THE CONFLICT MANAGEMENT BETWEEN CLASSES IN THE SECONDARY EDUCATION

CASE STUDY – „VASILE GHERASIM" TECHNOLOGY HIGH SCHOOL FROM MARGINEA, SUCEAVA COUNTY, ROMANIA

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Abstract:

Apart from the violence covered by the press by informative broadcasts at peak audience hours, we found it was extremely important to debate this topic in the pre-university environment, especially in high school classes, where students are easily trained in the education for life. A first argument to debate this topic is the one provided by television channels, radio shows and articles written in newspapers by non-professionals. In order to protect them from the aggressive media exposure to school-based conflicts, we thought to provide pictures or movies with a strong social and emotional impact to raise awareness of the bad actions in the everyday life of students.

A second argument is that we have tried to see the causes of class conflicts, to find solutions in diagnosing the occurrence of conflicts between classes, then to put into practice methods and techniques for solving conflicts in the form of a game, for the students to finally realize that some conflicts can be quenched from the beginning by treating indifferently gestures that can be tolerated and accepted at the same time.

Keywords: *management; conflict; compromise; solutions; tolerance.*

Introduction

The violence in the pre-university environment takes on new forms. If in the mid-nineteenth century the violence in the school environment was minor, today its harshness is fatal. This is the very reason we presented a topic on the „*The conflict management between classes in the secondary education***"** during the „*Educational counseling*" class at the "Vasile Gherasim" Technology High School in Marginea, Suceava County.

I proposed the students to write on a piece of paper and describe the interpersonal conflict they had encountered (or experienced) in the school environment. I asked them to briefly present the possible solutions through the conflict styles described during earlier classes and then to specify for each style of approach the possible effects of the occurrence of conflicts between classes.

We noticed that, on the one hand, the majority of the nine-grade pupils wrote about the existing conflict between them and their classmates in the 12th grade. The forms of violence they described ranging from insults, pushing, jostles to threats and hits. On the other hand, the 12th grade pupils have written about these conflicts and they are: quarrels, chants, slogans, calls for conflict, etc. Starting from this point, we considered it important to manage this type of conflict in order to eliminate it either permanently or for a longer period of time both in high school as an institution and among the students of the classes involved in the study.

Is the conflict between classes a problem of form master's management or a social problem among high school students?

We presented a case study frequently encountered in high schools in Romania, where a 12th grade pupil verbally and sometimes physically assaults a nine-grade pupil, invoking the kind of reasons that lead the latter to revolt and sometimes to enter into depression or to have an antisocial behavior by applying physical force. At each break the nine-grade pupil complains to the teacher about the behavior of his 12th grade classmate, because they both attend classes simultaneously and cannot avoid each other. According to the vision of the nine-grade pupil, the only solution is the transfer to a different school, which provokes the interest of the form master and determines him to take action in this respect.

To solve this conflict, during the educational counseling class, we proposed to work with the pupils of the two classes. The class was divided into five groups of pupils. Each group was tasked with identifying *pros* and *cons* for one of the following ways to approach the conflict. I decided to see the issue from their perspective and the way they would try to solve the conflict by using methods and techniques they are familiar with to solve the conflict. In the absence of minimal knowledge in conflict resolution, we thought to help them by offering four ways to solve the issue, with possible effects that may appear or cease over time as follows:

It was proposed to let the conflict resolve itself and, with the passage of time, to be forgotten, defining it as a method for *reconciliation.*

Possible effects: either the conflict is settled if the two sides make the effort to overcome the situation, or both sides ignore the situation created by forgetting it.

An explanation was provided according to which the conflict is always negative, destructive, so any of its forms must be avoided, an aspect or thing defined as a method of settlement by *avoidance.*

The possible effects are: either the conflict fades over time, but the frustration continues to persist, or the conflict ends quickly, but the consequences of revenge will persist over time.

The conflict was presented as a sign of lack of self-control, therefore there is a need for caution and self-control over ourselves in order not to cause any conflict, and if the conflict has occurred, let us forgive and put an end to this conflict. We have defined it as *compromise*: this type of conflict approach involves finding a solution that only partially satisfies the two sides. Both the cooperative attitude and assertiveness are moderate.

The possible effects are: either the conflict will diminish and disappear when solutions are sought to diminish it, or the conflict will decrease in intensity with the solutions taken by one side accepting the defeat at the expense of a performance desired by colleagues.

It has been said that in a conflict, someone is always a looser. The confrontation is unpleasant, so one should better avoid this problem. As an approach in the role play, we defined it as *victory-defeat* or *repression*.

Through the debate (the „*pros*" or „*cons*" method), pupils were asked to state their position: are the 12th grade pupils guilty? Why? At the end of the discussion, we will first ask pupils to identify the causes and circumstances that determined that behavior and then establish the verdict: „guilty" / „innocent".

Pupils were asked to analyze what was most important to them: to remain in good relations with the other party involved or not to participate in the conflict and achieve their goals. Throughout, we helped them to identify the style to approach conflict by redefining the terms:

✯ if one retires (one is neither interested in relationships nor in goals), then one actslike a **tortoise**;

✯ if one force oneself, desiring more to achieve goals rather than staying in good relationship with others, then one acts like a **shark**;

✯ if one let things go by themselves, forgetting them then one acts like a **bear**;

✯ if one finds solutions that only provide partial satisfaction to both parties and the cooperative attitude and the assertiveness are moderate, one acts like a **fox**;

✯ if the solution is the direct confrontation, then one acts like an **owl**.

Modes and stages specific to solving conflicts between classes in the secondary education

Different ways were presented to pupils, but also the specific types of approaches such as *victory / victory* (from the teacher's perspective):

The specific victory / victory stages are:

Problem formulation: – What is the problem? The student of the 12th grade verbally assaults on the nine-grade pupil, and at each break he or she complains to the form master about the behavior of the 12th grade pupil.

The identification of the parties involved in the conflict (directly and indirectly): – Who is involved in the conflict? A 12th grade pupil who tries to open the conflict and another nine-grade pupil who did not understand his colleague's gesture and had a problem of conduct.
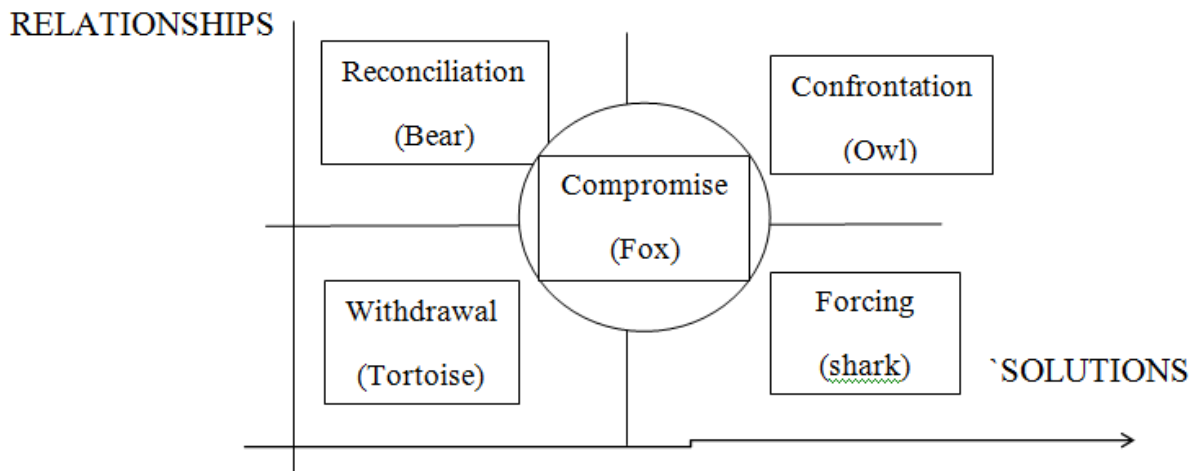
Knowing the other parties' needs: – What do those in conflict want? The 12th-grade pupil feels the need to „*stand out*" and to show that he is „*superior*" by comparison to the pupil from the other class, by showing off or trying to draw attention of his colleagues to himself.

Finding meeting points of the two parties' needs: – What are the common interests? Are there preferences that can be reconciled? What are the values underlying a common vision?

Finding alternative solutions that meet the needs of those involved:

Discussions with the pupils involved in the conflict, separately, then face to face, for confrontation.

Choosing a solution accepted by both parties – turning one's opponent into a partner by talks to attract pupils to become friends, not enemies or adversaries.

RELATIONSHIPS

Reconciliation (Bear)

Confrontation (Owl)

Compromise (Fox)

Withdrawal (Tortoise)

Forcing (shark)

`SOLUTIONS

Implementing the chosen solution into practice

Transposition into practice of the chosen solution – Who does what and when?

Symbols corresponding to the style of approach to the identified situation were provided. The class therefore disapproved of the behavior of the 12th grade pupil, causing him to ask for forgiveness. Finally, in order to better understand how to behave in relation to each other, a diagram – a function of two dimensions: the „relationships" and the „goals" as shown above was presented to the pupils.

As a result of the intervention we had in the course of this case study, we found that the victory-victory approach had the greatest impact upon the pupils because this approach succeeded in inducing each pupil the feeling that he or she was the one who was right and each one came out victorious.

The two sides have come to the conclusion that the lack of communication can sometimes lead to conflicts - which has happened, and that sincere and open dialogue is the best way to solve the problems, thus eliminating the shortcomings caused by the offensive words of the past. Possible effects: The conflict has come to an end shortly because both sides have skills and knowledge in the field of conflict resolution. Now the high school pupils are much closer to each other, their relationship has strengthened, they communicate more, they share one another's personal impressions and get to know each other much better.

The test results

In the beginning we proposed each pupil to vote without their answers being known. The responses were all put in a ballot box, then they were selected. Each response from each group was counted for a given relationship or purpose. The test was attended by 35 pupils

from the 12th grade, specialized in mechanics and 30 pupils of the 9th grade, specialized in carpentry.

The results for the 12th grade groups were as follows:

Relationship/ goals	Bear/ reconciliation	Owl/ confrontation	Tortoise/ Withdrawal	Fox/ compromise	Shark/ forcing
Group I – 7 pupils	1 vote of 7 votes	0 votes of 7 votes	1 vote of 7 votes	0 vote of 7 votes	1 vote of 7 votes
Group II – 7 pupils	2 votes of 7 votes	0 votes of 7 votes	0 votes of 7 votes	0 votes of 7 votes	0 votes of 7 votes
Group III – 7 pupils	1 vote of 7 votes	0 votes of 7 votes	0 votes of 7 votes	0 votes of 7 votes	0 votes of 7 votes
Group IV – 7 pupils	0 votes of 7 votes	0 votes of 7 votes	0 votes of 7 votes	0 votes of 7 votes	1 vote of 7 votes
Group V – 7 pupils	1 vote of 7 votes	0 votes of 7 votes	1 vote of 7 votes	0 votes of 7 votes	0 votes of 7 votes
Total pupils: **35**	5/35	0/35	2/35	1/35	2/35

After counting the votes and selecting the answers, the results for the questions asked in the 12th grade were as follows:

VERDICT	Group I	Group II	Group III	Group IV	Group V	Total
Guilty/Innocent	0/7	0/7	0/7	2/5	0/7	2/33
I interfere / I do not interfere	0/7	0/7	0/7	0/7	0/7	0/35
I withdraw / I do not withdraw	7/0	7/0	7/0	5/2	7/0	33/2
I support / I do not support	0/7	0/7	0/7	2/5	0/7	2/33
I report / I do not report	0/7	0/7	0/7	0/7	0/7	0/35
Enemy/Friend	0/7	0/7	0/7	2/5	0/7	2/33
Victory/Victory	7/7	7/7	7/7	2/5	7/7	33/35
Defeat/Victory	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/2	0/0	0/2
Victory/Defeat	0/0	0/0	0/0	2/0	0/0	2/0
I assist / I do not assist	0/7	0/7	0/7	2/5	0/7	2/33
Others	0/0	0/0	0/0	2/0	0/0	2/0

Similarly, in the 9th grade, the results on the groups were as follows:

Relationship/ goals	Bear / reconciliation	Owl/ confrontation	Tortoise/ withdrawal	Fox/ compromise	Shark/ Forcing
Group I - 6 pupils	0 votes of 6 votes	2 votes of 6 votes	1 vote of 6 votes	0 votes of 6 votes	1 vote of 6 votes
Group II - 6 pupils	0 votes of 6 votes	1 vote of 6 votes	1 vote of 6 votes	0 votes of 6 votes	3 votes of 6 votes
Group III - 6 pupils	1 vote of 6 votes	2 votes of 6 votes	1 vote of 6 votes	0 votes of 6 votes	3 votes of 6 votes
Group IV - 6 pupils	0 votes of 6 votes	2 votes of 6 votes	1 vote of 6 votes	0 votes of 6 votes	1 vote of 6 votes
Group V - 6 pupils	0 votes f 6 votes	1 vote f 6 votes	1 vote of 6 votes	0 votes of 6 votes	3 votes of 6 votes
Total pupils: **30**	1/30	8/30	5/30	0/30	11/30

After counting the votes and selecting the answers, the results for the questions asked in the 9th grade were the following:

VERDICT	GroupI	Group II	Group III	Group IV	Group V	Total
Guilty/Innocent	2/4	0/6	0/6	0/6	0/6	2/28
I interfere / I do not interfere	4/6	0/6	0/6	0/6	0/6	4/26
I withdraw / I do not withdraw	3/3	6/0	6/0	6/0	6/0	27/3
I support / I do not support	2/4	0/6	0/6	0/6	0/6	2/28
I report / I do not report	2/4	0/6	0/6	0/6	0/6	2/28
Enemy/Friend	2/4	0/6	0/6	0/6	0/6	2/28
Victory/Victory	6/6	6/6	6/6	6/6	6/6	30/30
Defeat/Victory	2/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	2/0
Victory/Defeat	0/2	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/2
I assist / I do not assist	2/4	0/6	0/6	0/6	0/6	2/28
Others	2/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	2/0

In such situations, the form masters must unite to eliminate the phenomenon of conflict between classes in the high school education environment. But through the drastic application of regulations or laws, other conflicts may arise, such as parents – teachers, who put the school in a bad light. That is why the resolution of such conflicts must be done quickly by bringing the parties involved face to face and definitively eliminating the verbal, physical or informational threat, the accusations or the verbal conflict.

The interpretation of the results brings added confidence through the solution proposed to the class, that of voting without the pupils knowing the answers that each other provided or the answers their other colleagues provided. Their sincerity in conflict situations can yield satisfactory results. Surprisingly, their older colleagues can hide a state of conflict very quickly, pretending that nothing happened, although there are complaints in this regard. The future will let us know if this type of behavior is related to their education or it is a social problem.

States of emergence and social problem solving in the conflicts between high school classes

As it is often noted, studying and explaining the social issues and their causes is the core concern for most of the scientists or researchers in the social sciences. In this context, the social service providers (high school) play a central role by identifying particular situations or conditions as social problems and by their involvement in formulating solutions and school curricula to remedy or alleviate them.

Of course, the discussion involves explicitly or implicitly a minimal sociological theoretical perspective. First of all, Sociology itself is pluri-paradigmatic and can generate different viewpoints upon one and the same social problem or even upon what we can consider as a social problem, „on the underlying causes of particular social problems, such as on how a problem should be studied and resolved." (Dan, A., 2007, p. 4).

A concrete example is the classification of problems that can be: personal, practical or social. From this classification, we believe that a first state of appearance is the **nature of social problems**. In 1989 two sociologists, Rubington and Weinberg present some theoretical developments on the nature of social issues, from the following 6 perspectives:

1. The social pathology focused on people;

2. The high-school de-concentration focused on the significance of laws and norms;

3. The conflict of values and interests / purposes;

4. The deviant behavior that emphasizes roles;

5. The social labeling that examines social responses;

6. The critical perspective – it focuses on roles as products of values and interests / goals.

The perspective of social pathology. The definition of the social pathology perspective is the following: the socially desirable conditions and the social order are viewed as healthy, while those who differ/deviate from the moral expectations (established by a dominant and thus widely accepted system of values) are viewed as *sick*, so they are bad and undesirable. Thus, for the perspective of social pathology, a social problem is a violation of moral expectations.

The main and ultimate cause of social problems is the failure of socialization. School has the responsibility to convey to all pupils the widely accepted moral norms, but sometimes such efforts are ineffective.

As a result, those who are considered to be deviant from this perspective are the defectives (*those who cannot be educated*), the addicts (*those who have some difficulty in receiving and acquiring education*) or the delinquents (those who reject education). For the later followers of this perspective, the social problems are the result of mislabeled values. In the *mild sense* of this perspective, people who contribute to the emergence of social problems are seen as *sick*; in the *hard sense* of it, these people are seen as *criminals*. In any case, behind both concepts there is the perception that the pupil or the situation is essentially *immoral*.

The first supporters of this perspective considered that some students are inherently defective. For most of them, *it was clear* that older students considered to be *faulty, addicted and delinquent* tend to learn through conflicts between classes of the same year. Later, the followers of this perspective considered the school environment as an important determinant of what contributed to the social pathology.

Some masters tended to focus on the immoral characteristics of pupils, while other masters tended to focus on the immoral properties of schools and saw the emergence and development of problems as a result of social forces such as the technological development and the increase of the population density. As a consequence, such school disturbances lead to an increase in the cost of maintaining a social order of law, which at some point may collapse, leading to the *dehumanization* of the entire classes of high school pupils.

In the older versions of some Romanian old school masters, the followers of this perspective advocate for the elimination of genetically *defective* students. Other masters of the same old Romanian school believe that the solution to the social problems generated by these pupils in their education and the improvement of *the level of morality* of the *freshmen* and *sophomore* classes is the decisions of the high school manager through the school integration programs.

The more recent version of this approach, which tends to see the high school or the school as being sick, rather than its *non-conformist* pupils, originates in the teacher's and pupils view of the human nature: the pupils are well-endowed by mother Nature, but their institutions (high schools) are *bad* and as a result they see the remediation of *sick* institutions by changing the value system and the value orientations of the pupil generations. A Romanian proverb says: *the moral education is given to the pupil by the good family upbringing during his or her first seven years of the early childhood*.

A second state of occurrence of social problems is the prospect of **the high school disintegration**. The high school disintegration is considered the *shaded, complementary facet* of the social organization. The high school organization presupposes, above all, that it is a whole, in which the parties are in a somewhat orderly dependency relationship. The central notion of these conceptualizations is that of *roles*, which define not only the different parts of the school or the high school, but also the way in which they are interrelated. The high school disorganization is perceived as a failure of role manifestation.

The three major types of disorganization are:

a) the lack of norms;

b) the cultural conflict;

c) the collapse of norms.

The main cause of high school disorganization is considered to be the social change, which leads some component parts to leave the system because they are no longer in harmony with other parts of the same high school. The conditions that generate such a state can be found in the technical, demographic or cultural changes generated by the social change and which will cause the current equilibrium to shift (which is a dynamic balance).

The consequences of the state of disorganization are manifested both at the level of the high school management and at the level of the school classes. For pupils, the high school disorganization determines the personal disorganization manifested, for example, by stress, mental illness and alcoholism. For the high school system, the consequences can be of three types:

a) changes in high school may occur, such as some adaptation responses that can bring both the school classes and teachers back to a steady state;

b) the high school can continue to operate in a state of increased stability, in the sense that although the disorganization may not disappear, the institution continues its operation anyway (but to other parameters);

c) the high school can collapse because the disorganization is very strong and extremely destructive.

A third state of the occurrence of social problems can be seen from **the perspective of the conflict of values**. The idea behind the conflict of values is that social issues are social conditions that are incompatible with the values of a particular high school class whose pupils are able to make public a call to conflicting action. The social issues are squeezing out of conflicts of values and interests. Different school classes with different interests are found in opposition. Once this opposition has been crystallized in a state / conflict situation, one can state that the social issue has emerged.

The support conditions that influence the occurrence, frequency, duration, and outcome of social problems are the competition and the contact among the school classes within the same high school. When two or more school classes are in competition and utilizing particular / specific ways of contacting other classes, a conflict cannot be avoided.

If school classes can solve the conflict in the name of a set of meaningful values shared by both sides, then it is the consensus that eliminated the problem. If school classes can negotiate, then there is an exchange of values, all in the spirit of the didactic process. If neither consensus nor negotiation takes place, then the school classes with more power gain or take control.

A fourth state of social problems can be viewed from the perspective of **the deviant behavior**. In terms of this perspective, social issues are violations of normative expectations and behaviors. The behavior or the situations that depart from widely accepted rules by society are regarded as deviant.

The causes of the deviant behavior are related to inappropriate socialization – the process of socialization is seen as taking place primarily within the contextual frame of relations between the school classes of the same high school. The predisposition to deviant behaviors is the result of the failure of the primary socialization. The favorable conditions for the emergence and manifestation of such behavior are the absence and blocking of positive opportunities, the stress, the access to deviant forms of satisfaction and the deviant role models.

Another state of the emergence of social problems is seen from **the perspective of social labeling**. According to the labeling (or deviant-social) theory, a social problem is defined by social reactions to an alleged violation of social rules or expectations. This perspective focuses upon the conditions where behaviors or situations are defined as problematic or deviant.

The cause of a social problem has its roots especially in the attention that pupils or classes receive or, rather, in the attention of those exercising social control, ie social reactions to an alleged knowledge of the violation of internal high school rules.

The conditions in which a pupil or situation is labeled as being problematic or deviant refers in particular to power and influence relationships (whoever labels is in a winning position by applying such a label, to apply a negative tag as well as the power to *tag* it to the pupil / situation in question), but also to the potential gain of being labeled, especially by self-labeling.

The consequences of such labeling are reflected both in the expectations of other classmates (for example, from a person labeled as deviant, he or she is expected to continue to violate norms or behaviors considered as conventional), and to reduce the chances of those labeled to re-integrate, but especially to develop and adopt deviant behaviors as a result of the reactions of other classmates, but higher (a form of deviance called *secondary deviation*).

The final state of social problems is seen from **a critical perspective**. According to this approach, a social problem is a situation resulting from the exploitation by those who hold power (high school management, masters), those who do not have enough power (the school class).

The main cause of the manifestation of most social problems is the form of secondary schooling produced by the high school council in a superficial manner. Consequently, the development of the superficial brings with it the amplification of the social problems. As a solution to solve social problems there is the reform or the revolution. In other words, the 9th grade must win *the conflict* and then *produce* a state of egalitarian equilibrium without the participation of 12th grade.

After having seen the state of social problems from the perspective of the two classes or the masters, one notices that in order to solve them the emphasis must be on identifying and understanding the reality of social problems through diagnosis. In other words, the diagnosis is seen as a stage in action / intervention projects, as aspects that analyze other specialized articles.

Conclusions:

The interpretation of the class results leads to two important conclusions:

✯ The 12th grade pupils are very united, they do not intervene, they assist, they do not report the conflict, they withdraw, they do not support the conflict, they are friends, and they declare they are innocent when asked about what they saw about the conflict situation when in front of the master.

✯ The 9th grade pupils are less united, they want to intervene, they assist, some even report the conflict, they are the ones who want to assist, film, amuse, to become high school stars in order to impress, but through this behavior they forget that physically they are not superior to the older colleagues and, often by victimizing themselves, they are in conflict with their older colleagues.

The interpretation of the concept of social problem leads to several important conclusions:

✯ according to the perspective of social pathology, the only real solution to social problems is the moral education;

✯ according to the disorganization perspective of the high school, the solutions to the problems raised generally refer to those actions that bring the characteristics of the high school education back to the state of equilibrium;

✯ the solutions proposed by this perspective to resolve the conflict of values are consensus, negotiation and sheer force;

✯ the methods of counteracting the deviant behavior refer in particular to resocialization, increasing the level of socialization in high school through the school classes, redistributing the access to opportunities, reducing opportunities for contact with deviant role models;

✯ the question of social labeling for solving high school conflict problems refers to the revision of the definition of a situation / school class as being deviating (greater tolerance and understanding of particular / special situations) as well as the elimination of potential gains from the labeling and self-labeling process;

✯ the solutions considered in the critical perspective for solving social problems are activism, reform or revolution.

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