonal relationships.

This study also included a rich categorical differentiation of conflicts according to their nature and the situation in which they are contextualised, together with a dimensional analysis of ethical dilemmas. Some of the categories overlapped with those of other studies on conflict in the teaching profession. Some conflicts reflected each of the ethics in the teaching profession posed by Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) and Escudero (2011), the main focus being the ethic that promotes the values of care, responsibility, and personalised teaching. Some previous studies have also agreed on the prominence of this ethic of care within conflicts faced by teachers (Aultman et al., 2009; Colnerud, 1997; Lindqvist et al., 2020). Other intrapersonal conflicts were also identified, including the perception of vulnerability or insecurity in carrying out the teaching role. This is similar to teachers' deep fears as detected in other studies using FT with in-service teachers (Motos-Teruel & Navarro-Amorós, 2012), and the tension associated with efforts to reach personal, family, and work balance. These internal moral imperatives in conflict with one another can cause moral stress (Colnerud, 2015) and help understand teachers' feelings of burnout. This syndrome has a high prevalence in the teaching profession, ranging from 11 to 35.5% depending on the country and the study considered (Gil-Monte et al., 2011; Ratto et al., 2015; Villaverde et al., 2019; cited in Llorca-Pellicer et al., 2021).

As in previous studies (e.g., Aultman et al., 2009; Levin, 2002; Lindqvist et al., 2020), some of the conflicts dealt with the relationships between the different educational agents, especially with colleagues. In particular, these conflicts with colleagues involved perceived lack of support, trust, identity, and group cohesion in demanding personal and/or professional situations, which may not have received the attention they deserved in the

literature (Tahull & Montero, 2015). The ethical dilemmas identified core values in education, focusing on justice and well-being, as well as on a sense of social commitment and responsibility. It became apparent that they differed in the dimensions related to person-oriented versus society-oriented care, independence versus conformity, and less attention was paid to the divergence between acceptance of values and critical reflection on values (Veugelers & Vedder, 2003). Shapira-Lishchinsky (2011) also noted that their main dilemmas showed an opposition between personal elements and more social and institutional elements.

The classification of the themes that contextualised conflicts provided a realistic and topical range of situations experienced in schools. In this way, various real-life emotional problems, types of violence faced by teachers, and a focus on diversity were prominently featured. This thematic classification reflected how conflicts were deeply rooted in the political, historical, and social contexts where they occurred (Davies & Heyward, 2019; Thornberg & Oguz, 2016). For example, the participating student teachers were aware of the need to promote an ethic of diversity and citizenship education (e.g., Banks, 2004; Torrego et al., 2018), and the tolerance of, and focus on, diversity, due to the presence of transsexual pupils and teachers. Therefore, social, political and media developments related to LGTBI-phobic bullying were addressed during the training programme, as well as the major debates on the Law for Real and Effective Equality for Transgender People that were happening in Spain at the time.

This study showed the potential of focusing on SEE skills in initial teacher training using drama-based pedagogical techniques. It illustrated that they can be helpful tools in addressing complex conflicts and ethical dilemmas in the teaching profession. This also pointed to the need for conflicts and dilemmas to originate from student teachers themselves. The study that will be discussed below aimed to test the effect that CD and FT can have on teacher trainees' perceived learning and on empathy, one of the key SEE skills.

## 5. Study 2. Analysis of the effect of the TVPCT programme on empathy and on the assessment of the teaching-learning process among student teachers

### 5.1. Method

#### 5.1.1. Design

A longitudinal analytical design was used to study the effects of the TVPCT programme on the level of empathy of student teachers. A cross-sectional and descriptive design was also employed to assess the perceived usefulness of the pedagogical resources used for learning SEE skills and their contribution to their lives.

#### 5.1.2. Participants

The total sample of participants was 626 students, with an average age of 19.03. They were all in their first Academic Year (AY) of the degree in PE (AY 2018–19 = 204; AY 2019–20 = 217) and the degree in ECE (AY 2018–19 = 110; AY 2019–20 = 95).

A total of 314 teacher trainees participated in AY 2018–19, of whom 35% were students from the ECE degree and 65% from the PE degree. Of these students, 165 took part in both the pre-test and the post-test (79.4% female, average age 18.82, SD = 3.07).

In the AY 2019–20, 312 students participated in the study, of whom 30% were students from the ECE degree and 70% from the PE degree. Of the total sample, 119 students took part in both the pre-test and the post-test (75% female, mean age 19.16, SD = 3.46).

#### 5.1.3. Variables and instruments

*Self-report on cognitive and affective empathy* (López-Pérez et al.,

2008). This instrument consisted of two cognitive factors of empathy: perspective-taking, composed of eight items, and defined as the intellectual or imaginative ability to put oneself in another person's place (AY 2018–19:  $\alpha_1 = 0.76$ ;  $\alpha_2 = 0.77$ ; AY 2019–20:  $\alpha_1 = 0.70$ ;  $\alpha_2 = 0.73$ ); and emotional understanding, which used nine items to measure the ability to recognise and understand the emotional states, intentions and impressions of others (AY 2018–19:  $\alpha_1 = 0.67$ ;  $\alpha_2 = 0.67$ ; AY 2019–20:  $\alpha_1 = 0.68$ ;  $\alpha_2 = 0.67$ ). It was also made up of two affective factors (with eight items each): empathic stress, which assesses the ability to share the negative emotions of others (AY 2018–19:  $\alpha_1 = 0.80$ ;  $\alpha_2 = 0.79$ ; AY 2019–20:  $\alpha_1 = 0.79$ ;  $\alpha_2 = 0.76$ ); and empathic joy, which measures the ability to share the positive emotions of others (AY 2018–19:  $\alpha_1 = 0.77$ ;  $\alpha_2 = 0.76$ ; AY 2019–20:  $\alpha_1 = 0.71$ ;  $\alpha_2 = 0.74$ ). All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = 'Strongly disagree'; 5 = 'Strongly agree').

*Assessment of the pedagogical resources of the TVPCT programme.* Four items were included on an ad hoc basis to assess the perceived usefulness of the different pedagogical resources. A 5-point Likert scale was used to do so (1 = 'not at all useful'; 5 = 'very useful'). Three items dealt with the main activities used in CD and FT (identification of teachers' personal and interpersonal problems; analysis of SEE skills in the conflicts faced by teachers; and performance). One last item encompassed other activities in the programme (identification of one's own values, individual stance and argumentation, and debates on a proposed moral dilemma). A factor analysis showed that the items were clustered into a single factor, with an explained variance of 53.97% in AY 2018–19, and of 52.29% in AY 2019–20. Reliability was adequate at both time points ( $\alpha = 0.71$  and  $\alpha = 0.69$ , respectively).

*Contribution of the TVPCT programme to their lives* (Briones et al., 2015). This 22-item scale measures the extent to which learners apply the SEE skills education in their behaviour both within the classroom and in the outside world. These items were rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = 'did not contribute to my life at all', and 5 = 'made a strong contribution to my life'). The scale showed adequate reliability overall ( $\alpha = 0.96$ ); moreover, the factor analysis confirmed its three-factor structure (63.6% variance explained):

- 1) One's meta-knowledge: personal learning about one's own values and behaviours and their consequences (six items, e.g., 'Becoming more aware of my values and anti-values when making decisions';  $\alpha = 0.89$ ).
- 2) Perspective-taking or learning linked to consideration, respect, and tolerance of other opinions (nine items, e.g., 'Understanding ideas other than my own';  $\alpha = 0.92$ ).
- 3) Socio-moral sensitivity and reflection: meta-knowledge of one's participation in the training programme, and transfer of what has been learned, addressing skills such as moral sensitivity, socio-moral reflection, and critical understanding of reality (seven items, e.g.: 'Identifying situations in which Human Rights are put at risk';  $\alpha = 0.90$ ).

#### 5.1.4. Procedure

The student teachers in the sample were asked to participate on a voluntary basis (at the beginning and at the end of the first semester). They were informed of the purpose of the study and of their right to cease participation at any time. Participants answered an online questionnaire individually during class hours using their smartphones. They did so on an anonymous basis, employing a system of personal codes. In AY 2018–19 they completed the empathy scale twice: pre-test, at the beginning of the semester and the course, and post-test, at the end of the semester. In the post-test they also answered a questionnaire to assess the pedagogical



**Table 3**  
Descriptive statistics on empathy factors before and after the TVPCT programme in two academic years.

Factors	AY 2018–2019				AY 2019–2020			
	Pre TVPCT		Post TVPCT		Pre TVPCT		Post TVPCT	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Perspective-taking	3.84	0.52	3.85	0.50	3.77	0.55	3.8	0.52
Emotional understanding	3.63	0.47	3.71	0.46	3.64	0.49	3.75	0.45
Empathic stress	3.33	0.69	3.32	0.70	3.19	0.79	3.21	0.68
Empathic joy	4.32	0.42	4.28	0.44	4.28	0.50	4.33	0.46

resources used. In AY 2019–20 they filled in the same empathy scale again at two points in time. In the post-test they also completed the questionnaire to assess the pedagogical resources employed and the questionnaire on the contribution that the TVPCT programme had made to their lives.

The study met the applicable ethical standards. It followed the Code of Good Practice of the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC) (2011) and of the Ethics Committee for Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Cantabria.

5.1.5. Data analysis

Data were analysed using t-tests and Cohen's *d*. SPSS 22.0 was employed in the analysis.

5.2. Findings

The next section examines the impact that the TVPCT programme had on the participants' empathy and their final assessment of the teaching-learning process.

5.2.1. Effect of the TVPCT programme on student teachers' empathy

In AY 2018–19, significant differences were observed on pre-post measures of empathy for the factor 'emotional understanding' ( $t(1,164) = -2.25, p < .05$ ), but not for the other factors ('perspective-taking' ( $t(1,164) = -0.50$ ), 'empathic stress' ( $t(1,164) = 0.24$ ) and 'empathic joy' ( $t(1,164) = 1.02$ )).

The same result was obtained in AY 2019–20, as the significant differences found in the pre-post measures of empathy only concerned the factor 'emotional understanding' ( $t(1,118) = -2.68, p < .05$ ). Despite their increase, the differences observed in 'perspective-taking' ( $t(1,118) = -0.75$ ), 'empathic stress' ( $t(1,118) = -0.25$ ) and 'empathic joy' ( $t(1,118) = -0.95$ ) remained non-significant. The descriptive statistics of these analyses are shown in Table 3.

Effect size of the differences in emotional understanding previously observed between the post-tests of the two academic years was calculated using Cohen's *d* (-0.09), with an effect size  $r = -0.04$ , which therefore showed a significant, albeit small, difference (Cohen, 1988).

**Table 4**  
Descriptive statistics on the assessment of the teaching resources used in the TVPCT programme.

Academic year	Identification		Conflict analysis		Performance		Other tasks	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
2018–19	3.97	0.96	3.90	0.95	3.98	0.95	3.95	0.93
2019–20	4.26	0.85	4.24	0.85	4.25	0.95	4.21	0.82
Cohen's <i>d</i> ( <i>r</i> )	-0.32 (-0.16)		-0.37 (-0.18)		-0.28 (-0.14)		-0.29 (0.14)	

**Table 5**  
One-sample t-test statistics and results (with respect to value 3, midpoint of the measuring scale).

	t	M	SD
One's meta-knowledge	17.085***	4.13	0.74
Perspective-taking	16.966***	4.11	0.73
Sensitivity and socio-moral reflection	13.614**	3.94	0.77

Note. Degrees of freedom were 123, and the results were significant (\*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ ).

5.2.2. Assessment of the teaching-learning process in the TVPCT programme

The assessment of the usefulness of the teaching resources employed was analysed by using t-tests with respect to the midpoint of the measurement scale (3). The results showed that the mean scores on all items were significantly above the midpoint ( $p < .001$ ) for both 2018–19 and 2019–20. In addition, the related sample t-test performed to compare the rating of teaching resources in each AY revealed no significant differences. Therefore, the participants assessed all the resources employed in the TVPCT programme positively (see Table 4). The analysis of effect size of the differences previously observed between the two academic years using Cohen's *d* showed significant results (Table 4), although effect size was small for all variables (Cohen, 1988).

The analysis of how participants assessed the contribution of the TVPCT programme to their lives (only for AY 2019–20) using a t-test with respect to the midpoint of the scale (3) showed that the mean scores were significantly higher, hence positive. The related samples t-test indicated significant differences in the comparisons between the factor 'socio-moral sensitivity and reflection' and the other two factors, namely, 'one's meta-knowledge' and 'perspective-taking'. Consequently, the students perceived the contribution of the programme to be lower for the factor 'socio-moral sensitivity and reflection' ( $p < .01$ ; see statistics in Table 5).

6. Discussion

The use of CD and FT in the TVPCT programme to address conflicts faced by teachers had a favourable impact on student teachers' cognitive empathy, although it should be noted that high average scores had been recorded from the outset. Therefore, it was only participants' perceptions of their emotional understanding that had improved. This skill provides a controlled process of self-awareness and prevents emotional contagion automatically triggered by another person's emotional state (Decety & Jackson, 2004). This is essential in order not to lose objectivity in teaching practice. No significant impact on perspective-taking was observed, perhaps because the pedagogical resources used were more focused on emotionally understanding others than on using different points of view. In this regard, it seems apt to recall the approach of Weisz and Zaki (2017), who argued that empathy training must teach people how to empathise with others (experience or express empathy) but should also train them to want to empathise with others. This motivation is related to the controlled cognitive process involved in (complex and necessary) perspective-

taking (Rameson & Lieberman, 2009). Along these lines, Keyesers and Gazzola (2014) proposed that programmes aimed at fostering empathy should adopt a multivariate landscape of empathy capacities and propensities shaped by attentional and motivational factors.

In contrast, no significant changes were found in the emotional dimensions of empathy (empathic stress and empathic joy). The lack of increase in empathic stress seems desirable, as a strong ability to share another person's negative emotions, when combined with a lack of healthy emotional self-regulation, can lead to situations of personal stress or professional burnout (Wagaman et al., 2015). As empathic joy recorded very high mean scores from the start, there was no need or opportunity for improvement.

The pedagogical resources employed were highly regarded. These included promoting clarity in values, discussing a proposed dilemma, and CD and FT applied to a conflict created by the different student teachers' groups, among others. The results confirmed that these tools were well received by the participants, as they perceived their usefulness for learning the contents of the course. The students reported that these tools had contributed to them meeting the objectives of the programme, including knowledge about their own values and behaviours, and their consequences; consideration, respect, and tolerance of others' opinions; and to a lesser extent, socio-moral sensitivity and reflection, and a critical understanding of reality.

Although these results require confirmation through a quasi-experimental design with a control group, they point to some key elements for the optimisation of the programme. These include ensuring a greater degree of perspective-taking by devoting more time to role exchange (with all the characters involved) in the FT; promoting the change of perspective from the initial personal position to other positions in dilemma discussions, even opposing positions (for example, using the Conscience Alley drama technique); managing strategies for emotional self-regulation during CD and FT to prevent empathic stress; and contributing to greater socio-moral sensitivity and reflection by employing strategies that entail greater involvement and participation in society.

Another limitation of the study is the use of self-reporting to measure empathy. Although the sample is representative of the reference teaching population, which is typically made up of a majority of women, this may explain the initial high levels of empathy, especially affective empathy. Therefore, there was greater difficulty in bringing about significant improvements in these skills. Several studies have reported higher levels of empathy among women, especially when measured by self-reporting, biased by gender-role stereotypes (Baez et al., 2017). Future studies could replicate the study by assessing empathy using an experimental empathy-for-pain paradigm.

## 7. Conclusions and implications: towards a social, emotional, and ethical education for teachers

This study highlights the opportunity that initial teacher training brings for dealing with the conflicts inherent in the teaching profession by promoting socio-moral reflection, connecting with the construction of the self, and providing conviviality experiences (Buxarrais et al., 2015).

Resources such as collective creation, dialogue, and simulations, as well as participation, which are characteristic of conflicts faced by teachers using CD and FT, help to achieve these objectives. In addition, the use of conflicts resulting from students' concerns and motivations, which reflect real-life situations in their full complexity and diversity, help them prepare for coping with similar dilemmatic spaces in their future practical training and professional life (Colnerud, 2015; Davies & Heyward, 2019; Ehrich et al.,

2011).

Higher Education programmes that use this type of approach to the training of SEE skills also seek to prepare student teachers for their future role by incorporating these aspects into their personal and professional development. This can be a healthy means of coping with teaching and social responsibilities and promoting social cohesion, by taking a critical stance in the face of social demands (Bergan, 2019; Trillo et al., 2018; Veiga et al., 2019). It is also consistent with the recommendations made by Shapira-Lishchinsky (2011) for teachers' professional development programmes, focusing on social justice by learning how to integrate justice and care. In this sense, empathy has shown to be a key promoter of these two moral targets (Baez et al., 2017). At the same time, these future teachers were trained to be 'teacher-artists', in the words of *Bowell and Heap (2005)*. This will give them the ability to meld their pedagogical standing and skill with an aesthetic craft and sensibility.

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