

Teacher Training Course: Conflict Resolution through Mediation

Csilla M. Szabó

Abstract—In Hungary, the society has changed a lot for the past 25 years, and these changes could be detected in educational situations as well. The number and the intensity of conflicts have been increased in most fields of life, as well as at schools. Teachers have difficulties to be able to handle school conflicts. What is more, the new net generation, generation Z has values and behavioural patterns different from those of the previous one, which might generate more serious conflicts at school, especially with teachers who were mainly socialising in a traditional teacher – student relationship.

In Hungary, the bill CCIV of 2011 declared the foundation of Institutes of Teacher Training in higher education institutes. One of the tasks of the Institutes is to survey the competences and needs of teachers working in public education and to provide further trainings and services for them according to their needs and requirements. This job is supported by the Social Renewal Operative Programs 4.1.2.B. The professors of a college carried out a questionnaire and surveyed the needs and the requirements of teachers working in the region. Based on the results, the professors of the Institute of Teacher Training decided to meet the requirements of teachers and to launch short teacher further training courses in spring 2015. One of the courses is going to focus on school conflict management through mediation.

The aim of the pilot course is to provide conflict management techniques for teachers and to present different mediation techniques to them. The theoretical part of the course (5 hours) will enable participants to understand the main points and the advantages of mediation, while the practical part (10 hours) will involve teachers in role plays to learn how to cope with conflict situations applying mediation. We hope if conflicts could be reduced, it would influence school atmosphere in a positive way and the teaching – learning process could be more successful and effective.

Keywords—Conflict resolution, generation Z, mediation, teacher training.

I. INTRODUCTION

ALTHOUGH there have always been conflicts at school between teachers and students and between students and students, both the number and the intensity of school conflicts have risen for the several past decades. There has frequently been news in media about school bullying: children beating their classmates or even teachers, or about parents who take law into their own hands and threaten teachers [1].

All organisations, such as schools, colleges, and other work places have potential conflicts as they are communities of people with diverse personalities. Schools are special communities as their members, teachers, students, and their

parents in the background often have totally different value and norm system and have absolutely different views about the world. However, they have to work together for years, as successfully as possible [1].

The frequency and the quality of conflicts have a significant influence on the circumstances at the organisation, such as persons' relationships, the performance of the organisation, or the satisfaction of the staff. Regarding interpersonal researches, many experts have stated that conflicts are not only negative phenomena. They have several positive influences on the relationship: successful conflict management may strengthen relationships and deepen the confidence between the parties [2].

In the background of the increase of school conflicts, several reasons can be found. In most Hungarian schools the teaching – learning process is rather traditional, resembling the Prussian-like school, where teachers are considered to be authoritative persons on the top of the school hierarchy, and where school disciplines are unquestionable. While there have been several major changes in Hungarian society for the past 25 years, which significantly modified people's thinking and their attitude to social phenomena, the majority of teachers studied and socialised in the era that can be characterised by traditional teacher – student relationship [3]. What is more, while most teachers, especially in Hungary, belong to generation X or even baby-boomers, today primary and secondary school pupils and students belong to the generation Z. This new net generation often denies authoritative rules and disciplines and questions the necessity of learning lexical data. While they are really bright at handling digital devices, they are under-mature to express and communicate their feelings. All this means that teachers face challenges or even difficulties when they deal with generation Z, which may contribute to the increase of school conflicts.

Most of the teachers have realised that they need to acquire competences how to handle and resolve school conflicts. In Hungary, universities and colleges take part in a European project, the aim of which is to improve teacher training and further training. Surveying the needs of teachers working in public education, higher education institutes should develop and widen the range of their teacher training and further training courses and services. These trainings and services should inevitably contain conflict management including the newest techniques, such as mediation.

II. SCHOOL CONFLICTS OF THE PRESENT TIME

Conflict is the pursuit of incompatible interests and goals by different groups or individuals [4]. Many claim that conflict is

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„a struggle over values or claims to status, power, and scarce resources in which the aims of the conflicting parties are not only to gain the desired values, but also to neutralize, injure, or eliminate the rivals” [4]. That is why people think that conflicts are negative, destructive or even abnormal phenomena. On the other hand, conflicts should be regarded as natural interactions between people that bring problems on the surface and may provide possible resolutions [1].

The quality of conflict management has a significant effect on the organisational climate of the particular school, which influences students' performance and behaviour. The result of these researchers are synthesised by Balázs [5].

However, conflicts can lead to students' hostile behaviour or their withdrawal from school activities. They often negatively influence students' self-esteem or even their career so conflicts must be solved. Resolution is the act of finding a solution to a conflict. The aim of conflict resolution strategies is to terminate conflicts through the use of constructive ideas so that both parties could be satisfied with the outcome of a settlement [4], which means that the conflict must end with a win-win resolution. There are several ways for conflict resolutions, but one of the most effective ones is mediation.

The most typical and frequent school conflicts can be found between students and teachers or between two or more students. Most school conflicts are among students, peers. Value conflicts appear among children when they enter school and these conflicts become more frequent in the pre-adolescent period of life. In teenage years, children's essential need is to belong to a group, the norms and values of which might be built in the adolescents' personality. The values of the reference group can be opposite to those of school, or can be even deviant, which may generate school conflicts. The most typical types of conflicts among students are the following:

- bullying,
- school violence,
- stigmatization, labelling,
- victimization, mental pressure [6].

As far as teacher – student conflicts are concerned, they are mainly based on educational problems: on different expectations of parents and teacher towards the student. In educational situations, the two or three parties are influenced by emotions, which can be either positive or negative: a teacher can show favour or bias towards a student – sometimes without any reasonable basis. Moreover, the teaching situation in most Hungarian schools is vertical: teachers stand higher in school hierarchy; they instruct students what to do and how to do it. In case of conflict, many teachers want to resolve it from their hierarchical position [1], which can lead to aggressive behaviour among students.

School conflicts often based on a generation gap: a new generation, generation Z has entered public education, and these kids are totally different from the previous generation. Generation Z has several other names, referring to their media consumption: Facebook generation or digital natives by [7]; zappers or „Instant online” generation by [8]; dotcom kids, net generation or even iGeneration by [9]. Generation Z is the first

global generation; while they were growing up they were consuming the same culture: they like the same food and fashion; they watch the same films, listen to the same music and love the same brands all over the world. Global attitude to the linguistic code is typical: they use nearly the same words, which other generations do not understand [10]. The most significant attributes of generation Z are the following:

- Personal freedom is extremely important to them.
- They continuously share their social life with public.
- They live faster rhythm of life than their ancestors.
- They are characterised by multitasking doing several different things parallel.
- They were born in a changing world so they are not afraid of changes.
- They are brave and initiative.
- They are hardly characterised by words and emotions.
- They have practical views.
- They are not likely to observe rules.
- They have high proficiency in handling electric devices [10].

Although their digital competence is higher than that of any other generations before and they are perfect at handling digital technical devices, their emotional intelligence has not developed parallel with their mental intelligence and so they are sometimes not able to handle real interpersonal situations properly. As they overuse social media, they are not used to being on their own; they can hardly bear silence around them. Expert claim that existing in digital space – such as the need of communication or multifocal attention due to continuous multitasking – indicates changes in adolescents' personality. On the one hand, since about 80 per cent of their communication in social media is about themselves, it may lead to high self-esteem and narcissistic feelings. On the other hand, continuous self-presentation in social media may lead to the process that teenagers underestimate their own self or even could develop depression [3].

In Hungary, the typical resolution of school conflicts is based on School Rules. These resolutions, in most cases, sanction students' not proper or deviant behaviour, which strengthens the win-lose situation. The sanctions present the different levels of the disciplinary punishment from form-teacher's written warning to putting the student into a different class or even to expulsion from school. Although School Rules can be put into force if they are accepted by the Students' Local Government, teachers often solve conflicts from their hierarchical position based on punishment.

Except for punishment or legal cases, there are several other ways that can help to resolve conflicts. These methods are frequently and successfully used in other fields of life, such as in business or marriage conflicts. One of the alternative ways of conflict management is mediation. Mediation is a process that can be used to resolve conflicts and disagreements between the parties. Opposite to punishment or legal solutions, mediation is voluntary and confidential. Mediation has several benefits for all participants of school conflicts: teachers, students, and parents:

- As conflicts often arise from misunderstanding or the lack of information, mediation can help parties to be able to communicate directly and in an assertive way.
- Mediation is faster and less costly than legal or school disciplinary processes.
- Mediation tends to find a win-win solution.
- During the mediation process, the parties are equal, their relationship is not hierarchical.
- Mediation maintains the positive relationship between the parties even after the conflict resolution procedure.
- During the mediation process, the parties get to know each other's views and attitudes towards the case.
- Mediation generally results in agreement that participants find satisfactory and the parties tend to follow the terms of their mediated agreement [11].

The direct goal of school mediation is to find resolution to the given problem, while the indirect aims are to achieve that teachers, students and parents could mutually respect one another's values; that all parties could indicate the proper behaviour and acquire the elements of empathic communication.

The main person of mediation is the mediator, a trained and impartial professional who facilitates the mediation process helping the participants clearly communicate their interests and keep the rules (given by the mediator), finding common ground and identifying the possible solutions. Although mediation process requires the active participation of a third party, the mediator, conflict resolution is found out by the two opponent parties not by the mediator [12]. That is the point where mediation differs from arbitration; opposite to the mediator, an arbitrator is the person who decides how to settle the dispute and offers the resolution to the parties [13]. The mediator's role is like a catalyst: contributes to finding and declaring the resolution by recognising and understanding parties' emotions and motivations that are not communicated in an explicit way. When the agreement is achieved, the mediator drafts a document that reflects what the participants have agreed upon, and participants sign the final agreement [12].

As school conflicts between students significantly differ from teacher – student or teacher – parent conflicts, conflict management and the mediation process should be different. A student – student conflict resolution can successfully be found and done by another student, which process is called peer mediation. In this mediation process, trained student leaders help their peers work together to resolve everyday interpersonal disputes and learn from them. Peer mediation is one of the most popular and effective approaches to resolve school conflicts. But it must be stated that peer mediators need an adult coordinator, who supports or supervises students' activities [14].

On the other hand, in a teacher – student or teacher – parent conflict the mediator must be an adult person. It would be advisable to apply an outside mediator, who is absolutely impartial, but most schools either cannot afford it or are not willing to display their inner problems and become vulnerable or ruin their image in society [15]. Instead an outside person, a

school psychologist or a social worker, a health coordinator or a social-pedagogue can work and function as a school mediator. Teachers can mediate conflict situations unless they become partial, biased or influenced by their colleague teacher who is involved in the conflict.

III. THE PROJECT

In Hungary, the bill CCIV, 2011 about national higher education declared the foundation of Institutes of Teacher Training in higher education institutes if the university or the university college has teacher training minimum in two study programs. The work of Institutes of Teacher Training is supported by the Social Renewal Operative Programs 4.1.2.B. One of the tasks of Institutes of Teacher Training is to survey both the competences and the needs of students entering the teacher training, as well as of those who have finished their training and started to work in public education. After having surveyed the needs of teachers, the Institutes should provide further trainings and services for teachers according to their needs and requirements.

The College of Dunaújváros is a university college in Central Hungary. At the College the Institutes of Teacher Training was founded in July 2013 and it is supported by the Social Renewal Operative Programs 4.1.2.B.2-13/I-2013-0011, the title of which is 'The Renewal of Teacher Training and Teacher Further Training in Central Transdanubian Region'. The project declares the foundation of the Regional Pedagogical Service Centre within the Institutes of Teacher Training, the aim of which is to monitor the needs of teachers and provide different services and trainings for them.

IV. THE QUESTIONNAIRE AND ITS RESULTS

The Institutes of Teacher Training at the College of Dunaújváros carried out a questionnaire survey among primary and secondary schools teachers working in schools that can be found in the region of the College. The purpose of the survey was to present and analyse the needs of teachers so that we could provide further trainings and professional services for them. The research was carried out by online self-administered questionnaire from March to May 2014. The online questionnaire was available on a net forum formed in the project, on pedhalo.duf.hu. Although many teachers received the link of the questionnaire, the sample was not too big: 85 teachers filled in the questionnaire and sent it back.

Majority of the teachers who answered the survey were women (65%), and most of them (58%) worked in primary schools (they teach students from the age of 6 to 14-15). 56 per cent of the respondents has a university degree (today it is equal with an MA degree), while 44 per cent has a college degree, which is equal with a BA degree.

The questionnaire surveyed teachers' requirements on various services and trainings that can and should be provided for them by the Institute of Teacher Training and the Regional Pedagogical Service Centre. In the survey, there were professional services listed, and respondents had to evaluate them on a 1 to 5 scale, according to Hungarian school

assessment system. 1 meant the particular service is the least suitable, while 5 meant that the service is the most suitable for teachers. After counting the means of the answers, the bar chart shows that teachers expect the Institute most to provide professional materials for the work (4.53), as well as further trainings and short courses (4.27). Professional events and programs as well as educational brochures and publications are less popular. Personal counselling was considered to be the least attractive service (2.9).

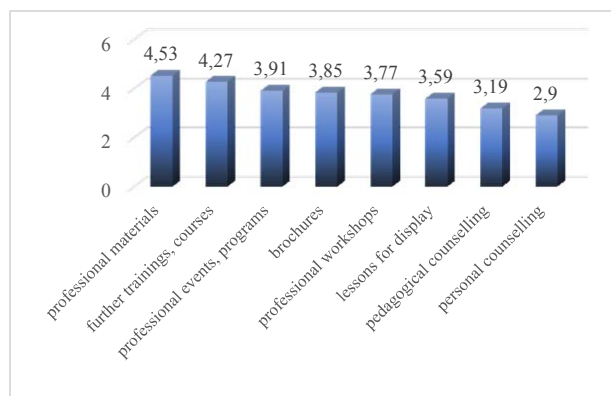


Fig. 1 Types of services required by teachers

After several forms of services, there were various schemes of professional services listed in the questionnaire and teachers had to evaluate all of them on a 5-grade Likert-scale, where 1 meant the particular service is the least suitable, while 5 meant that the service is the most suitable for teachers. Based on the analysis, all professional services are required by teachers, the most popular ones are: to provide best practices for them, to learn school conflict management and to consult questions of methodology. The least popular ones were to provide support in institutional measurement tasks and in assessing and evaluating teachers and principals' jobs.

TABLE I
THEMES OF FURTHER TRAINING REQUIRED BY TEACHERS

| | Mean | Deviation |
|---|------|-----------|
| Consultation on best practices, adaptable patterns. | 4.02 | 1.122 |
| Consultation on handling school conflicts. | 3.96 | 1.098 |
| Consultation on methodology. | 3.93 | 1.028 |
| Support in application of adaptive learning strategies. | 3.73 | 1.066 |
| Consultation on making up professional teacher portfolio. | 3.65 | 1.323 |
| Support in application of info communication technology. | 3.64 | 1.1 |
| Organising group and personal lesson observation with consultation opportunities. | 3.61 | 1.184 |
| Support in doing measures on students' knowledge and behaviour. | 3.45 | 1.161 |
| Consultation on mentoring teacher trainees and young teachers. | 3.38 | 1.29 |
| Support in forming institutional assessment system. | 3.32 | 1.273 |
| Support in evaluating teachers and principals' job. | 3.31 | 1.221 |
| Support in organising institutional assessment tasks. | 3.3 | 1.266 |

V. THE SHORT MEDIATION TRAINING

As the results show, majority of teachers prefer trainings and courses and they need information and help how to handle and resolve school conflicts. That is why the Institute of Teacher Training at the College of Dunaújváros planned to organise a short course on school conflict management. The professors of the Institute want to present a specific technique for teachers the application of which may help to resolve school conflicts. This technique is mediation. In Hungary, conflict management and resolution was not the part of teacher training in the past, so experienced teachers having finished their university or college studies 15-25 years ago did not learn conflict management. Moreover, middle aged teachers have to face problem behaviour of generation Z, and they often do not know how to resolve conflicts with or among their students. They have recognised they would need conflict management techniques, which was indicated in their answers filling in the questionnaire.

Based on teachers' requests, we are planning to hold a short, pilot course in spring 2015 focusing on conflict management through mediation. According to Hungarian legislation, teacher further training courses could be minimum 30-hour long. That is why the course has been planned for 30 hours including communication, conflict management, mediation, and coaching. The exact curriculum of the course was worked out in January and February 2015 and it contains the following elements:

1. Communication
 - 1.1 Difficult communicational situations: definition, communication styles and situations, analysis
 - 1.2 Conflict based communication model: communication process, techniques (active listening, I-message)
2. Conflicts
 - 2.1 Conflict: definition, types, reasons
 - 2.2 Escalation of conflict: conflict in organisation, participants, escalation
 - 2.3 Levels of conflict, typology of conflict personality
 - 2.4 Conflict management techniques: lamp-model, 3W model, Harvard conception; techniques of questioning
3. Mediation
 - 3.1 The mediator: role, duties, possibilities and limitations, personality
 - 3.2 Definition and framework of mediation: legislation, application, benefits
 - 3.3 Mediation in practice: types, procedure, structure of mediation hearing
4. Coaching
 - 4.1 Consultation at school: types, applications
 - 4.2 Coaching in practice: the coach's role, duties, tools, process

The purpose of the course is to provide an instrument for teachers so that they could resolve today school conflicts. The course consists of theory (professors' presentations) as well as a lot of practice, role and situational plays. The course might be suitable for acquiring basic mediation techniques. The primary aim of the course is to apply them and could cope with conflict situations; while the secondary aim is to teach

them to their students. Starting from theoretical background, the course aims to teach real life techniques through role plays and situation plays. Teachers offer conflict situations from their own school situations and the group simulates the mediation hearing: teachers play the roles of the two or three parties involved in the conflict as well as the role of the mediator. All role players act roles voluntarily. All the other participants of the course, who do not take part actively in the role play, follow the simulated conflict situation and the mediation hearing and provide comments or offer communication formulas to any role players or even put questions about the situation. If needed, any role players can be exchanged by another course participant.

Most mediation processes start working with the two parties at the same time. The mediation process applied by us begins with hearing the two parties individually at different occasions. As all people who have entered a conflict situation are involved and influenced emotionally, they need calm atmosphere and need to feel the sings of love and patience. During individual hearing the mediator has several tasks:

- They must use the technique of active listening continuously responding on the story with some words or gestures.
- They should reflect the words of the client summarising the main points.
- They sometimes need to transform the client's negative comments about the other party into positive ones so that the client might see and recognise the other party's approaches. Transformation is suitable to find excuse to the other party's weaknesses.
- They should make people say something positive about the other party, whom they often think their enemy.
- They must ask questions especially about emotions as people have difficulties to communicate about their feeling clearly and punctually. Questions make people think about their attitudes and feelings from a bit different point of view, which may help them to see the other party's attitude.
- Finally, they must clear up what the client expects from them and the mediation process.

When the mediator has discussed the conflict with both parties, the process is going on to the mediation hearing. The mediation hearing is totally controlled by the mediator: they give the rules, which are must be kept by both parties during the whole hearing. The parties know the exact date of the mediation hearing and should prepare for it. The preparation phase is really important as before the mediation hearing both parties must think over their relationship from the beginning: they should list the good points of the other party as well as their own responsibilities in the conflict.

In case school conflicts, especially when a (pre-)adolescent student and a teacher is involved in the conflict, it may be rather difficult to make the teenage student realise and declare the positive features of the teacher. On the other hand, an experienced adult person who was deeply hurt by an adolescent could hardly express positive thoughts and feelings about an impertinent and mischievous teenager. This problem

situation could be facilitated both by the individual hearing and the preparation phase. The parties might respond on the other party's saying but they must not express either anger or aggression, and they must not assess the other party in a negative way.

The second part of the mediation hearing is to find a resolution of the conflict and to come to a compromise. The parties express their essential needs regarding the relationship with the other party, and offer possible solutions to the conflict situation. [16] The requirements of both parties are written on a board, and each one is discussed with both parties whether it could be accepted or needs some modification. Discussing all requirements with the parties, the mediator writes the settlement agreement. It declares all the discussed requirements with the expected behaviour in uneasy situations. The agreement is signed by both parties and the mediator. As all compromises are made and worked out by the conflict parties, it has a big chance that the parties will keep them in the future.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

As it could be seen, modern life is full of conflicts, which means that more conflicts can be found at schools than some decades ago. As teachers are not well-prepared to handle and resolve conflict situations, they need trainings to learn how to manage school conflicts. Teachers who were socialised in the era of socialism can hardly handle situations and conflicts of modern times. Moreover, they have to face the difficulty of dealing with students belonging to generation Z, who have totally different views about the world and different approaches to school and learning. In Hungary, the Prussian-like school disciplines sometimes contribute to school conflicts.

After asking the teachers in the Central Trans-Danubian region, the Institute of Teacher Training at the College of Dunaújváros decided to launch a short course for teachers focusing on conflict management. The professors of the College aim to present the modern techniques of conflict resolution, such as mediation. The course is planned to be a pilot one in spring 2015, and besides teaching the theory it provides practice for communication and conflict management techniques, mediation process, and coaching. We hope that the teachers who will take part in the course will benefit from it and can apply the techniques in their everyday work at school. Moreover, they might convince their colleagues on acquiring and applying new conflict management techniques and on the usefulness of mediation. After finishing the pilot course, the professors of the Institute of Teacher Training would like to offer this course for all the teachers in the region who need to improve their competence of conflict resolution. We hope that if the number and the intensity of school conflicts could be reduced, it would influence school atmosphere in a positive way: the teacher – student relationships may improve and the teaching – learning process could be more successful and effective.

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