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Received: 02.07.2023; revised: 21.07.2023; accepted: 22.07.2023

COMMUNICATION DISORDERS RESULTING FROM SCHOOL VIOLENCE: CHALLENGES IN EDUCATION FOR PEACE

ZABURZENIA W KOMUNIKACJI WYNIKAJĄCE ZE ZJAWISKA PRZEMOCY W ŚRODOWISKU SZKOLNYM. WYZWANIA DLA EDUKACJI DLA POKOJU

Streszczenie: Agresja i przemoc w środowisku szkolnym są uznawane za jeden z najpoważniejszych problemów, z którymi musi mierzyć się szkoła. Stanowią również jeden z największych zagrożeń dla zdrowia psychicznego dzieci i młodzieży, nierzadko

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bywają przyczyną urazów fizycznych, a w skrajnych przypadkach mogą doprowadzić do śmierci. Przemoc generuje poważne, różnorodne problemy na wielu płaszczyznach życia człowieka. Jedne z tych utrudnień widoczne są na płaszczyźnie komunikacji. Zaburzenia komunikacji są sytuacją, w której pojawia się trudność w porozumiewaniu się z innymi. Mogą mieć formę agresji werbalnej lub wynikać z braku komunikacji, czyli przyjmowania postawy biernej (łączy się to z niewyrażaniem emocji, tłumieniem ich). Uczniowi, który ma problemy w komunikacji interpersonalnej jest trudno realizować swoje potrzeby emocjonalne, tj. potrzeba bezpieczeństwa, przynależności, szacunku, akceptacji, realistycznego stawiania granic i oczekiwań. W relacjach stosuje nieadaptacyjne strategie porozumiewania się. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest przedstawienie trudności z obszaru zaburzeń w komunikacji interpersonalnej wśród uczniów, które wynikają ze zjawiska przemocy. Autorki publikacji będą chciały również wskazać na wyzwania jakie stoją przed pedagogami w obszarze wychowania do pokoju w zakresie omawianego tematu.

Słowa kluczowe: zaburzenia w komunikacji, przemoc, szkoła, edukacja, pokój

Abstract: Aggression and violence in the school environment are among the most serious problems a school must face. Aggression and violence often cause physical injuries and in extreme cases can lead to death, posing a great threat to the mental health of children and adolescents. Violence generates serious, diverse problems on many levels of human life. One problem becomes visible at the level of communication. Communication disorders are situations in which an individual has difficulty communicating with others. These can take the form of verbal aggression or arise from a lack of communication when, for example, a student adopts a passive attitude (which is associated with suppressing or not expressing emotions). It is difficult for a student with interpersonal communication problems to get his or her emotional needs met, such as the need for security, belonging, respect, acceptance, and setting realistic boundaries and expectations. Such a student uses non-adaptive communication strategies in relationships. The aim of this article is to present some problems that students experience with interpersonal communication disorders owing to the phenomenon of violence. The authors will also explore the challenges facing educators in the field of education for peace regarding the topic under discussion.

Keywords: communication disorders, violence, school, education, peace

Introduction

The issue of aggression and violence in the school environment is of scientific interest to researchers of various disciplines, including educators, psychologists, sociologists, and medics. The rapid development of civilization, as well as the increasingly earlier criminal initiation of children and adolescents, forces us to seek solutions. Increased action is needed to prevent the escalation of aggression and violence in the school environment and beyond. Making society aware of the essence, causes, and consequences of young people's engagement in aggressive and violent behavior promotes an understanding of the problem and adequate problem-solving action (Cichosz, Tyburska 2014).

School is a meeting place for students. It fills a significant part of the life of the younger generation. School is the terrain of confronting authorities, forming a student's sense of self-identity, and verifying parents' expectations regarding their own child (Cichosz, Tyburska 2014). These factors translate into strong, often difficult emotions that a young person experiences and that he or she releases not infrequently in the form of aggressive behavior (Ostojski 2012). It should be noted that aggressive behavior and violence do not only cover the school area. They also often occur in students' homes. Therefore, it should be noted that preventive measures should be taken not only by the school environment, but also by the family environment. An understandable, clear-cut message from parents and teachers, as well as the implementation of education and prevention programs in schools, play a fundamental role in reducing the scope of the phenomenon of violence. Thus, it is necessary to support students in overcoming difficulties, equip them with protective resources, and eliminate factors that threaten their proper psychophysical development (Cichosz, Tyburska 2014). A major role here can be played by education for peace. Through its goals and objectives, peace education involves preparing young people to communicate and resolve conflicts without violence. In view of the above, the purpose of this article is to show the problems arising from communication disorders among children and adolescents due to violence they experience. In the final part of the article, the authors will also indicate how to build a positive climate in the classroom, create mature interpersonal relations, and minimize the phenomenon of aggression and violence at school, referring, among other things, to the principles of education for peace.

The phenomenon of violence in the school environment— determinants and consequences

The phenomenon of aggression and violence at school has been recognized for decades as a serious social problem. Even though the latest research reports (including the Report of the Institute of Educational Research)⁴ indicate that the scale of this phenomenon is decreasing, especially among secondary school students, the problem is still highly discussed and thoroughly analyzed by a group of experts from various disciplines, and certainly requires constant action in the area of prevention and psychoeducation (IBE 2014).

Students in schools not only in Poland but all over the world experience various forms of violence, most often in the form of verbal aggression (name-calling, taunting, ridicule). The second most common form of aggression to which a student is exposed is relational aggression, involving the dissemination of damaging, often untrue information about the child, exclusion, or repulsion by the group. Aggressive behavior is wide-ranging and can include bullying, name-calling,

4 IBE 2014.

peer exclusion, isolation, intimidation, and physical aggression. It's also worth noting that increasing access to information technologies has given rise to new forms of aggression, such as cyberbullying. Adolescents are increasingly using the internet to harass disliked peers, whether through text messages, spreading rumors and slander on blogs, or posting videos to discredit someone (Borkowska, Szymańska, Witkowska 2012).

Aggressive and violent behavior, like other challenging behaviors observed in children and adolescents, is conditioned by several risk factors, both individual, family, environmental, as well as localized in the school environment. Numerous scientific studies describe several categories of factors that determine aggressive behavior. "D. Flannery and D. Hawkins list several categories of factors paving the way for aggression and violence" (Borkowska, Szymańska, Witkowska 2012):

1. Risk factors associated with perinatal problems, i.e.: hypoxia caused by prolonged labor or associated with respiratory distress in the newborn
2. Temperamental traits (high impulsiveness, explosiveness, poor control, quick to fall into frustration)
3. Low intelligence
4. Parenting mistakes, i.e., a pattern of aggression at home, condoning aggressive behavior, lack of clear rules, lack of boundaries
5. Serious dysfunctions in the family environment, such as addiction, criminal actions of parents, incarceration, chronic diseases, parental behavior involving rejection of the child, neglect, a harsh upbringing, inadequate punishment of the child for inappropriate behavior, hostility toward the child, indifference
6. An experience of violence
7. High exposure to violence in the media
8. Risk factors related to school climate, i.e.: overly large classes, a large school, a neglected school environment (damaged equipment, dirty classrooms), unfavorable school location, organizational chaos, lack of clear school rules and expectations, unfavorable relationships and/or lack of communication at the level of principal-teacher, teacher-teacher, teacher-parent, teacher-student, excessive rigor or restrictions, lack of positive school traditions, low competence and morale of students and teachers, failure to take into account the needs, interests and expectations of students, overloaded learning, overloaded or constantly changing curricula (Borkowska, Szymańska, Witkowska 2012; Moczuk 2015; Siemieniecki, Wiśniewska-Nogaj, Kwiatkowska 2020).

These phenomenon of aggression and violence occurs in schools in various configurations, with varying degrees of severity, and with different conditions. For many students, behaviors such as theft, ridicule, name-calling, harassment, and fights are an everyday reality they face at school.

In analyzing the effects of aggression on human development and functioning, it should be noted that the World Health Organization (WHO) has emphasized that aggression and violence experienced by an individual, whether the perpetrator is

an adult or a peer, is a serious threat to the mental health of children and adolescents. “Peer violence is considered the most serious school-related risk factor affecting the development of a variety of mental health problems and disorders” (Borkowska, Szymańska, Witkowska 2012). The most common problems caused by violence include:

- anxiety disorders
- depressive disorders
- low self-esteem/low self-worth
- lowered school achievement
- psychosomatic disorders
- the use of psychoactive drugs
- impulsive behavior (sudden outbursts of anger/aggression, which often result from a sense of helplessness)
- suicide attempts and completed suicides,
- self-harm/self-injury
- interpersonal communication disorders,
- truancy and sick leave (Borkowska, Szymańska, Witkowska 2012).

Violence generates serious consequences for human psychological functioning. It shatters an individual’s sense of security. Its effects, unfortunately, will not always be observed. Often adults attribute a child’s difficult behavior to completely different factors. It is worth adding that violence does not generate negative consequences for the victims alone, but also has a destructive effect on the perpetrator himself. Through aggressive behavior and violence, he satisfies his psychological needs. Even though the aggressor achieves certain benefits in this way, he does not acquire the psychosocial skills that would allow him to build healthy relationships with people in the future and thus satisfy his emotional needs in a mature way. Violent people, being characterized by a low level of social competence and having weak adaptive mechanisms, are unable to build deeper, mature relationships with those around them (Borkowska, Szymańska, Witkowska 2012). Like victims of violence, perpetrators also exhibit communication disorders, the main symptoms of which are difficulty naming, showing, and recognizing emotions (their own and others’), naming and realizing their needs, communicating assertively, and setting limits.

Interpersonal communication disorders among students resulting from the phenomenon of violence

Interpersonal communication disorders cause an individual to have difficulty communicating effectively, as well as establishing healthy, mature relationships with others. People affected by these disorders experience various problems in expressing their thoughts, feelings, and needs; they also misinterpret incoming social signals. Interpersonal communication problems can involve both verbal

(verbal) and non-verbal (gestures, facial expressions, intonation) communication (Ciecierska, Zawadzka 2018).

When analyzing the causes of interpersonal communication disorders, several groups of factors can be mentioned. These include:

1. Development factors
2. Genetic and neurobiological factors
3. Life experiences (including trauma)
4. Social and environmental factors (Kawka 2019).

Taking into account the first point, it should be noted that communication disorders can have their roots in early childhood—for example, a poorly formed emotional bond with the parent in infancy, which is the foundation for the child's further proper cognitive and social-emotional development—or can arise as a result of inappropriate modeling of communication by caregivers. Such problems can translate into the child's later relations with other people who will take advantage of these early maladaptive forms of behavior learned in childhood.

Certain studies indicate that the causes of communication disorders can also be traced to genetic and neurobiological factors. This is because they result from improper functioning of the brain and communication systems.

Any difficult life experience, including trauma, violence, or neglect, can lead to interpersonal communication disorders. Traumatic events can affect the way people communicate, trust others, and express and interpret emotions.

The last category of factors influencing the emergence of communication disorders are social and environmental factors. They point to the causal role of inappropriate communication patterns in the family. Interpersonal communication disorders can also result from a lack of social skills, isolation, dysfunctional relationships, or experienced social stress.

People affected by interpersonal communication disorders may have difficulties in:

- Verbal communication disorders—expressed primarily in difficulties presenting one's thoughts and feelings in words, problems with speech fluency, speech that is very poor or chaotic (Ciecierska, Zawadzka 2018)
- Non-verbal communication disorders, which translate into difficulties in recognizing and interpreting gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice and other non-verbal signals important for interpersonal communication (Ciecierska, Zawadzka 2018)
- Disorders of pragmatic competence, manifesting in problems with adapting communication to the social context; difficulty in understanding unwritten rules of communication; difficulty maintaining fluid conversation (Kita, 2015)
- Social-verbal communication disorders, such as selective mutism, which translate into difficulties communicating in certain social situations, such as public speaking or talking to a group (Janowska, Karwowska 2014).

Interpersonal communication disorders caused by the phenomenon of violence are a significant social problem. They have serious consequences for the mental health of those affected by violence, and significantly translate into a reduced quality of life. Experiencing aggression and violence are undoubtedly traumatic events, bound to significantly impact the individual's communication with his or her environment. Individuals experiencing violence also feel anxiety, are unable to trust, exhibit difficulties in expressing their own needs and feelings, and show excessive emotional excitability. It is not uncommon for them to have trouble recognizing and interpreting social signals, which consequently hinders their ability to communicate effectively, and at the same time translates into problems in building mature, healthy relationships.

Analysis of the experiences of violence-affected people shows that aggression can cause serious emotional disturbances negatively impacting interpersonal communication. People who experience violence are overwhelmed by anxiety, depressive symptoms, anger, and feelings of helplessness. This results in difficulties expressing needs, understanding other people, and building close relationships.

It should also be noted that violence lowers an individual's self-esteem and self-worth. It also often causes problems with self-expression, decision-making, and maintaining balance in interpersonal relationships. Such individuals may avoid conflict or be overly susceptible to abuse and attack.

Another difficulty faced by those experiencing violence is the problem of setting boundaries. Violence can disrupt one's ability to set and maintain healthy boundaries in interpersonal relationships, which is compounded by the difficulty of recognizing unhealthy behavior in oneself and others. Such people most often lack or have diminished assertiveness skills, which hinders their ability to express their opinions and defend their rights.

Violence also negatively affects verbal and nonverbal communication skills. People experiencing violence have difficulty expressing their thoughts and feelings in words, as well as interpreting and responding to non-verbal communication (gestures, facial expressions, or tone of voice). Existing problems with concentration and attention can also hinder effective communication (Ciecierska, Zawadzka 2018).

Certainly, the problem of interpersonal communication disorders is a complex issue that requires an interdisciplinary approach to better and more deeply understand its manifestations, causes, and effects. To help individuals experiencing these difficulties, the cooperation of specialists belonging to different disciplines is required—for instance, psychologist, speech therapist, educator. Understanding these issues is important for developing effective support and rehabilitation strategies for those experiencing or exposed to the phenomenon of violence. It is important for public education to prevent violence and promote healthy interpersonal relationships.

Challenges for peace education on the formation of proper interpersonal relations

Education for peace is an educational approach whose main goal is to promote the values and skills needed to build and maintain peace in society. Its task is to develop individual and societal awareness of peace as a key value, fundamental to the harmonious coexistence of people and the development of society (Betson 2011). Education for peace promotes the building of a culture of peace by addressing such values as tolerance, dialogue, social justice, equality, and respect for human rights (Reardon 1988). It also seeks to develop the ability to resolve conflicts peacefully through dialogue, negotiation, mediation, and cooperation (Solomon, Nevo 2002). It encompasses a wide range of activities and strategies to develop empathy, dialogue, constructive conflict resolution, and positive interpersonal relationships. The assumptions of education for peace are therefore important in the formation of proper interpersonal relations.

1. Based on the general assumptions of education for peace, several areas can be identified for educational, psycho-preventive activities in the formation of proper interpersonal relations:
2. Developing empathy and understanding: Education for peace promotes the development of empathy. This is the ability to understand and identify with other people's feelings and experiences. Developing empathy in students allows them to better understand other people, their needs, emotions, and perspectives (Noddings 2005).
3. Forming dialogue and communication skills and teaching constructive conflict resolution: Learning constructive dialogue and effective communication is also an important area for peace education. Students learn to listen carefully and express their thoughts, emotions, needs in a way that respects others. They gain the ability to negotiate, mediate, and resolve conflicts peacefully, which is important for building healthy, mature interpersonal relationships (Johnson 2012) and significantly strengthens relationships between people (Deutsch, Coleman, Marcus 2006).
4. Promoting tolerance and diversity: A key tenet of education for peace is the promotion of tolerance, respect, and acceptance of diversity. Students learn to appreciate and respect cultural, social, and worldview differences. This positively influences the building of positive relationships between people (Banks 2015).

The principles of education for peace are important in the context of countering the phenomenon of violence and in the formation of healthy interpersonal relationships. It should be emphasized that violence is the opposite of peace and undoubtedly represents a violation of fundamental social values. It is the result of improper resolution of disputes and conflicts and is often associated with social inequalities that lead to conflict and aggression. It is therefore important to develop,

through education for peace, individuals' awareness of the importance of peace as a fundamental value. Through education for peace, alternative ways of resolving conflicts can be promoted, thereby countering violence. Developing students' empathy and ability to understand others can contribute to reducing violence and building healthy relationships. With education for peace, one can contribute to reducing social inequality by promoting social justice, through which societies based on respect, dignity, and equality can be created. This in turn has an impact on reducing violence.

Conclusion

Modern society faces many challenges, such as conflict, tensions between different groups, social inequality, intolerance, and violence. Education for peace has strategies and tools to help deal with these challenges and build healthy, respectful cooperative relationships between people, by developing skills to better understand others—their beliefs, experiences, emotions, and needs. Education for peace seeks to build a culture of peace. In its tenets, it is based primarily on respect for human rights, equality, and social justice. Through education for peace, therefore, norms and values can be promoted that counteract violence and build mature interpersonal relationships.

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