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Conflict Management Among Secondary school Students

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Abstract

Conflict between students is a common problem in the schools. If they are not supervised and controlled in a practical way, it can prevent school from reaching its goals and objectives and will have negative impact on school climate. One of the approaches for reducing conflict between individuals or groups at home or in the school or work place is mediation. Teaching students conflict management and resolution skills may provide them with necessary tools to solve their own conflict in a productive and practical way. This kind of training can also improve students' self-esteem, self-confidence, and communication skills. Main thrust of this paper is on the exploration of the history of mediation and explain essential elements of adult and peer mediation programs. Then it follows by discussion about advantages, limitations and techniques adopted for its management and redressal

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1. Introduction

Students' behavioral problems and abnormalities in school are not new phenomena. Undesirable activities of students include a vast range of unacceptable behaviors such as lack of participation in class programs, causing disturbance for other students, violence (verbal, physical), destroying the school building, equipment and facilities. Methods used in Iranian schools for solving conflicts depends on the position where they see the undesirable behavior as a result of student's personal problems and those of the family and the student's cultural environment. These methods therefore, apply force and use the reward /punishment system to eliminate such behaviors. Warning, reproach, calling the parent to school, physical punishment and in some cases expulsion from school are among common methods used in school against the students violent behaviors. These methods which are often carried out

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without considering the children needs, expectations, students' behavioral conflicts and problems. In fact, by generating negative feelings in the students, these methods result in some other undesirable behavior in the future. By investigating methods for confronting with the students behavioral conflicts in other countries, it becomes obvious that in the recent decades new viewpoints have been offered in the field of analyzing students' behavioral problems. Accordingly, different policies are used for preventing and reducing conflicts. Before addressing these methods, first it is necessary to define conflict and its type.

1.1. Conflict Definition

Conflict refers to some form of friction, disagreement, or discord arising within individuals or a group when the beliefs or actions of one or more members of the group are either resisted by or unacceptable to one or more members of another group. conflict pertains to the opposing ideas and actions of different entities, thus resulting in an antagonistic state.(Tschannen-Moran, 2001)

1.2. Types of conflict

Because of diverse and varied definitions of conflict, attitudes towards it and images of its role are also varied. Conflict in schools takes different forms; for example teachers seem reluctant to obey the principals, they do not seem to follow rules or accept extra work, they do not easily get along with their principals. Principals too adopt an authoritative approach, for example they pressurize teachers for an uninterrupted working of the school activities. It, therefore, becomes common that conflict between teachers and the school principal occur frequently at any time in the school⁷. In institutions, conflict occurs between various individuals because of their frequent interaction with each other. Conflict is an expression of hostility, antagonism and is understanding between the staff members.(Gebretensay Tesfay ,2002)

Bearing all in mind, conflict is classified into the following four types:

a)Interpersonal conflict refers to a conflict between two individuals. This occurs typically due to how people are different from one another.

b)Intrapersonal conflict occurs within an individual. The experience takes place in the person's mind. Hence, it is a type of conflict that is psychological involving the individual's thoughts, values, principles and emotions.

c)Intra-group conflict is a type of conflict that happens among individuals within a team. The incompatibilities and misunderstandings among these individuals lead to an intra-group conflict

d)Inter-group conflict takes place when a misunderstanding arises among different teams within an organization. In addition, competition also contributes for intergroup conflict to arise. There are other factors which fuel this type of conflict. Some of these factors may include a rivalry in resources or the boundaries set by a group to others which establishes their own identity as a team. (Denohue, and Kott.1992)

In addition to this category,Jehn and Mannix(2001) have proposed a division of conflicts into three types: relationship, task, and process. Relationship conflict stems from interpersonal incompatibilities; task conflict is related to disagreements in viewpoints and opinion about a particular task, and process conflict refers to disagreement over the group's approach to the task, its methods, and its group process. They note that although relationship conflict and process conflict are harmful, task conflict is found to be beneficial since it encourages diversity of opinions, although care should be taken so it does not develop into process or relationship conflict.(Denohue, and Kott,1992)

Amason and Sapienza(1997) in turn differentiate between affective and cognitive conflict, where cognitive conflict is task-oriented and arises from differences in perspective or judgment, and affective conflict is emotional and arises from personal differences and disputes.

1.3. Factors Leading to Conflict

Auerbach and Dolan (1997), Rahim (2001), Champoux (2003) , De Janasz, et al.(2006) and Mohamad Johdi & Raman (2011). identified the causes of conflicts. They are specialization, common resources, goal differences, interdependence, authority relationships, status differences, jurisdictional ambiguities, and, roles and expectations.

a) Organizational factors

- 1- *Specializati*: when one may have insufficient knowledge of the other's job responsibilities, dissatisfaction in either party may exist (Auerbach & Dolan, 1997; Rahim, 2001) anticipated that the management of organizational conflict involves channeling the energies, expertise, and resources of the members of conflicting groups for synergistic solutions to their common problems or attainment of overall organizational goals.
- 2- *Common resources*: In many schools, teachers are obliged to share resources, the scarcer the resource the greater potential for conflict. (Rahim, 2001; Champoux, 2003)
- 3- *Goal differences*: When a principal and a head of academic department have different goals for improving the way of teaching in school. The principal needs to recruit newcomer teachers who have more advanced teaching techniques than long-teaching teachers in school. (Champoux, 2003)
- 4- *Interdependence*: Sometimes one employee of school must depend on another to complete a task (Auerbach & Dolan, 1997; Champoux, 2003). For example, a principal may clash with a teacher who works in registration department because he/she provides inaccurate data of students (Pukapan, 1999).
- 5- *Authority relationships*: Often, there is underlying tension between principal and teachers. This is because most teachers do not like being told what to do such as principal who is overly strict is frequently in conflict with their teachers (Auerbach, Dolan, 1997)
- 6- *Status differences*: In many organizations even in school, principal is granted privilege denied to other employees or teachers. For instance, manager and principal may enjoy flexible hours, free personal long-distance calls, and longer breaks. Auerbach and Dolan (1997) stated that human beings are unique who possess a variety of physical, intellectual, emotional, economic, and social differences.
- 7- *Jurisdictional ambiguities*: When it is unclear who does what, teacher has a tendency to pass unwanted tasks onto the next teacher
- 8- *Roles and expectations*: Every employee plays one or more roles within the organization. Manager-subordinate conflict can result when the subordinate's role is not clearly defined and each party has a different understanding of that role (Auerbach, Dolan, 1997)

b) Personal Factors

According to Auerbach & Dolan (1997) and, Rahim (2001) stated that the most common personal factors associated with organizational conflict are skills and abilities, personality conflicts, perceptions, diversity, and personal problems.

- 1- *Skills and abilities*: Conflict can result when an experienced employee must work with a novice who has good theoretical knowledge but few practical skills (Auerbach & Dolan, 1997). For example, a long-teaching teacher in school is familiar to teach in the old way of teaching will have a conflict with young newcomer teacher who has an advanced technique of teaching. (Pukapan, 1999).
- 2- *Personality conflicts*: Rahim (2001) admitted that personality conflicts are a reality in any group setting, including the workplace. There always seems to be at least one co-worker who is difficult to get along with.
- 3- *Perceptions*: Kellermann (1996) suggested that conflict may be simply described as a clash between two individuals who are unwillingly or unable to fulfill expectations of each other (Auerbach, Dolan, 1997)
- 4- *Diversity*: There are increasingly heterogeneous. Differences in age, cultural background, ethics, and values can be a source of conflict among employees. (Rahim, 2001)
- 5- *Personal problems*: When a teacher brings his/her personal problems to work, his/her performance tends to suffer and she/he may clash with co-workers who are obliged to "pick up the slack." (Auerbach & Dolan, 1997)
- 6- *Communication*: A common cause of conflict is poor communication, which can lead to misunderstandings and allow barriers to be erected. Probably the easiest way to prevent conflict is to ensure good communication.

1.4. Conflict management and Mediation

Conflict management minimizes the negative outcomes of conflict and promotes the positive outcomes of conflict with the goal of improving learning in a school. (Rahim, 2002, p. 208). In fact, The better educators and students

understand the nature of conflict, the better able they are to manage conflicts constructively(Kinard, 1988). Moran (2001) sees conflict management as “a philosophy and a set of skills that assist individuals and groups in better understanding and dealing with conflict as it arises in all aspects of their lives”(Hanson,1991). One practical method for responding to behavioral problems often emphasizes a viewpoint that is systematic, and is the result of combination and interaction of various factors in creating a person’s behavior. In these methods, instead of searching for problems in the students, the problem are investigated in a broader framework so as the factors related to the students, his/her family, cultural background, and especially the school and its internal variables are assumed influential factors in triggering the problems. In order to prevent and reduce undesirable behaviors, these methods entangle with each of the factors important in creating problems, especially in changing the school social-mental conditions. Mediation , circle time, participatory conflict resolution and management, whole school policy, and assertive training are examples of the successful methods that are used in the recent years in school of some other countries for responding to students’ behavioral problems. These methods strengthen the fundamental communication skills especially the ability to listen, to sympathies ,and to co-work strengthen self-acceptance and self esteem in the students and equipping them with a set of beneficial and positive strategies to be used in difficult conditions, such as personal conflicts, or in bullying situation(Kingston friends workshop group,1989)in this article mediations described as one of the effective techniques for conflict and problem resolution between individuals and groups and is explained as an educational attitude and education equipment for supporting children and youth in the school.

1.5. What Mediation is?

Mediation is a simple, positive and clear process in which trained and neutral individuals help the two sides of the conflict come to a solution that is acceptable for both sides. Mediators are equipped with special skills. Bentley (1996) describes mediation as a form of problem solving process where a neutral third party assists disputants to reach a mutually acceptable agreement. Mediation can be used in different humanitarian environment, meaning places where individuals live or work with each other, whether it is based on necessity or interest. One type of mediation is mediation in the family and in times with family members are caught up with conflicts and arguments.(cailler,1995). In these cases, skilled and trained individuals can be suitable help for these conflicts.(Guillet & Leblanc,1995;Van Den Steen,1995) Of other types of mediation, is neighborhood mediation or mediation among neighbors. In the judgmental circumstances as well, mediation can be carried out between two parties of the quarrel aside from the regular judgment procedure. This type of mediation has been also very much welcomed.(Bonfe-Schmitt,1988,Delgado,1998). Another type of mediation is one used in organizations in order to resolve organizational conflicts(Drowly,1998). Yet another type of mediation are used in international conflicts. Mediation is important to be used in all situations at individual, group and international levels. Holy Quran also considers mediation as a religious responsibility: “heed God patch up an differences that may stand between you.”(Al-Anfal:1). “Keep yourselves to improve matters among mankind.”(Al-Baghareh:224)

1.6. Mediation in school

The philosophy of mediation in school is that the existence of conflict is a normal issue and an unavoidable part of the school daily life. Mediation in school is done in different ways in different countries. In general , two methods are more in used: a)Adult mediation – in this method, the mediation services are carried out through specialized individuals that are called “Mediators”. These persons who are often invited from outside school(universities, research centers, and social services organization)to school for the purpose of preventing behavioral and educational problems of students as well as assisting teachers in these matters.b)peers mediation. As part of a whole school approach to student welfare, schools may consider introducing peer mediation. Often student/student disputes can be resolved best by student mediators. Students can be trained in the skills of mediation so that they can act as mediators for their peers. Not all conflicts may be suitable for peer mediation. Other processes may be more appropriate in situations involving assault, theft, alcohol or drug use.Peer mediation programs must be co-ordinated by staff trained in mediation who provide ongoing supervision to student mediators(Stern, 2001). In this method, essential elements of non-violent management of students’ conflicts are discussed. This method, which has become popular in many countries such as the United states, Australia, Newzeland, and the united kingdom, often takes place in continuation of adults mediation programs in school. In this method, students gain the skills necessary to

solve conflicts and problems and take care of peers' issues.

1.7. Mediation training levels

Training provides the opportunity to learn the steps of mediation, practice the skills required in the process and discuss potential difficulties or ethical issues that might arise during the mediation session. Mediation training also has the added benefit of allowing people to develop or enhance life and communication skills that are relevant to all relationships. (Stern, 2001)

Maccoby and Studdert identify five steps to handle a conflict through mediation:

1. Anticipate – Take time to obtain information that can lead to conflict.
2. Prevent – Develop strategies before the conflict occurs.
3. Identify – If it is interpersonal or procedural, move to quickly manage it.
4. Manage – Remember that conflict is emotional
5. Resolve – React, without blame, and you will learn through dialogue. (Maccoby & Scudder, 2011)

If we want to adopt above steps in school, mediation training will be consisting of the following levels:

- a) Making the Volunteer teachers and students aware of behavioral problems in school and their consequences ;
- b) Training volunteer teachers and students essential skills and activities for mediation between peers. The volunteers are also trained in methods of confronting issues such as aggression harming others, damaging the school equipments. Students are trained in field of strengthening self-esteem , communication skills, creative thinking, and group collaboration.
- c) Implementing the project. In this stage, the mediation volunteer students who have already received necessary training, will be given special clothing, sign, or hat so that they can be recognized and distinguished from other students.
- d) Setting up an operation group. The operation group in school set up upon starting the deviation program. Members of this group are mediating volunteer students and one or two teachers for supervising effectiveness of program.
- e) Evaluation. In order to assess the program, it is necessary to evaluate peers' mediation or any other program that is run in school , at the end of each term or academic year . researchers show that mediation programs have positive influences. (cooper, 1995). One of the countries with successful experiences in the field of mediation is north Ireland (Farrel et. al., 1998). Of other successful experiences, we can refer to the field research in the University of Peace in Belgium in the field of peers' mediation (Cuvelier et. al., 1996) some researches as well show the limits of such methods applied in the world are without error, mediation also has certain limits despite all its benefits.

2. Conclusion

Conflict management styles are essential in order to utilize them for handling conflicts in the schools. Prominent conflict handling styles include; competing, avoiding, collaborating, compromising, accommodating and mediation. Among all mentioned styles, using the mediation approach, can be very beneficial especially for those schools situated in suburban areas of cities with behavioral disciplinary problems. The children and adolescent in these areas are grown with a culture of defeat and respond to the contrasts and different crises in their lives by violence. These students are often indifferent toward or resistant against traditional disciplinary methods in schools. Some of the centers in the country can encourage the carrying-out of this type of programs and teach the schools healthy and constructive methods of responding to behavioral problems and offer mediatory services. The educational sciences and psychology faculties can be considered among the most important centers for offering this kind of training to schools.

In either case, mediation is a process, which can help moving to a healthier society, if it takes place with the participation , guidance , and supervision of parents and instructors, and by complete training of persons involved.

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