CONFLICT MANAGEMENT REGARDING STUDENTS, TEACHERS AND PARENTS. THE IMPORTANCE OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT WITHIN THE PROCESS OF IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF THE SECONDARY EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Ph.D. Student Gabriela LAZAR (SOARE)
"Valahia" University of Târgoviște, Romania
E-mail: gabrielasoare70@yahoo.com

Abstract: Conflict is a three-dimensional psychosocial phenomenon that involves 3 components, one that refers to thinking, perception of a conflict situation, another one that refers to emotions and feelings and a behavioral component, one regarding actions and communication. Managing conflicts between students, teachers and parents has its importance in order to increase the quality of the secondary education system. Quality in education refers to a complex of principles and practices that crosses the entire educational environment, in all its components, oriented towards obtaining superior results, related to standards and meeting the needs and expectations of the primary beneficiaries of education. This article aims to establish the main principles and best practices regarding conflict management within the secondary education system.

Keywords: conflict, conflict management, quality in education, secondary education.
JEL Classification: I21, I25, I29, D74.

1. Introduction

The literature regarding the behavioral changes in the management of classrooms in schools, implies from behalf of the teacher a set of behaviors through which:
- he/she can promote and stimulate the appropriate behaviors from his students;
- he/she can reduce the frequency and the probability of the occurrence of maladaptive behaviors;
- he/she ca facilitate interpersonal relationships and a positive socio-emotional climate in the classroom.

In order to prevent disruptive behaviors in the student classroom, the teacher must be aware of his role in determining the classroom climate and interpersonal relationships.

In order to define a high quality school, it is necessary to study: the school's climate, the physical environment, the curriculum, relationships between teachers, students and the community. In this way, a "school of high quality" aims at achieving a set of targets, not just at delivering lessons, or programs. Going through a circle of high quality standards requires an approach to quality in education starting from the implementation of the circle of quality at the level of the teaching process, as the first link (stage) of its achievement. Therefore, teachers need to constructively address conflicts, using them as real learning and development opportunities.

2. Literature review

The present article starts by underlying the conceptual basis regarding conflict resolution, and by point out the main differences between the traditional approach towards conflict management and the new approach towards conflict management, as it has been underlined by authors such as Ulrich, Barron or Drumitru. Further on, the article focuses on presenting the main types of conflicts within the secondary educational system. Literature regarding these 4 types of conflicts expresses many of the causes of these conflicts, however the main obstacles that prevent from resolving these conflicts in the secondary education system are just pointed out by authors such as Iucu (2006) and Bowling (2012). They express the "necessity of identifying the main obstacles in resolving

conflicts in the secondary education system", and thus the research consists in identifying the key obstacles and ways of avoiding them.

3. Conflict resolution. Conceptual basis

The present acceptances on the conflict emphasize the positive aspects of the conflict, emphasizing the undesirable elements:

- *"Conflict is an indispensable part of life, of change*" (Barron, 1990);
- *"Beyond all perspectives, conflict is a natural consequence of diversity"* (Dumitru, 2000).

Conflict has it contribution to social change, thus ensuring certain interpersonal and inter-group dynamics within society. Conflict between groups, especially in the secondary educational system can provide unity or it can divide groups. There are many ways conflicts can be analyzed, thus we can summarize them by explaining them from a traditional and modern approach, and especially by insisting on the difference between them:

The traditional (old) approach towards conflict management	The new approach towards conflict management
- Conflicts can be avoided - Conflicts are caused by errors; - Conflicts divide and prevent optimal performance - The objective of management is to eliminate conflicts - Optimal performance requires conflict resolution	- Conflicts are inevitable - Conflicts are caused by needs/interests, perceptions, different value; - The objective of management is to shift conflicts towards obtaining maximum performances - Optimal performance requires reducing the level of conflict

Conflicts are therefore ambivalent experiences: they have a potential danger but they can also be viewed as an opportunity, a chance to progress, they also have a positive potential, it all depends on how they are approached. Thus, approached through positive thinking, conflicts can be exploited for the purpose of one's own personal development or for social change. At the opposite pole, the unilateral approach (gain-loss) can have negative results emotionally and physically (Ulrich, 2000).

Conflict management involves the proper management of disagreements, misunderstandings, conflict situations so that their positive potential is harnessed, it involves cultivating distinct strategies and techniques to address, control and treat conflicts. Consequently, conflict management involves education in the spirit of peace, cooperation, by developing the appropriate attitudes towards others and towards conflict.

The sources of conflicts can be: control over resources, interdependent activities, individual approaches, different objectives, communication problems, differences between perceptions and values, working environment, personality and attitude difference, unclear authority structures.

3. Types of conflicts in the secondary educational system

There are many types of conflicts in the secondary schools, but rather that focusing on the types of conflicts, we should focus o the causes of these conflicts and the main sources of these conflicts. However, if we refer to the types of conflicts that may occur, conflicts can be divided into:

a) **conflicts between students -** are probably the most important ones professors should be aware of and be able to manage. Amongst the most important causes of these conflicts are:

- Competitive atmosphere of the educational process;
- Low intolerance to frustration;
- Low communication skills;
- Inability to express negative emotions;
- The desire to prove themselves at any price;
- Envy, mutual antipathy;
- Fight for the domination of the group;
- Lack of conflict resolution skills;
- Misuse of power by the teacher;
- Repeated aggression from colleagues, criticism from their families;
- The arrogance, lies and mock of physical aspect.

The teacher plays a decisive role in solving all these conflicts. He must be a peacemaker who effectively uses conflicts in order to achieve his/hers educational goals established. This goal can only be achieved by knowing, the initial fundamental causes of the conflict that arose (Ciobotaru, 2004).

The repeated and consistent use of conflict resolution techniques by teachers will make the students, after a while, be able to resolve their conflicts on their own and not bring them in front of the teacher. This has positive effects on the classroom atmosphere, contributing to the creation of an educational community in which students rely on each other (Stoica, 2004).

b) conflicts between professors and students - are also some of the fundamental conflicts that may occur within secondary education schools. Some of the main causes of these conflicts are:

- the incapacity of solving old problems, which can cause stress and tensions amongst groups;
- the overload with tasks correlated with the incorrect evaluation;
- subjective evaluation of knowledge and behaviors;
- giving greater importance to de informative and less to the formative ways of communication;
- not being able to asses concerns of students for independent study, their needs of expressing their creativity, or their needs regarding extracurricular activities;
- reduced diversification of active-participatory methods and of effective involvement of students in the teaching-learning activity;
- the abusive use of curricular work that blocking the express of creativity;
- insufficient application of the various forms and recipes of communication with all students.
- not being able to accept different opinions expressed by students;
- resorting to authority in dealing with conflicts;
- passivity or delay towards resolving conflicts;
- not being able to deal with external complaints that eventually affect the whole group;
- gaps in developing friendly relations, work groups, cooperation and mutual acceptance;
- not being able to involve students in the decision making process, in their own coordination and evaluation;
- not being able to convince students to participate in different activities;

- not being able to use communication skills outside the teaching hours, within extracurricular activities;
- ineffective communication with parents regarding the evolution of the students, in establishing a real partnership towards solving conflicts;
- incorrect assessment, subjective assessment of student behavior;
- permissive, or on the contrary autocratic, rigid way of dealing with communication.

In order to avoid such type of conflict, the professor must not use power in a discretionary manner, with the sole purpose of highlighting the lack of power of students. His/hers authority must be manifested in a constructive manner by creating a proper learning environment, by maintaining peace and order, and by being able to bring out the best out of each student. On the other hand, authoritarianism implies blind obedience and conformism on behalf of the students, and, although might be seen as efficient, it only solves short term problems in a classroom. It's a superficial way of dealing with things and thus on the long term it`s imperative that teachers view their own ways of dealing with things, and especially with the ways they exercise their authority. In order to improve things, professors should:

- agree common conduct rules with students;
- discuss the importance of each of these rules with their students;
- together with the students, decide on the consequences of braking these rules;
- together with the students, decide on lower sanctions in case of mitigating circumstances towards braking the rules.

c) conflicts between teachers and parents - might be some of the most difficult to handle due to the fact that parents are usually (or should be) the main pillar in educating children. When conflicts occur between teachers and parents, that usually leads to conflicts between students and teachers, mostly because teachers loose their authority in front of the children (Preda, 2018).

The main causes of this type of conflict are usually:
- the lack of communication as a result of misunderstandings or a reduced number of meetings in the course of a year;
- the conflict of values and the struggle for power: parents have their own prejudices based on their previous experiences or it is unclear to them what the role of teachers is in their children's lives.

Improving relationships with parents by reducing the possibility of conflicts involves:

- Periodically informing parents, in writing or verbally, about the achievement of educational objectives, highlighting the progress made by their child.
- Increasing the number of contacts in which teachers ask parents for suggestions and opinions that show a certain level of openness on behalf of the teacher.
- Familiarity with the different ideas of the parents regarding the development of the educational process and the explaining the educational approach that generated the differences of opinions.

d) conflicts between teachers - are mainly caused by:
- the fight for obtaining certain advantages;
- the fight for obtaining certain management positions;
- the desire of satisfying his/hers own interests;
- the desire of affirmation;
- the existence of different beliefs and opinions, of different values, differences in their personality types or cultural values.

The conflicts of some teachers with the management team in general or with the school manager in particular can be very sensitive. In order to avoid and / or quickly resolve such conflicts, it is advisable for each party to adopt a proactive behavior, which seeks to improve interpersonal and organizational relationships. The management team must make their activity as transparent as possible, and the decisions must be made in common with the whole team.

4. The main obstacles in resolving conflicts in the secondary education system

Identifying and avoiding obstacles in resolving conflicts in the secondary education system can be a key point in improving the quality of the educational system. Thus each obstacle must be identified from the point of view of each participant, whether we refer to teachers, students or parents. [Iucu, 2006] The following tables can be just a starting point of many obstacles and ways to avoid them from the secondary education system (Bowling, 2012). Thus:

a) from the teachers point of view:

Obstacles	Ways of avoiding obstacles
- time management problems regarding the curricular activities	- redefining time as a resource with the help of parents who can help their children with the curricular activities (homework)
- budget problems regarding the curricular activities	- redefining curricular (and even extra-curricular) activities, budget planning and found raising
- communication problems regarding conflict management	- developing communication skills and understanding modern approaches towards conflict management

b) from the students point of view:

Obstacles	Ways of avoiding obstacles
- lack of interest/ lack of motivation	- establishing measures that will determine / increase a certain level of interest in the proposed activities, depending on each situation
- lack of understanding the scope of the proposed activities	- the teacher will explain them the purpose of each proposed activity

c) from the parents point of view:

Obstacles	Ways of avoiding obstacles
- lack of resources to help their children obtain a better education	- public grants, scholarships for their children etc.
- lack of patience for the curricular activities	- the teacher will explain them the purpose of each proposed activity

5. Increasing the quality level of the secondary educational system

The quality of education and professional development is essentially determined by measuring "added value" and the "value created". The quality of an educational service is expressed by what remains as a results obtained after completing the educational programs, after taking into account the influence of the "entry" factors (aptitudes, personal qualities and performances as "entries", social, economic and cultural environment, qualification of teachers/trainers, available resources etc.). In other words, "the absolute value of the obtained results does not count (for example - the percentage of students who pass their *final exams or the number of teachers who apply the results of specialized training), but the ratio between these results and the performances at the entrance of the system that expresses the contribution of a school to a person's education*" (Preda, 2018).

From a conflict management point of view, the increase of the quality of the secondary education system means that both educational managers and simple teachers need to take action in order to develop and implement an improvement plan.

Following the implementation of the improvement plan, the investigation instruments are applied in order to measure the new results, the difference between the previous results and the measurement of the added value. In other words, the comparison is made: results obtained before the improvement plan - results obtained after the implementation of the improvement measures. The added value is always higher when the efforts are made in the team, because in this way it represents the plus that each member of the team can bring to its overall activity, regarding the working procedure and the particular implementation of each one of the proposed activities.

The first step into developing such programs must consist into proposals for better ways of resolving conflicts with both students and parents.

6. Conclusions

When we talk about conflicts and resolving them there are several ways of doing it, but whether it`s active involvement, or problem solving, resorting to some sort of compromise or ignoring it, conflict management takes an important part of the teacher's daily activity. Understanding the basic principles of conflict management helps create a better environment within the classrooms which therefore leads to the improvement of the quality of the secondary educational system.

References:
1. Baron, R.A., 1990. *Conflict in organizations*. In: K.R. Murphy & F.E. Saal (Eds.), *Series in applied psychology. Psychology in organizations: Integrating science and practice*, pp.197-216. Hillsdale, NJ, US: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Inc.
2. Bowling, D., 2012. *Psihologia mediatorului*. Bucharest: Trei.
3. Ciobotaru, A., 2004. *Tehnici și rezolvarea conflictelor*. Iași: Polirom.
4. Dumitru, I.A., 2000. *Dezvoltarea gândirii critice şi învăţarea eficientă*. Timişoara: Editura de Vest.
5. Iucu, R., 2006. *Managementul clasei de elevi*. Iași: Polirom.
6. Preda, V.R., 2018. *Factori stresanţi şi strategii de coping la elevii de liceu*. Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut.
7. Stoica, A., 2004. *Conflictul interpersonal- prevenire, rezolvare, diminuarea conflictelor*. Iași: Polirom.
8. Ulrich, C., 2000. *Managementul clasei de elevi*. București: Corint.