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The Study of Modern Adolescents' Conflict Resolution Skills

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Abstract

Conflict is the most unpleasant way to resolve disputes which inevitably arise in the process of social interaction. It implies the opposition of those participating in the interaction and is usually accompanied by negative emotions that go beyond the conventional norms and rules. A conflict situation is a component of any conflict. Many scientists believe that conflict situations usually appear as a result of miscommunication.

The ability to build constructive relationships with others and effectively mediate contentious issues is an important indicator of personal development. The patterns of behavior in conflict situations, unique to every person, are formed at the earliest stages of personality development.

The analysis of literature and the results of our research show that, unfortunately, the development of conflict resolution skills in modern adolescents is not on the list of educational goals at comprehensive schools. Despite the fact that its importance is not denied, teachers do not take active measure to help students develop the ability to resolve conflict situations.

The aim of this paper is to study and identify the development of conflict resolution skills in modern adolescents as well as to provide rationale for the organization of purposeful psychological and pedagogical work to improve conflict resolution skill in students. On the basis of the results obtained, recommendations are given for the organization of special psychological and pedagogical work on the development of conflict resolution skills in adolescents. The empirical part of the study took place in a comprehensive school (the city of Kazan, the Republic of Tatarstan) and involved 74 pupils aged 13-15. The preliminary diagnostic assessment was carried out by means of the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI), adapted by Grishina; Q Methodology (Q-sort) developed by William Stephenson (adapted by Bekhterev); the methodology "Assessment of Conflict Resistance Level" developed by Raygorodsky.

Keywords: conflict, conflict situation, interpersonal conflicts, adolescents.

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Introduction

Conflicts are inevitable in any society and accompany every person throughout life. Unfortunately, not all people seek to achieve their goals in a constructive way – many disregard the needs of others, which inevitably leads to rivalry and tension in relationships. Any person is a part of society and interacts with other people who have certain individual characteristics, such as: communicative features, temperament, propensity to aggressive behavior and their own views, thoughts and ideas.

The most important age from this perspective is adolescence, as particularly complex and contradictory, hence more emotionally intense and conflict susceptible. The experience of a successful or, conversely, unsuccessful communication, acquired by a teenager, serves as the basis for mastering various ways of resolving conflict situations, whether constructive or not. The problem is that it is during this age period that social settings, values, attitudes towards oneself, people and society are formed. Moreover, in adolescence, character traits and basic types of interpersonal behavior become stable. The main motivations of this age period, associated with an active desire for personal self-improvement are self-knowledge, self-expression and self-affirmation.

The problem of developing the skill to resolve conflicts is an endless field for studying, the relevance and practical importance of which have increased due to emerging processes that take place in the economic, social and political spheres of our lives.

Purpose and objectives of the study

Our main research question is as follows: What is the level of conflict resolution skills development in adolescents and what is the rationale for organizing special psychological and pedagogical work to improve it? The purpose of the study is to study and determine conflict resolution skills development in adolescents.

Literature review

Conflict as a socio-psychological phenomenon is natural for social relations. In the scientific literature there are a large number of studies devoted to the problem of conflicts, their solutions and various aspects of this issue.

Some aspects of this problem were studied by Russian and foreign scientists: Galustova (2013), Dmitriev (2009), Kozyrev (2008), Cornelius & Fair (1992), Mukhina (2013), Scott (1994). The essence of the concept of “conflict”, its structural components are revealed in the works of Babosov (2000), Grishina (1995, 2013), Danakin, Dyatchenko, & Speransky (2009), Kashapov (2010). Age-related features of conflicts manifestation were studied by Vachkov & Bityanova (2010), Kazantseva (2008), Kulagina (2014), Mukhina (2013), Rice (2000). Antsupov (2007) and Grishina (1995) examined the prevention of conflicts in adolescence.

The concept of "conflict" is a broad notion and is used in various meanings. In the general sense, the conflict can be defined as the extreme point of tension, the lack of agreement between two or more parties that are represented by certain individuals or groups.

The English sociologist Giddens (2004) defines “conflict” as a real struggle between people or groups, regardless of its origins, ways and means. This position is mostly shown in the studies of German sociologists Simmel (1923) and Dahrendorf (1994) and an American sociologist Coser (2000). The main thesis of Simmel’s conflict theory (1923) is based on the fact that any conflict, in spite of being one of the forms of contradiction, has a socializing force able to unite the opposing parties and contributes to the

stabilization of the society. Coser (2000) in his classic work "The Functions of Social Conflicts" notes that the conflict does not perform a destructive function - it undoubtedly has a huge positive potential.

Druzhinin & Kontorov (1989) define conflict as "a method of adjusting the main contradictions unsolvable by a logical way". Grishina (1995) believes that a conflict is a bipolar phenomenon, i.e. a confrontation between the two parties manifesting itself in the activity aimed at overcoming objections, where each of the parties is represented by an active subject.

Kovalev (1965), an outstanding Soviet social psychologist, stated that conflict is a natural contradiction that arises between people and is caused by problems in personal and social life, disagreements of interests, goals, views and social attitudes.

We share the view of Grishina (1995, 2013), who claims that interpersonal conflict is an open confrontation between the interacting parties on the basis of emerging contradictions, which serve as antagonistic goals incompatible in any given situation.

According to Antsupov (2007), misunderstanding often results in interpersonal conflicts. It usually happens because of opposing views about the subject, fact, action, etc.

To resolve the conflict means to eliminate the conflict situation and to settle a dispute. The first is more difficult, yet more important. Unfortunately, the resolution is generally limited only to reconciliation. It is common to resort to repression - avoiding the realization of goals under the influence of external pressure, when frustration is forced inward and can at any time come out in the form of aggression.

Usually the conflict is preceded by two groups of phenomena: the objective life situation the opposing parties are part of, where these parties themselves are people who have certain interests and values.

At the heart of any conflict is a situation involving either opposing positions of the parties on some issue, or opposing goals or means of achieving them in the given circumstances, or a mismatch of interests, desires, drives of opponents, etc. This is the so-called conflict situation. It includes objects and subjects of a possible conflict. Most frequently researchers state that a conflict situation is such a confluence of circumstances that objectively creates the ground for real confrontation between social actors.

We agree with the position of Grishina (1995), who defines a conflict situation as the accumulated contradictions associated with the activities of the subjects of social interaction and creating the ground for real confrontation between them.

The study of the concepts "conflict", "interpersonal conflict" and "conflict situation" made us identify age-related features of conflict in adolescence. It is important to note that interpersonal interaction in conflict situations causes difficulties for adolescents – destructive tendencies prevail in their relationships. There is a restructuring of the already established system of relations with parents, teachers, peers, which leads to the emergence of contradictions, conflicts. Often, instead of analyzing the problem and finding the best ways to handle it, a teenager is dominant and tries to influence the object of the contradiction committing actions that lead to an aggravation of the conflict. First of all, this is due to the lack of communicative and social competence of adolescents. Thus, the problem of mastering the best ways to resolve conflict situations is crucial, especially in adolescence.

Methodology

In the course of the experiment there were used the following methods: study and analysis of psycho-pedagogical literature; diagnostic test by means of Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument

(Thomas & Kilmann, 2001); Q Methodology (Q-sort) (Stephenson, 2001); the methodology "Assessment of Conflict Resistance Level" (Raygorodsky, 2007); pedagogical observation.

The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Test (TKI Test) is used to study personal predisposition to conflict behavior. Kenneth Thomas distinguishes the following types of behavior in a conflict situation: rivalry (competition) as an effort to achieve satisfaction of one's own interests to the detriment of another person; conformity, in contrast to rivalry, sacrifice of one's own interests for the sake of another person; compromising that involves an agreement based on mutual concession; avoidance characterized by both the lack of desire for banding and teaming up, and the lack of desire to achieve one's own goals; cooperation, when the participants of the situation come to a decision that fully satisfies the interests of both parties.

Students were asked in each set of statements to choose the answer that describes their typical behavior in a conflict situation. For each answer, coinciding with the key answer for the corresponding type of behavior in the conflict situation one point was scored. Dominant types were those getting the highest score.

Q Methodology (Q-sort) (Stephenson, 2001), is used to study the self-concept. The advantage of the methodology is that the subject manifests individuality, the real "selfness", and not "compliance – non-compliance" with statistical norms and choices or results of other people.

The methodology allows to identify six basic trends of human behavior in a real group: dependence, independence, sociability, unsociability, acceptance and readiness for "the fight" and avoiding "the fight".

The methodology is used to determine:

- the social "self" (how others see me);
- the ideal "self" (what I would like to be);
- the actual "self" (how I behave in different situations);
- significant others (how I see my partner);
- the ideal partner (how I want to see my partner).

The subjects were asked to read 60 statements and answer "yes" if it corresponds to one's self-concept or "no" if it contradicts self-concept. In exceptional cases, it was permitted to answer "I doubt".

The answers of the subject, according to the key answers, are distributed into 6 trends. Each of the trends has an internal and external feature, i.e. dependence, sociability and "fight" can be true, inherent in a personality, but can be external, the so-called "mask" hiding the true face of a person.

Dependence. The internal and external motivation of the individual to adopt group standards and values: social, moral and ethical. Dependence on group leaders, indecisiveness in communication, obedience, submissiveness when executing orders are common for these personalities. The surrounding people characterize such personalities as weak-willed and submissive.

Independence. Internal and external motivation of the individual not to accept group standards, both social and ethical. This is a person with a martial spirit, disobedient to the leader's will, self-determined in his actions, confident in his rectitude and manifesting independence, determination, strong will and assertiveness in advocating his views.

Sociability. The motivation of the individual to form emotional ties both in his group and outside it. This person is cheerful in communication, lively and outgoing. The surrounding people characterize him/her as a sanguine person by temperament type. This person is never depressed.

Unsociability. The motivation of the individual not to form emotional ties both in the group and

outside it. This person is dull, indifferent to the group's activities, sluggish, taciturn, insensitive to the group's issues, insecure, passive and inert.

Acceptance and readiness for "the fight". The active motivation of the individual to participate in group life, the desire to achieve a higher status in the group. This group is characterized by striving for struggle and fight, perseverance in achieving goals, assertiveness. Such people are demanding of others, resilient, efficient, determined and have an uncompromising stand.

Avoiding "the fight". Such personality tends to avoid interaction and to compromise solutions, tries to maintain "neutrality" in group disputes and conflicts. These individuals are dependent, indecisive, subordinate, prone to passivity.

The methodology "Assessment of Conflict Resistance Level" developed by Raygorodsky (2007) allows us to identify the main strategies of behavior in the potential conflict zone – interpersonal disputes and indirectly determine the conflict resistance level. The subjects were asked to evaluate each of the ten polar judgments indicated in the form, which are more characteristic of their behavior. To do this, they were supposed to determine which of the two extreme judgments is appropriate, and then evaluate it on a 5-point system.

Results and Discussions

The implementation of the study took place in the comprehensive school No. 88 (Privolzhsky district, the city of Kazan, the Republic of Tatarstan) and involved 74 pupils aged 13-15.

To determine the level of conflict resolution skills development, there were used the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (Kilmann & Thomas, 2001); Q Methodology (Q-sort) (Stephenson, 2001); the methodology "Assessment of Conflict Resistance Level" (Raygorodsky, 2007).

When processing data obtained by means of the methodology "Assessment of Conflict Resistance Level" by Raygorodsky (2007), the following data were revealed. As Table 1 shows, 46% have an average level of conflict resistance; 32.4% have low level; 16.2% - very low level; 5.4% - high level of conflict resistance. The analysis of the data obtained indicates that the majority of adolescents have an average level of conflict resistance with a tendency for low level.

Table 1

**Results of assessing the conflict resistance level in adolescents
(method developed by Raygorodsky, 2007)**

P oints	Level	Number of pupils	Number of pupils (%)
4 0-50	High	4	5,4
3 0-40	Average	34	46
2 0-30	Low	24	32,4
1- 19	Very low	12	16,2

Next, we identified the most common strategies for behavior in conflict situations in modern adolescents: compromise and rivalry. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

**Adolescent Conflict Behavior Strategies
(Kilmann-Thomas Test by Kilmann & Thomas, 2001)**

Indicator	Number of pupils	Number of pupils (%)
Compromise	30	40,54%
Rivalry	16	21,62%
Avoidance	6	8,11%
Cooperation	12	16,22%
Adaptivity	10	13,51%

The analysis of the data obtained indicates that respondents choosing the “compromise” behavior strategy in conflict resolution amount to 40.54%, whereas “rivalry” behavior strategy was chosen by 21.62% of pupils. However, the “cooperation” behavior strategy, one of the most favorable strategies, is used extremely rarely as only 16.22% of respondents prefer it. It can be concluded that conflict situations can arise for this reason.

The “compromise” behavior strategy is characterized by a balance of interests of the conflicting parties on the average level, which means they accept the view of others, though only to a certain extent – when a conflict situation happens again, the behavior may change. It can also be called the strategy of “mutual concession”.

Those who choose the “rivalry” behavior strategy, strive to get their own way by all means, defend their position, make others take their point of view, the opinion of others does not interest them.

The results obtained in the study of behavior strategies in the group using Q Methodology (Q-sort) by Stephenson (2001) are presented below.

Table 3

**Indicators “dependence – independence”
(Q-sort by Stephenson, 2001)**

Indicator	Number of pupils	Number of pupils (%)
Dependence	32	43,24
Independence	42	56,76

As table 3 shows, independence (56.76%) prevails, which indicates the desire not to adopt group standards. These are personalities with fighting ability, rebellious to the leader’s will, independent in their actions, determined, self-righteous, assertive in advocating their views. 43.24% tend to be dependent in their behavior, which shows internal and external motivation of adolescents to adopt group standards and

values. They are indecisive in communication, servile, compliant, submissive when executing orders.

The results of the study on the indicators “sociability – unsociability” are presented below in Table 4.

Table 4

Indicators “sociability – unsociability”

Indicator	Number of pupils	Number of pupils (%)
Sociability	52	70,27
Unsociability	22	29,73

The results show that more than half of the respondents (70.27%) are sociable, they tend to form emotional ties both in the group and outside it, cheerful in communication, lively and sociable.

Unsociability is characterized by sluggishness in communication, taciturnity, passivity and indifference to group problems and activities. 29.73% of adolescents tend to be unsociable.

Next, we examined the results on the indicators of acceptance and readiness for “the fight” and avoiding “the fight”. The results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Indicators of acceptance and readiness for “the fight” and avoiding “the fight”

Indicator	Number of pupils	Number of pupils (%)
Acceptance and readiness for “the fight”	38	51,35
Avoiding “the fight”	36	48,65

As table 5 shows, the trend of acceptance and readiness for “the fight” predominates (51.35%), which indicates the desire to achieve a higher status in the group, striving for the struggle, perseverance in achieving goals, assertiveness in advocating views, demanding of the others and strong-willed.

People who tend to avoid “the fight” (48, 65%) usually escape interaction, try to stay neutral in group disputes or conflicts and compromise solutions. They are dependent, indecisive and inert.

Summing up the results of the diagnostic assessment, we can conclude that a high level of proneness to conflict in the team can be explained by the lack of constructive communication skills in adolescents, which in turn leads to misunderstanding and interpersonal conflicts. Teenagers are more inclined to compete with each other than to cooperate.

In general, the results obtained show the necessity to develop conflict resolution skills in modern adolescents.

Conclusion

Only by overcoming a conflict situation, resolving a conflict or an argument, either internal or external, an individual enters a new stage of development. Consequently, knowledge about conflicts, its characteristics, the ways of conflict resolution and prevention methods is necessary for any person,

especially a teenager. It is crucial to choose the right methods and forms of work with pupils.

When developing conflict resolution skills in modern adolescents, it is necessary to take into account their age and individual characteristics. Working with parents and, above all, consulting them play an important role.

A social educator working at school can act as an intermediary in resolving conflicts among adolescents. We have proposed a program for building up conflict resolution skills in modern adolescents, which develops skills for handling conflicts and facilitates choosing the best strategies for behavior in a conflict if a teenager has already got into a conflict situation. The program is intended for working with adolescents aged 13-15 studying at comprehensive schools. Techniques and exercises are tailored to the age characteristics of adolescents. The program is designed for 34 hours of group lessons. The structure of each lesson presupposes semantic blocks, typical for psychological trainings with adolescents: greeting, warming-up, the main part relevant to the topic of the lesson, the final reflection.

In the process of experimental work the authors recommend to use the following forms and methods for developing conflict resolution skills: conversation, demonstration of the film with subsequent discussion, relaxation exercises, training, discussion, role-playing games.

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