

# THE MANAGEMENT OF EDUCATIONAL CRISIS SITUATIONS IN THE SCHOOL GROUP

## MANAGEMENTUL SITUAȚILOR DE CRIZĂ EDUCAȚIONALĂ ÎN GRUPUL ȘCOLAR

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**Abstract.** *The paper emphasizes a series of theoretical and methodological aspects regarding the management of educational crisis situations in the school group. There is an axiom in education which says that it is easier to prevent a conflict than solving it later. Understanding by a situation of educational crisis the appearance of an event or a series of unexpected and unplanned events, considered to be dangerous for the climate, health and security of the respective class and its members, then it is advisable to resort to all stages of crisis management, among which we mention: their identification and knowing, the etiology of the crisis situation, the intervention program, the control and evaluation. The conflict management from the school environment through negotiation is a sine qua non condition for reestablishing the climate adequate for didactic activities in the educational group. For the correct adaptation to each specific situation, it is necessary to know the negotiation styles, as well as the types of negotiators. Negotiation is the procedure belonging to the methods of efficient, yet "honorable" solving of conflict situations, inherent to the management of school classes.*

**Key words:** educational crisis, educational group, negotiation

**Rezumat.** *În această lucrare sunt evidențiate o serie de aspecte cu caracter teoretic și metodologic a managementului situațiilor de criză educațională în grupul școlar. În educație, există o axiomă care susține că este mai ușor să se prevină un conflict decât să fie dezamorsat ulterior. Înțelegând prin situație de criză educațională - apariția unui eveniment sau un complex de evenimente inopinante, neașteptate dar și neplanificate, generatoare de pericolozitate pentru climatul, sănătatea ori siguranța clasei respective și a membrilor acesteia - atunci este bine să se apeleze la toate etapele de gestiune a crizei, printre care: identificarea și cunoașterea acestora, etiologia situației de criză, programul de intervenție, controlul și evaluarea. Managementul conflictelor din mediul școlar prin negociere este o condiție sine qua non pentru restabilirea climatului propice activităților didactice în cadrul grupul educațional. Pentru adaptarea corectă la fiecare situație specifică, este necesară cunoașterea stilurilor de negociere precum și a tipurilor de negociatori. Negocierea este procedura care nu poate lipsi din arsenalul metodelor de rezolvare efectivă dar și „onorabilă” a situațiilor conflictuale, inerente conducerii claselor școlare.*

**Cuvinte cheie:** criză educațională, grup educațional, negociere

### INTRODUCTION

There is much talk nowadays about the conflict situations in the school group, about the teachers' complaining about the inappropriate behaviour of

pupils, aspect that seems to deepen from generation to generation. Therefore it appears that it is necessary to lay emphasis on certain concrete modalities to cope with these behaviour deficiencies without greatly interfering with the instructive and educational process.

## MATERIAL AND METHOD

In the attempt to define a crisis situation a justified call for elements of theoretical management is made: it would be defined as an *event or complex of unforeseen, unexpected and unplanned events, which pose a danger to the climate, health or security of the class concerned and the members thereof.*

Understanding by a situation of educational crisis the appearance of an event or a series of unexpected and unplanned events, considered to be dangerous for the climate, health and security of the respective class and its members, then it is advisable to resort to all stages of crisis management, among which we mention: their identification and knowing, the etiology of the crisis situation, the intervention program, the control and evaluation.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The first step of the management activity of crisis situations lies in:

**1. *Identifying and knowing the situations concerned:*** at the beginning of the analysis it is appropriate to particularise the crisis situations at the level of the school environment by determining the school phenomena within the class of pupils that may constitute genuine crises, conflicts and relational situations hard to control that occur between: teachers and pupils, teachers and parents.

**2. *Etiology of the crisis situation:*** generated by the development according to atypical forms of manifestation, the necessity to thoroughly know the situation and the causes thereof constitutes the second step in the management processes of school crises. Identifying causality must be a necessary beginning of the analysis operations.

**2.a. Conflicts between pupils** may be generated by:

- competitive environment – the pupils have long been used to working individually, thus preventing them from growing accustomed to working in groups, to communicating more intensely with their colleagues and therefore from trusting each other;
- intolerant environment – within the class the so-called “cliques” are formed and the absence of support between pupils leads more often than not to loneliness and isolation;
- low level of communication – most conflicts may be attributed to misunderstandings or to misperceptions of intentions, feelings, needs and actions of the others;
- inappropriate expression of feelings – conflicts will escalate when pupils have feelings uncalled for, when they do not know how to express sorrow or discontent in a non-aggressive manner;

**2.b. Conflicts between teachers and pupils** may occur against the background of several aspects of which we specify:

- little attention given to causes of some behaviours that precede or exemplify a psychological stress;
- failure to provide the smallest support in coping with critical situations;
- subjective evaluation of knowledge and affective and attitudinal behaviour;

**2.c.** The main causes of **conflicts between teachers and parents** are as follows:

- defective communication due to misunderstandings or to the small number of contacts over the course of a school year;
- value conflicts and fight for power;
- parents have prejudices based on previous experiences or it is not clear to them what role teachers play into their children's life.

**3. Intervention programme.** The management of crisis situations by means of *negotiating* has become an indispensable condition for restoring a climate favourable to didactic activities within the class. Negotiating is the procedure that may not miss from the arsenal of methods of effective and "honourable" solving of conflict situations, inherent to running a school class group.

Generally, negotiation may be defined as interaction between groups and / or persons having initial divergent interests and objectives that after discussing and confronting positions aim at reaching an agreement and at taking joint decisions ("Educational Management" Laboratory 2001, p. 120).

In the opinion of Hassan Souni (1998) the main negotiation styles are as follows:

**3.a. Avoidant style.**

- This conflict management style is characterised by the reduced capacity to support own interests and on the other hand by very reduced collaboration with the negotiation partner.
- It may also be called the "head-in-sand ostrich" strategy. Although it is not the most indicated strategy, it may constitute a good policy if it is followed by practical situation improvement measures.

In other words it is the most indicated method of buying time provided that this time is well used.

**3.b. Obliging style.**

- An obliging management style involves a minimum achievement of personal interests and a maximum achievement of cooperation. Thus the bases of a partnership are laid, if this is the intent, and such partnership is very likely to continue.
- This style may be explained as follows: A helps B without requesting anything for the time being, given that A has more to gain in the future.
- Some authors deem that such management is a sign of weakness, but it may be construed as a good cooperation model, but also a way to become obliged.

**3.c. Competitive style.**

- Through this management method own interest is imposed and any form of cooperation is reduced. A dictatorship is thus formed, performed by the strongest party that is not interested in any kind of collaboration with the lower rank partners.
- Teachers who resort to this manner of resolution of possible conflicts occurred at the level of the class of pupils will create a stressful atmosphere that is exerted on the pupils and this atmosphere will create conflicts in its turn, but these will be latent.

### ***3.d. Collaborative style.***

- This final conflict management style is the most indicated because it involves the maximisation of both personal interests as well as communication.
- It is the most indicated style between two basic school actors – teacher and pupils – who have joint goals. Thus the issue of consent of the two parties is raised.
- Through this collaboration method, the efficiency of achieving goals may be increased.

### *Types of negotiators*

➤ *Cooperative negotiator*: involves the observance of a certain number of rules such as: transparency, loyalty to the partner, respect for objectives, determination to reach a positive arrangement. As far as efficiency is concerned, he or she is an organiser of short, medium and long-term positive states;

➤ *Affective negotiator*: acts and negotiates according to his or her feelings at the time. He or she is not at all pragmatic in their negotiation, acts according to situational affectivity and to the intensity degree of the relationship with the partner. His or her reaction is based on wish, subjectivity, friendship and rejection. The ideal fighting manner is to enter his or her affective universe;

➤ *Conflictual negotiator* is a person who gives priority to force and diplomacy, uses blackmail or threat, easily gives up to dialogue and abuses the force ratio. Strategically, in order to cope with a conflict, this type of negotiator must be more “conflictual” than his or her interlocutor or to bring the same into an “affective” or “cooperative” field;

➤ *Demagogue negotiator* is the type of negotiator who hides behind lies, manipulation, stimulation and duplicity. The manner to counteract such managerial manifestation lies in using the other types of negotiation.

Four stages may be distinguished within the negotiation process:

#### *a. Negotiation preparation*

The first step is represented by the determination of the next elements of negotiation: initial position; objective of negotiation and breaking point, beyond which we are willing to renounce.

#### *b. Negotiation opening*

The starting point in a negotiation is very important because the first impression that the interlocutor forms with respect to the discussion partner has a great impact on the negotiation process. Consequently, it is recommended that the negotiator:

- rely on reality;
- lay emphasis on active listening;
- ask questions and explore the situation;
- make known his or her points of view, but without trying to “destroy” the negotiation partners: positive intents must prevail over negative ones.

#### *c. Actual performance of negotiation*

During this stage the negotiation techniques may be successfully applied. Some of the best known negotiating techniques are the ones specified below, which use already acknowledged names:

- “Taking the temperature” – preliminary informal meeting (useful with a view to testing points of view, adopted positions).
- “Early negotiations” – technique that attempts to find out the point to which the negotiation partners are willing to go; hard feelings are thus avoided when someone is forced to pass over the limit represented by the braking point.
- “Foot-in-the-door technique” – aims at breaking the ice with an initially small demand, which is difficult to refuse, and after involvement is produced, a higher demand may be put forward highly likely to be accepted.
- “Door-in-the-face technique” – a higher demand is followed by a smaller one. The principle lies in demanding the interlocutor to make higher concession, which cannot be accepted, before asking for a second compromise, with smaller implications.
- “Silence” – is a gap that the people feel obligated to fill, if one asks a questions and an unsatisfactory reply is given, the best option is to say nothing; be keeping silent a signal is sent that one requests more information.

#### *d. Negotiation conclusion*

The conclusion of negotiation is the last stage where the assessment of what may be obtained through conditioned concessions, where a brief summary of the agreement is given and where the final position is established.

**4. Control:** must accompany any actional procedure. Its importance lies in the concern for the exact location of the phenomenon, for the avoidance and prevention of further effects of the crisis or even the prevention of parallel micro-crises. The fluency of interventions, the homogeneity and coherence degree are checked and optimised by means of control.

**5. Assessment:** aims at measuring and assessing the final state of the class following the completion of resolution procedures. It is recommended to design sets of relevant indicators in order to avoid assessment distortions and in order to certify the final level. A critical objective of the assessment stage lies in inferring

conclusions following the impact of the crisis state and engaging all those involved in knowing and preventing future situations of this kind. A good experienced teacher who also has obvious manager qualities will be able to exploit the entire extent of the events and thus to favour the future development of organisation, to render his or her personal actions more efficient and also to increase the output of the class.

## CONCLUSIONS

In order to succeed over time and to be efficient within the social, group interaction process, the final compromise requested by conflict resolution must not be viewed by neither of the parties as a sign of weakness and must not be speculated within the conciliation process by neither of them, but it must be appreciated for its positive – integrative function.

The attempt to create a totally homogeneous organization or group, which has no controversies or disputes whatsoever results usually in weak performances and finally, in group disintegration. But it is necessary to make a difference between productive disagreements and conflicts and to reiterate the possibility of creating an environment in which disagreements may be solved through collaboration.

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