NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION, EMPATHY AND ASSERTION AS MODERN STRATEGIES IN THE STUDY OF OVERCOMING CONFLICTS

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A b s t r a c t

In this study, the term "communication" is analyzed with an accent on the importance of implementation and on the results of assertiveness and non-violent communication in every day life.

The study is especially focused on conflicts and non-violent situations.

"To communicate non-violently means not to judge something that others have said or done. Also, it is very important that we express our personal feelings and needs" (Kare, 2006:91).

Only with a definite adoption and interpretation of non-violent attitude, we can influence the other protagonists in communication to find peaceful solutions in conflict situations. In this way, an escalation of conflict could be avoided.

After defining problems and expressing emotions, it is very important to analyze the real needs and clearly present our attitudes and expectations. Today, a modern teacher is responsible for educating the students into taking the proper actions in a conflict situation.

Key words: *communication, non-violent communication, assertion, conflict, emotions, needs, empathy, school workshop.*

The roles of communication, non-violent communication, and empathy as a modern strategy in students' education

Our everyday lives contain many issues regarding other people, which are reflected through: disagreements, non-acceptance, conflicts and communication breakdowns. Often, we care about our personal actions which could launch a wave of negative emotions in other people; at the same time, we forget our personal potentials and needs.

Instead of positive feelings, such as feeling strong, confident, relaxed, accomplished, satisfied, inspired, calmed, enthusiastic, etc., a whole palette of feelings appears, which alienates us from satisfying our personal needs and from good communication. These negative feelings are manifested as: pain, tension, anxiousness, disappointment, hurt, tiredness, dispiritedness, fear, bitterness, desolation, discomfort. Non-violent communication is focused on the recognition of "universal needs that are common to all human beings - qualities that sustain life that we all cherish" (Leu, 2006: 186).

In a modern and fast-paced world, it is necessary to recognize the difference between basic needs (existential, secure, connection and communication needs, needs for respect, etc.) and specific needs.

Bashful, reclusive, or insecure adults or children will not express personal feelings, ideas or statements because they are not self-confident and skilled in communicating with others. That child/adult will make an impression of disinterest, which is a result of a deficiency of their knowledge.

Unsure and frightened persons are very inflexible and categorical in presenting their own opinions and thoughts. They forget about their own strengths and weaknesses and they don't know where they belong.

Therefore, it is very important that parents and teachers encourage children to develop their own communication skills.

"Communication (lat. communicare - common) is a process that makes something common, a community interconnected, and an operation with the people among themselves." (Pokonjak, 1996: 244).

Developed communication skills enable an easier way to establish communication. In humans, this is primarily reflected in the spoken (verbal) skills. Certain professions require specified and highly developed communication skills, such as a developed ability to communicate the emotional effect on participant gestures, facial expressions, and the like.

These are the communication skills required of teachers in modern teaching.

Any communication includes: a source of information (where they originate), information (a message that is transmitted), transmission (used to transfer information) and reception.

"Communication in education is reflected in the communication, reception, transfer, and exchange of messages and even the establishment of relationships, ways of dealing with and understanding among the participants in our care - the educational process (students and teachers, educators, and the trainees themselves)." (Potkonjak, 1996: 244).

"Nonviolent communication emphasizes the practice of nonviolence because of the importance of language and the way we use words in relation to people. Often, instead of the concept of nonviolent communication, we use the term 'compassionate communication'.

Compassionate communication is focused on improving what we do and our source, what we perceive, feel and need; however, it is not focused on the judgments and advice." (Marshal Rosenberg, 2006).

In their everyday communication people today apply techniques of nonviolent communication in respect to the needs of listeners. In this communication, the techniques have a role to facilitate the process of transmitting information - to hear people in communication, for example, expressing disagreement without rejection and condemnation. "Non-violent communication includes active listening and I-messages" (Various authors, 2006: 31).

Active listening is one part of communication which refers to conscious attention to what the other person tells us. In this process we consciously invest their will, because in addition to verbal, we hear and recognize feelings, needs, and values of respondents.

A listener caller leaves an open space, freedom, and opportunity to fully express.

On the other hand, I-speech/messages are best reflected in the slogan "I will speak in his name". In this way of expression, we turn to the first person singular emphasizing personal experience, our own attitudes, beliefs, opinions, feelings. By using I-messages, we leave ourselves the possibility of assertive research.

"Empathy is a respectful understanding of what others are experiencing. We often have a strong urge to give advice or reassurance and to explain our own position or feeling. Empathy, however, calls upon us to empty our mind and listen to others with our whole being"(Rosenberg, 2006: 107).

Ability to sympathize with another in critical and stressful situations through empathy certainly can contribute to ending violence.

In order for a child or person to understand a thing or object, he does not have to use the tactile way by touching the item of his interest or pointing at the object. Children in preadolescent ages acquire and develop cognitive skills and abstract thinking about successful relationships (social, emotional, physical, etc.). Therefore, the child becomes able to recognize feelings (for example: sadness, happiness, physical pain and the like). The child not only recognizes, but also understands, the same feelings; it sympathizes and experiences the same. In this way, a constructive approach is implemented.

Equally important is the understanding of empathy by the student/child. Empathy for the world is important for the child, particularly in relation to people close to children: the family as the immediate environment and teachers / trainers. At this age children manage to understand their own needs and behaviour through empathy.

The school directs the behaviour of students/children and fosters socialization. "In this sense, schools can certainly deal with the understanding of social phenomena - e.g. prejudice, discrimination, violence... A teacher can make questions and create experience that can help the student to search for answers

"(Jovanovic et al., 2003: 15), all in order to improve conditions for the acquisition of new knowledge.

For this reason, we can speak of the inevitability of the existence of workshops; for in their own way, they offer the opportunity to discover cooperative relationships and improve socialization within the group, i.e. classroom.

In examining the sources of support in school, just as in the family home, children will often make various "errors" in their behaviour to determine the "limits". They will also seek protective attitude of teachers, who need to demonstrate the child's familiar protective role of parents.

Through the phenomenon of "complaining" in situations involving frustration, the child expects that the teacher is at all times with him or her, to be the so-called "extended arm" that makes decisions in his favour, as the parent would do.

This confirms the fact that the child is not mature enough to establish a cooperative relationship in the classroom or in a team.

Assertiveness as a basis of quality and successful strategies in learning and teaching

Assertive conduct in school is an integral part of a modern, present-day role of teachers, students, and parents. The roles of teachers such as disseminator, arbitrator, and implementor have long since been overcome.

Students who blindly listen to and learn solely through the presentation of the teacher as the sole source of knowledge and recite without understanding, students who are afraid to express opinions and emotions, are outdated and unacceptable in modern society.

Parents who are inconsistent and tend to punish will not achieve the same educational success in their demands as parents whose educational role is realized on the basis of assertiveness.

Assertiveness is the (Lange & Jakubowski, 1976) "Expression of thoughts, feelings and beliefs in direct, honest, and appropriate manners while respecting the rights of people. Conversely, aggression involves self-expression, which is endangers the rights of others and obstructs them in achieving their goals" (Tomasevic, Krstic, 2009: 2).

Since people are social beings, it is easy to conclude that their relationships with other people mostly depend on personal communication skills and their manifested behaviour, both towards themselves and to other living beings/people.

Behaviours such as passiveness, conformity, and aggression (strong reaction wave of violence / verbal, physical, emotional, social, sexual etc., lack of attention for the feelings of others) can be regarded as extreme and unacceptable for a healthy living environment. The following is a summary display of attitudes of passivity, aggression, and assertiveness:

* **PASSIVE** - other people's needs are in front of ours; feeling - anxiety;

* **AGGRESSIVE** - personal needs are always ahead of others people's needs; feeling - anger;

* **ASSERTIVE** - a balance between the personal needs and others people's needs; feeling - satisfaction or dissatisfaction, and so on.

Assertiveness is a behaviour that is characterized by self-confident communication of people aware of their own rights and values" (Vidanović, 2006.), and is reflected in the full appreciation of the needs and rights of respondents, but also of other people in the communication process which can be affected by our behaviour.

In conflict situations, assertiveness is related to the problem of conflict, not the person who is the focus of the event / conflict. Therefore, personal feelings and opinions have been aimed at the problem and activity to solve the problem.

It is necessary to express personal opinions and feelings in the process of assertion, so that people around us know how we feel. It is important that through the listing of personal feelings and opinions we do not forget that the person we are addressing has personal feelings and emotions, too.

"In assertive behaviour, people are always striving to find a balance between the needs of both sides. It is necessary to distinguish the behaviour and decisions that you are responsible for and to take that responsibility, but also to recognize the behaviour of other adults you are not responsible for, and for whose actions you should not blame yourself, or suffer the consequences of."(Various authors, 2006: 36).

Being assertive means to express clearly what bothers us. This is certainly the only way to overcome a problem. Otherwise, our communication partner will not know what bothers us and how it negatively affects communication.

In the research of our own opinions, an individual presents reasons for disagreement with the environment. The feeling of dissatisfaction that occurs will interfere with, and violate, good communication. The protagonists of assertiveness emphasize the importance of taking responsibility for one's own decisions and behaviour, and recognizing the behaviour of other people. Also, we should not blame others or feel the consequences of bad decisions and assessments made by other people.

Clarity of the requests of what is wanted or expected is very important. Ambiguity and the so-called "assumptions" can further distort the communication relationship. This leads to the possibility that, because of someone else's assessment, dissatisfaction may develop into aggression, which is a certain way to deepen the conflict.

Determination is important in the rejection of other people's requirements and expectations with which we disagree with and do not accept. Specifically, a short "no" and an explanation of the reasons for disagreement are significant and essential in the decision. Otherwise, the contradiction will bring us back to endless debates.

Assertiveness leaves the possibility of self-criticism for the individual to change his/her mind or to change his/her position after learning new facts and arguments.

Assertiveness involves the reaction towards attitudes or behaviours of other people.

Some useful techniques in assertive relevant teaching/communication are:

• *Broken record*: it is used in lack of clear demands, and is reflected in the fact that he/she is repeating like a "broken record";

• *I-messages*: these messages are talking only about themselves and their own state. These messages leave no possibility for the manifestation of egocentrism "I and I", but also help to identify individual needs through self-criticism and enjoyment of personal success.

Assertiveness gives us the opportunity to choose, but decisions are not always assertive. In fact, when we are in communication with ill or deeply agitated people, if our individual matters or decisions are not important, if exaggerated emotions exist... it is desirable to first allow the reduction of the intensity of emotions, and then take the desired position.

Necessity of applying non-violent communication in teaching and learning

"To communicate in a nonviolent way means not to evaluate what others do or say, but to pay special attention to what we feel, and to present our needs. It is primarily about fostering personal development in which an individual assumes liability for what he/she does, thinks and feels; not believing the other is always responsible for his/her trouble and defeat." (Kare, 2006:91).

By using nonviolent communication skills, we avoid the elements and processes that can lead to the deterioration of relations in communication and be the foundation of discord and deepening of the conflict, such as decision-making, judgement, justification, examination, defending.

Marshal Rosenberg, a doctor of clinical psychology, describes a communication path to overcome the conflict through four stages, namely:

1. Observing the problems,

2. Listing to your own feelings,

3. Analyzing personal needs,

4. Formulating requests.

Observing the problem

In the first stage of dealing with conflict, it is necessary to examine the situation, and answer the questions - where and when it is happening, who is participating, and how it is manifested? It is most important not to seek an

explanation or an excuse for facts acquired through our research of the roots of conflict; also, it is imperative not to make judgements, to redirect criticism, or to defend oneself.

It is most important to realistically and concretely describe the situation, just as it is actually happening, stating full facts.

Recognition of personal feelings

Having recognized the conflict situation, which is a result of the first phase of problem determination, and having collected information, emotions appear, such as feelings that bring worry or dissatisfaction because of the conflict situation. At this stage, we determine our own experiences without blaming others.

No matter how difficult this seems, it is important to start from the fact that our feelings, which we have in ourselves, belong exclusively to us. They are indicators of some personal emptiness or some unmet needs. At this stage, it is important to use "I"-messages so that we can acknowledge our personal feelings at that moment.

Emotions are not always easy to recognize; they are even harder to accept and direct.

Under the influence of previously acquired moral and educational norms, oftentimes we do not accept our personal emotions simply because they expose our weaknesses. With this attitude, we are more likely to find ourselves in conflict situations, but we understand ourselves and others less.

Analysis of personal needs

In their life experience, adults and children often use harder ways to achieve their personal goals. These roads go through a third person as a representative, and are very often followed by judgement, assessment, blaming, and pain due to unreciprocated and unfulfilled expectations. Criticism and judgements then take the stage; they inevitably lead to accusations, excuses, and conflict.

In such situations, the actors of the communication process can solve their potential conflicts or disagreements through polarized black/white relations:

- Empathy obtained from respondents who understand the hidden meaning of needs, which are not articulated;

- The interlocutor does not understand the meaning of hidden messages and needs, and gives them meaning that leads to conflict.

When presenting their own needs that are related to emotions, it is important that our attention is focused on the problematic situation without expressing general conclusions; it is also vital to never allow the imagined thoughts and considerations take precedence and dominate us.

With a personal commitment, we improve the quality of communication.

Formulating the requests

In the first three stages, the situation that results in problems is clearly described. From these problems, defined emotions arise with requirements that must be satisfied and that are in direct relation with emotions.

The next and final stage is to formulate a request. In presenting the request we need to go directly to the goal, without hiding behind ambiguous messages and suggested solutions.

The request must not be generalized. It should clearly express what we want to achieve. Only in this way, communication will go towards improving relations. Hidden thoughts and unconscious desires will not be recognized, and will launch a storm of emotions that will again lead the communication process in crisis, implying a new conflict. Hence, the importance of non-violent communication is essential in order to overcome the conflict, normalize relations and deepen the existing good relations between the interlocutors.

Workshop work as a modernized approach to conflict resolution in schools

The modern teacher of today must prepare pupils for the proper handling of conflict situations. Also, the teacher needs to find a way to encourage student self-confidence and positive affirmation of collective and personal identity in order to develop non-violent communication skills (through the I-message, active listening, and active voice), and encourage assertiveness. Therefore, it is expected that in addition to recording the frequency of conflict, the teacher recognizes the environment in which conflicts are most evident; conflict is handled precisely on that ground. If conflicts are most common on the football field, the teacher can prepare a workshop which talks just about the conflict on the field. It is natural that topics of conflict (i.e.: works about conflict) for which students seek solutions are coming from childhood experiences: conflicts that happened in the classroom, during class, after class, or at a birthday party, etc.

Workshop projects that are realized in working with students can initiate a hypothetical conflict (when working with puzzles). It is desirable that the processing of workshops and themes/attitudes be directed towards an inclusive person, with the intent that children perceive their behaviour as spontaneous, dominant, withdrawn, and maybe aggressive in imposing their will on others, and changing it because it is unacceptable for the environment.

The modern teacher initially researches in the class and collects information on frequency, gender and the age of children involved in conflicts, place, time (during the school classes or after) etc.

After completing this program, it is necessary to research the effectiveness of the program. The goal of this research would be to determine statistically if the

number of conflicts between students is higher or lower than before implementing the program.

Example of a workshop method

(WORK IS ORGANIZED BY THE TEACHERS AND THE GOAL IS TO IMPLEMENT MODERN TEACHING STRATEGIES IN THE EDUCATION OF STUDENTS)

Scheduled Time: 45 minutes

Objectives:

- adoption and understanding of the term "conflict" and the recognition of conflict situations;
- identification of where conflicts occur and triggers for their occurrence;
- identification of the types / forms of conflict;
- adoption of a constructive approach of conflict resolving through conflict resolution techniques;
- understanding of the message - "attack and solve the conflict, not the person!".

After creating a positive working atmosphere, the teacher introduces the activity and the reasons for gathering. In communication with the students, the teacher is open, clear and direct.

Activity: "WIN AWAY" or A FOOTBALL MATCH

"CONFLICT - FELLOWSHIP, 00:10"

(resolution of conflict situations through "fair-play maps of the conflict")

Scheduled Time: 25 minutes

On the flip - chart panel, there is a graphical representation of a "fair play map of the conflict." The teacher should explain to students the symbols of "players" in the field and the importance of third parties in the form of an "assistant referee" who can be there or not; this depends on whether both "sides of the conflict" are interested in / agree to such a presence, or the severity of situation (when a parent, teacher, an adult feels it is necessary to intervene).

Students are engaged in concrete and constructive ways to solve conflict situations, after the introductory story about Ivan:

Story about Ivan:

Ivan was angry with Jana all of last week after her birthday party in her apartment. He did not say anything, but used every suitable opportunity to show her how she and her party, which he had not been invited to, were both unworthy. During recess, Jana explained to her friends that she could not invite the whole class because their apartment is too small; her parents were not able to rent a party room where they would celebrate, because his dad had lost his job.

Today in math class while Jana was answering the teacher's question, Ivan was trying to annoy and distract her. He was turning around, looking for Vanja's eraser, who sits next to him, whispered, and when she finished answering and went back to her seat, he called out: "You are a geek". She tried to talk to him at recess and asked him why, but he just passed by without saying a word.

On the way home, Ivan waited for Jana, forcibly removed her bag and threw it over the fence into the yard where there was a barking dog. Jana was crying and she asked Ivan: "Why are you doing this to me?". Ivan angrily exclaimed: "Because you're a stupid girl and a weakling who listens to mom and dad!"
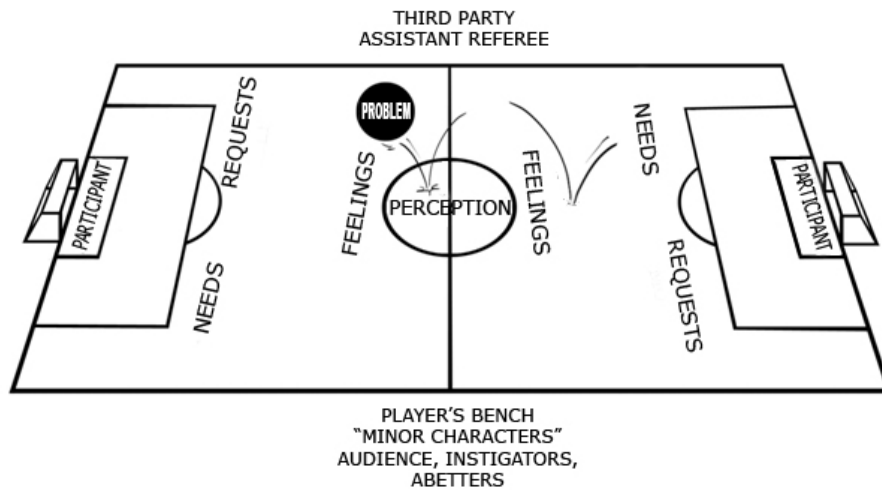
The teacher helps students to define the problem that has occurred between Ivan and Jana. If necessary, the teacher can use some extra questions to guide students, for example:

1. How would you explain the problem that happened between Ivan and Jana?
2. Name participants in the conflict?
3. What are Ivan's needs? Why do you think he treated Jana the way he did?
4. What did Ivan notice (experience, see, realize that he did not like) that came from Jana?
5. What were Ivan's fears and feelings in this regard? What did he not want? What worries Ivan?
6. What were Jana's needs? What did Jana notice? What were Jana's fears and what feelings she had?

On the flip - chart board, there is a poster of a "football field" and empty fields to write: problem, perceptions, needs, emotions, who could be "extra judges" and the like.

The teacher is prepared for a brief presentation, which tells about the types of conflicts and introduces students to the same (mini-lecture):

"Conflicts are an integral part of communication. Very rarely, conflicts erupt suddenly, unexpectedly, or "just like that". An "OPEN or external" conflict, in which two or more people may participate, always precedes HIDDEN conflicts that may be masked skilfully as Ivan did. Explain, how Ivan concealed the conflict? Why do you think so?

UNAWARE conflicts are also hidden and appear when we perceive something that offends us, that we do not agree with and respond in time, and often do not even get to consider them.

There are MIXED conflicts too, when the above-mentioned conflicts appear in the form of one; we cannot say that some of these conflicts are more important.

Conflicts can be FALSE ones, when we only think that we have a conflict with someone, but actually, it's just an ordinary misunderstanding.

The teacher leads discussions with students about situations with players on the court (using attached "fair play map of the conflicts."). Showing the "football field", the teacher tries to apply the model from the map to actual conflict situations in the classroom.

Conclusion

A conflict shows one or more persons who are confronted for a variety of conflicting views with different needs and different behaviours" (Kare, 2006:9).

No matter what type of the conflict is present, or what the number of people involved in it and the nature of their relationship are, conflict situations do not bring anything good to them. Conflict situations create a sense of inability of its protagonists.

Conflict situations can develop in the following ways:

- a fair and reasonable solution where all the protagonists in the conflict are satisfied;
- one of the protagonists gives up the claim, which entails acceptance of the demands of the other protagonists of the communication process. Despite the fact that the dissatisfied protagonist is "released" from the conflict, pseudo peace and an apparent solution are present, and the protagonist who gave up knowingly accepts the decisions of others;
- as the conflict culminates, it is necessary to involve a third party, ("neutral person"), a so called external coercion;
- a conflict persists, but it doesn't impair the relationship;
- conflict worsens and leads to a negative development;
- complete failure of communication and relationships.

Sometimes, our conflicts go around in a circle, blocking us so we do not recognize how to get out of this vicious cycle.

A non-violent communication helps to establish and renew the dialogue, which is necessary for finding positive solutions and the way out of misunderstanding.

"The use of non-violent communication does not require the person who we communicate with to be sophisticated in nonviolent communication, nor motivated to treat us with compassion" (Rosenberg, 2006: 26).

Nonviolent communication can be applied to all fields of life and different situations: intimate relationships, school, family, institutions, in negotiations, through counselling, disputes and conflicts, and the like.

It is quite sufficient to show our desires, the willingness and sincerity in expressing emotions and feelings and needs. It is important to hear and listen. Simply, we cannot afford to condemn, estimate, make conclusions, or decide for others.

Approach to a conflict in a manner described by Marshall Rosenberg opens doors of opportunity to put the conflict in the epicentre of what players feel on a personal level in a particular situation. The modern teacher must find an appropriate way based on the basis of non-violent communication to facilitate the successful rehabilitation of any conflict, and make the understanding of it easier for children. It is important that students embrace the adopted model of rehabilitation of conflict situations and implement it in real life when they find themselves in a new arena of conflict.

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NENASILNA KOMUNIKACIJA, EMPATIJA I ASERTIVNOST KAO SAVREMNE STRATEGIJE POUČAVANJA PREVAZILAŽENJA KONFLIKTA

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S a ž e t a k

U ovoj studiji pojam komunikacije je analiziran s akcentom na važnost implementacije i rezultate asertivnosti i nenasilne komunikacije u svakodnevnom životu.

Ustvari, studija je posebno fokusirana na konflikte i nenasilne situacije.

„Komunicirati nenasilno znači ne suditi nešto što drugi ljudi rade ili govore. Takođe, sa velikom važnošću to takođe znači da mi treba da iznesemo (predstavimo, iskažemo) naše vlastite osećaje i potrebe." (Kare, 2006: 91).

Samo sa odlučnim prihvatanjem i interpretacijom nenasilnog stava mi možemo uticati na druge protagoniste u komunikaciji da nađu mirno rešenje u konfliktnoj situaciji. Ovim putem eskalacija konflikta može biti izbegnuta. Posle definisanja problema i iskazivanja emocija, jako je bitno analizirati realne potrebe i jasno prezentovati naše stavove i očekivanja. Savremeni nastavnik današnjice je dužan osposobiti učenike za pravilno ophođenje u konfliktnoj situaciji.

Ključne reči: *komunikacija, nenasilna komunikacija, asertivnost, konflikt, emocije, potrebe, empatija, radioničarski rad*