

Theoretic Foundations of Building up Future Specialists' Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution Skills

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Abstract: The article deals with the problem of building up future specialists' conflict prevention and conflict resolution skills. According to the authors' point of view lack of professional preparation for constructive conflict resolution leads to a negative attitude towards conflict in general and forms an inclination to apply destructive behavioral tactics in conflict. The problem could be successfully solved through the development of conflict proneness which is viewed by the authors as an integral personal quality, determining the moral attitude towards the others and revealing itself in the ways of conflict resolution an individual opts for. The following levels of conflict proneness are identified: primitive, elementary, neutrality, adequate and optimal. The description of each level includes rational, emotional and behavioral component. The positive development of conflict proneness is carried out through a range of traditional and innovative methods covered in the article.

Key words: Conflict % Behavioral tactics % Proneness % Resolution skills

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary society development is characterized by global changes inevitably causing serious antagonisms in all social spheres. Mutual intolerance and hostility are on the increase.

Consequently, the aggravations of social contradictions lead to a variety of conflicts between individuals. Regrettably, destructive ways of dealing with conflict are often opted for. Thus a behavioral pattern in conflict not orientated towards cooperation or collaboration is formed, creating a negative attitude to conflict in general.

Educational establishments should be aimed at building up a positive attitude towards conflict and should teach their students to view it as a means of resolving contradictions, build up their skills to address conflicts timely and in a constructive way or transform them into possibilities for self-development and interpersonal communication improvement. Nevertheless, professional educational establishments frequently fail to cope with this task as teachers do not always possess the necessary skills themselves and, therefore, appear to be unable to build up the afore – mentioned skills in their

students. Very few learners get any kind of advice or help in case a conflict arises [1]. This stems from the fact that the problem of building up future specialists' conflict prevention and conflict resolution skills remains underresearched and underdeveloped in both pedagogical theory and practice.

The results of scientific research in this area of Russian pedagogical conflictology are uncoordinated and unsystematized. The key phenomenon of conflict awareness is not properly studied or defined; moreover, the question of interpersonal conflict management methods is unresolved.

In our research of the problem we defined conflict as a phase of interpersonal or group relationships in which there appears a contradiction between personally significant aims, principles and motives of the parties involved; the parties in question experience and are well aware of the nervous and psychological tension and they take actions which result in the violation of the opponents' personal space boundaries [2].

The Main Part: Under the complicated modern conditions involving dramatic transformations the problem of "Self – The other" acquires a new sense.

There is an undeniable connection between the problem of conflict and the problem of “Self – The other”. Our behavior and the behavior of others depend to a great degree on the mutual understanding. Constructive conflict resolution can be achieved on condition that the opponents realize what ideas each of them represents during conflict interaction, what their aims are and what their emotional state is like. The ability to understand the other through the space of self plays a crucially important role at the pre-conflict stage [3].

Admitting that a conflict can possess immoral nature, in our research we hold a belief that *conflict proneness as a personal quality does not have a destructive character as it functions as a personality development condition. Conflict proneness is viewed by us as an integral personal quality, determining the moral attitude towards the others and revealing itself in the ways of conflict resolution an individual opts for.*

In course of education and upbringing conflict proneness is developed in an evolutionary way, which allows identifying the levels of the personal quality in question: *primitive, elementary, neutrality, adequate and optimal ones.*

According to M.M.Bakhtin, B.S.Bratus, V.N.Myasishchev, S.L.Rubinshtein [4] and some other researchers the centerpiece of a personality development is the individual’s attitude to others. Any kind of damage or malfunction of this attitude results in a personality’s pathology – its destruction. From this point of view the attitude to other people serves as a kind of indicator, which demonstrates the quality of an individual’s activities aimed at the transformation of themselves, their subjectivity and the world in general. Taking this into account the structure of attitude has played the role of the criterion for identifying the levels of conflict proneness. Attitude as an integral concept has three structural components: rational, emotional and behavioral.

The corresponding criterion characteristics have been defined.

At the primitive level of conflict proneness the rational component which includes the extent of theoretic knowledge of psychological and pedagogical nature of conflict, its structure, dynamics, kinds and possible reasons for it is described by the following criteria:

- C The absence of any idea concerning constructive interpersonal communication, a distorted idea of conflict and conflict proneness;
- C Viewing conflict management skills and abilities to resolve conflicts in a constructive way as ones of minor importance.

The emotional component at this level of conflict proneness characterizes an individual’s emotional state during conflict interaction. An individual demonstrates poverty of feelings expressed in lack of interest towards other people, weak emotional sensitivity and, moreover, low communicative tolerance manifested in emotional instability and aggressiveness.

The behavioral component of attitude includes the existence of a system of a working knowledge and practical skills concerning conflict prevention or constructive resolution. At the primitive level of conflict proneness it is characterized by ignoring the opinions and activities of the group, demonstrating low communication culture, opting for a competing style when a conflict arises, deliberate denial of compromising and collaborating.

At the elementary level of conflict proneness the rational component is characterized by the following criteria:

- C Formal opinions concerning conflict and constructive interpersonal interaction in it leading to a mismatch between an individual’s opinions and behavior;
- C The interests and beliefs of the significant others are of great importance to an individual.

The Emotional Component Criteria:

- C An extremely low level of empathy;
- C The emergence of emotional connections with the significant others in process of communication;
- C Demonstration of situational communicative tolerance towards the appealing individuals;
- C Emotional excitability, vulnerability, groundless feelings of being hurt or insulted, irritation towards unappealing individuals;
- C An urge to argue with other individuals, initiate conflicts and compete with others.

The behavior of an individual with an elementary level of conflict proneness is characterized by the lack of flexibility in determining the personal space boundaries, inability to understand. The Other through the discovery of Self. An individual does not possess self-regulation abilities, fails to stop tension escalation, demonstrates a low level of self-organization in conflict situations which results in frequent conflicts. Balanced relations with other individuals are only possible in case of personally significant motifs.

At the neutrality level an individual's opinions about conflict and conflict proneness are characterized by the conflict-free orientation. As a result of lack of confidence and low aspiration level an individual prefers adjusting to the needs and demands of others. An individual deliberately follows the principles of non-interference.

Situational communication tolerance is well-developed and is practiced with both significant and insignificant others.

The behavioral component is notable for deliberate refusal to solve the fundamental contradictions serving as a conflict base, preferring accommodating or avoiding strategies which reduce the number of conflicts.

At an adequate level the rational criteria are expressed in an individual's ability to connect their own idea of conflict and conflict proneness with other individuals' interests. The essence of interpersonal communication is perceived as a moral attitude towards The Other.

The emotional component is described as showing relative stability of emotional reactions in conflict. However there appears to be a mismatch between the demonstrated and the inwardly experienced emotions. An individual strives for establishing firm positive emotional connections and feels satisfied during the constructive conflict resolution. The well-developed empathy and positive outlook promote the constructive interpersonal communication.

At the adequate level of conflict proneness an individual's behavior has certain distinctive features. An individual opposes those who violate or do not recognize other people's rights, practices purposeful manipulation of conflict factors in communication process, measures up the price of conflict with the value of interpersonal relations. An individual's ability to keep tension escalation under control and prevent open collisions leads to rare conflict interactions.

The following criteria define the optimal level of conflict proneness. Conflict is viewed as liberty of an individual who is well aware of the necessity of successful settlement of all kinds of clashes and disputes. This settlement is of significant personal value for an individual. The humanistic orientation of Self and building up constructive communication and conflict resolution skills are essential.

An individual is characterized by a high level of general communication tolerance. Empathy and emotional responsiveness enable an individual to foresee a partner's reactions, the early stage and the development of conflict and promote constructive communication.

Facilitating harmonization of the relationships between group members an individual contributes to the group success and brings his/her actions into correlation with other people's interests and feelings. An individual foresees conflict and its possible consequences, relieves the tension in relationships and resolves any conflict up to the end giving preference to collaboration tactics.

Making a Model of Building up Conflict Prevention and Conflict Resolution Skills Within a Group Is Based on the Corresponding Principles of the Educational Process:

- C *The principle of harmonization of the relations between an individual and society during conflict resolution is expressed in the protective functions of the state, society and educational establishments responsible for providing biological, psychological, physical, intellectual, moral and social security of an individual;*
- C *The principle of correlation between an individual's identification stage in a group and his/her conflict proneness level makes it necessary to coordinate the process of conflict prevention and resolution with an individual's identification stage as a group member;*
- C *The principle of conflict resolution on the basis of recognition of civil society moral values views an individual as the ultimate goal and a subject of the education process;*
- C *The principle of subject-subject activity in solving conflicts grants an individual a right to initiate a conflict and resolve the contradictions serving as its base in accordance with his/her aims, moral orientations and social and communication conditions;*
- C *The principle of the self-actualization of a personality's potential in conflict resolution suggests future specialist's regular conscious activities directed at self-improvement which involves achieving the optimal level of conflict proneness;*
- C *The principle of pedagogical management and self-management combination in dealing with conflict declares the leading influence of the teacher in organizing students' activities;*
- C *The principle of creating special educational environment encouraging harmonization of an individual's and group's interests lays emphasis at the fact that a group functions as a prerequisite for a*

future specialist's self-realization and self-assertion, hence, settlement of conflicts between group members becomes an urgent issue.

The ascertained principles of the educational process aimed at building up future specialists' conflict prevention and conflict resolution skills allow the creation of the process's model which schematically reproduces its structure, interconnections and correlations between its elements.

The model includes the corresponding stages of the educational process. Each stage of the process involves specific content and is carried out through the appropriate methods and forms. The implementation of each stage of the educational process raises an individual to a more positive conflict proneness level.

The following five stages of the educational process aimed at building up future specialists' conflict prevention and conflict resolution skills are defined:

- C "Demonstrational" – presentation of conflict prevention and coping with interpersonal frustrating situations patterns;
- C "Ritual" – building up of conflict prevention and constructive conflict resolution skills;
- C "Stereotypic" – creation of educative situations, aimed at consolidating conflict prevention and constructive conflict resolution skills;
- C "Conscious choice" – awareness of personal and social importance of conflict prevention and constructive conflict resolution skills;
- C "Self-actualization" – future specialists' involvement into the conflict prevention and constructive conflict resolution process [5].

The successful and efficient application of each stage requires a range of traditional and innovative methods.

The rational element of conflict proneness is formed through such methods as persuasion, explanation, ethical talk, dispute and example.

The persuasion method forms a strong conviction that it is necessary to create constructive interpersonal relationships in a group.

The explanation method is directed at a definite individual; hence, it involves taking a future specialist's individual characteristics into account. Moreover an individual's sociometric status and the relationships with the group members should be considered. During explanations a positive attitude towards conflict and conflict resolution is formed.

In course of ethical talk conflict management knowledge is increased and generalized. The constructive outlook on conflict, an essential component of conflict competence, is formed and maintained [6, 7]. Individual talks are crucially important while a conflict between group members starts and develops.

One of the most effective methods of forming the rational component of conflict proneness is dispute. It involves the collision of opposing opinions by nature, thus enabling the participants to practice their conflict management skills.

All the aforementioned methods set an example of how conflicts should be dealt with. Furthermore a teacher's personal example is supposed to have a positive influence on students' conflict management skills.

The second group of methods – practicing conflict solving, commission/errand, training situations - builds up the behavioral component of conflict proneness.

A great variety of conflict resolution techniques can be organized in a form of training, participating in which future specialists practice their conflict management skills, raise their awareness of the concept of conflict, work in collaboration to reach a peaceful and effective solution to a problem. At training sessions students are introduced to direct and indirect methods of conflict settlement. The former include persuasion methods, negotiations of the parties in conflict, mediation, group discussions, imposing sanctions (in order to de-escalate tension and avoid conflict induced violence) and some others [8, 9].

The latter are often referred to as preparatory methods for they are used extensively at an early stage of conflict. Thus, the indirect methods cover role reversal, positive appreciation of an individual, "venting emotions" (to enable participants of the training express their feelings and reduce the tension), compulsory listening to the opponent (the parties in conflict have to re-state or paraphrase what they have heard to the speaker obligatory to confirm the understanding) [10], broadening of conflict perception and the modeling of conflict.

The emotional component of conflict proneness is built up throughout all the stages of the process with the help of such methods as persuasion, explanation, ethical talk, dispute, carrying out errands etc. *Nevertheless, there are some specific methods aimed at forming exactly this component. They include exercises creating a positive emotional perception of conflict and the opponent, situation of success and rewarding.*

Situations of success appear to be of special importance. They should be created with the individuality of a student in mind. Such situations promote the future specialists' emancipation in communication with peers

and develop relations with them on equal terms. Moreover, they encourage raise of self-esteem, motivate an individual's engagement into group activities and create a stimulus for self-reliance progress, thus supporting building up future specialists' conflict prevention and conflict resolution skills.

CONCLUSION

It is undeniable that an individual plays a leading part in any conflict. A successful resolution of interpersonal misunderstanding and opposition depends to a great degree on an individual's level of conflict proneness. The positive development of the personal quality in question is achieved through the application of corresponding methods and ensures building up future specialists' conflict prevention and conflict resolution skills.

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