

THE DEVELOPMENT OF PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOUR IN EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract. *In the formal educational environment characterized by changes and uncertainties, the lack of safety and discouragement we can signal attitudes and behaviours that are considered undesirable. We can notice an alarming growth of inadaptable behaviours that can be determined, among others, also by the fact that in school, there is not enough attention given to stimulating the psycho-social abilities or to the process of forming the prosocial behaviour. The analysis of the variables that influence the development of prosocial behaviour emphasizes the importance of affection and emotion control in the process of adaptation to the social and educational environment.*

Key words: *prosocial behaviour, attitudes, emotional intelligence*

Introduction

In a formal educational environment marked by changes and uncertainties, insecurity and discouragement, one can often notice undesirable attitudes and behaviours. The inventory made by T. Lickona (1996. pp. 11,12) registers real dangers, applicable to the Romanian educational environment, too. They occur as psycho-behavioural manifestations such as: increasing violence, increasing dishonesty (lie, cheating, theft), disrespect for educators and other persons with legal authority, increasing violence, fanatics and crime, language distortion, increasing selfishness and reduction of personal responsibilities, increasing self-destructive behaviour (premature sexual intercourse, drug abuse, suicide), increasing ethical ignorance, immoral and amoral behaviours without a prior judgement of the consequences.

By relating these to the reality we notice a concerning increase of unadjusted behaviours, which can be caused among others by the fact that school does not pay enough attention to stimulating psycho-social skills or to the development of prosocial behaviour.

Conceptual delimitations

The analysis of variables that influence the development of prosocial behaviour, highlights the importance of affection, emotion awareness and control in one`s adjustment to social and educational environment.

The following assertions are arguments in favour of the usage of affection in school learning and in the development of prosocial behaviour:

- Emotions activate and direct the behaviour and support motivated behaviour. Affection can regulate the behaviour because it has the role of “action acceptor”.
- The intensity and quality of emotional experience depends on the cognitive assessment of the situation. It is made according to a series of socio-cultural or personality factors and allows judging the experience in terms of pleasant or unpleasant, stimulating or coercive.
- Our feelings and emotions are a valuable source of information, being involved in making decisions with a universally human character.
- The defining role played by emotional encoding in learning is acknowledged by more and more researchers after the 1990s. H. Gardner (2004, p. 89) „The formative role of emotions is more and more often acknowledged in learning” D. Goleman (2001, p. 139) „The pupils` emotional development is decisive for their success in life and not only for good school results”.

The complex role of affection in an individual`s adjustment to the world can be grasped by relating it to other elements or psychical processes. Thus, cognitive judgement as part of different emotional states becomes significant in the development of “Emotional Intelligence”. In this respect, the evolution of theories that regard intelligence as formative structure and affection as prosocial function brought about numerous debates lately. **Emotional Intelligence** can be defined as the ability to recognise, understand and direct emotions inside ourselves and in the others. According to Goleman, it determines „our potential of acquiring practical skills based on his five elements: self-awareness and self-control, motivation, empathy and social skills. Our emotional competence proves how much of that potential have we managed to turn into real skills ready to be put into practice” (D. Goleman, 2000). The recognition of Emotional Intelligence based on skills can open new perspectives on the organisational level – in schools, business and in all institutions that have been hostile or indifferent to emotions. Finally, on a social level „the concept of Emotional Intelligence based on skills marks an interaction between two opposing poles: the stoic idea that emotions are a distrustful and unworthy guide of life and the romantic position that we have to listen to and follow our heart. Maybe, these two positions that are placed in a conflict can reach a high level of understanding and peaceful life through Emotional Intelligence” (J. D. Mayer, 2001). Daniel Goleman allowed the expansion of the concept of Emotional Intelligence, changing the way people have regarded the role of emotions in health and welfare, in everyday life, at work and in schools. In 1995 he published a book that became a bestseller – „Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter

More Than IQ” where he defines the concept of Emotional Intelligence. The author considers it the key to personal and professional success and also a mixture of self-control, motivation, empathy, free thinking, tact and diplomacy. These attributes make a person possess a high level of Emotional Intelligence. Thus, s/he can control emotional reactions in relationship with other persons because s/he is aware of all factors that contribute to the emergence of that particular reaction. In this definition, Goleman identified five fundamental aspects of Emotional Intelligence: *knowing one`s emotions, managing emotions, motivating oneself (self-motivation), recognition emotions in others (empathy), handling relationships between individuals and in the group.*

H. Gardner (1993), in his theory on multiple intelligence assigns an important role to these forms of intelligence that allow a superior adjustment to an individual`s closer or further social environment. Thus, he introduced the notion of interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence.

Interpersonal intelligence refers to the ability of understanding the others, knowing what motivates people, how they work and how one can cooperate with them.

Intrapersonal intelligence is the ability to turn to one`s self, inside the own self and it is also the ability to develop a vertical, rigorous model of the self. The development of intrapersonal intelligence is similar to a guide of behaviours based on a deep self-knowledge.

Emotional literacy is a similar process to literacy in the classical meaning of the word. As Dan Kindlon and Michael Thompson point out in their book entitled Emotional Intelligence, for the child that would grow up into an adult „*Teaching the alphabet of emotions helps children become balanced and relaxed teenagers. It helps them develop the skills of reading and understanding their emotions, as well as the emotions of the others. We learn to appreciate the complexity of emotional life and it enriches our personal and professional relationships, helping us strengthen the bonds that enrich our life.*” Goleman highlights the importance of emotional education „*The remedy lies in the manner we prepare our children for life: emotional education should not be made randomly, we should adopt innovative lectures in schools that would teach them self-control, self-awareness, empathy, listening and cooperation.*”

I would also add that Emotional Training is the tool which helps children experiment the usage of their emotions as welfare, safety and joy tools, leaving behind the idea that emotions are a scarecrow they should be ashamed of. A low EQ and a reduced emotional competence can lead to social, relational and personal disorders, with severe consequence upon their own life and the life of the community. It was proven in the USA that children who attended lectures in Emotional Literacy had benefits inside and

outside the classroom but also improved their learning abilities (D. Goleman, 1996, p. 327-328).

Assumptions and objectives of research

We assumed that learning a few techniques of emotion recognitions, control, self-control and emotional regulation could help the development of social skills.

Objectives:

- Selecting the sample for research;
- Choosing the methods to set the frequency of prosocial behaviours;
- Selecting pedagogic strategies that could be used to develop prosocial skills;
- Selecting techniques, exercises and games for emotions recognitions, control, self-control, emotional regulation that would be learnt;
- Statistical processing of data and the qualitative interpretation of results.

The Sample:

We have involved three classes with children aged 11-12 from two secondary school of Arad, each class with 23 pupils.

Out of three classes, two were experimental classes (A, B) and the third one was the key/control class (C). The experimental classes benefited differently from the experimental intervention which involved the following:

- Class A – the teaching and relationing strategies of teachers had been changed for four months (October 2013 – January 2014);
- Class B – two changes took place; the teaching and relationing strategies had been changed and pupils took part in counselling sessions where they were taught games, exercises and techniques of emotion recognitions, control, self-control and emotional regulation;
- Class C – key/control class continued its programme without any intervention.

Methodology

Two experts – a psychologist and an expert in educational sciences – had observed these three classes, registering how they talk, recognise, control and regulate their emotions, the frequency of undesirable social behaviours. After the actual experimental phase (when the experimental intervention was performed in all three classes), the experts observed the children`s behaviour for a week. They registered the frequency of undesirable social behaviours. Social skills of interpersonal type have been split into two categories: social relationing and solving social problems.

Results and discussions

Table no 1. reveals the frequency of undesirable social behaviours manifested by children during a week:

	Class A	Class B	Class C
Social relating	12	14	13
Social problem solving	8	9	8
Total	20	23	21

We can notice that in all three classrooms there is an approximately equal number of undesirable social behaviours during one week. It ranges between 20 and 23 manifestations. We also notice that inappropriate social relating is more frequent than inappropriate conflict solving. This is not surprising if we analyse the general behaviour of our current society. Inappropriate behaviour is a way for pupils to fit in a group and a way to oppose to parents or school authority.

From a pedagogic perspective, the authoritarian teaching style, centred on contents can annoy the pupil. It brings about inner tension because s/he cannot leave the programme. An increasing intra psychical tension and the feeling of not being able to leave the programme, reduce the self-control skills. Consequently, conflicts are more likely to emerge from the most insignificant reasons.

Our experiment had a psycho – pedagogical formative character. It tried to identify only the above mentioned variables, which influenced the child`s interpersonal skills. The classes A and B benefited from independent variables for a period of four months: the teaching strategies and the teacher-pupil inter-relating had been changed; they took part in games, exercises and techniques of emotion recognitions, control, self-control and emotional regulation. Traditional teaching methods were replaced by interactive methods, which favoured the critical approach, brought relevant arguments on a topic, developed teamwork. Pupils were involved in educational projects for the community, where each child had its own tasks and responsibilities. The aim was to enhance self-esteem and responsibility (class A). Pupils had learned techniques of self-control and conflict management in weekly counselling sessions through games, inter and self-awareness exercises, speaking activities and activities for recognition of emotional states. These activities were carried out by a psychology expert with children from class B. The expert selected special situations, according to the aim of the activity, during these sessions. Children learnt to control their anger, to be

self-motivated, to use different methods of postponing, reducing and cancelling negative reactions. They practiced techniques of amiable conflict solving, through negotiations – between the parties or through a colleague – mediator. In class C, key/control class, the activity continued normally, without any formative intervention.

After four months of experimental intervention, all three classes were assessed again. We considered necessary a period of four months for the subjects to be able to learn the techniques of self-control and conflict management. Pupils from group A had time to be involved in the interactive learning methods and in the educational projects.

The results of the second assessment are presented in Table no 2 compared to the first assessment.

Table no 2. The frequency of undesirable social behaviours in all four classes compared to the first assessment

	Class A		Class B		Class C	
	1st assessment	2nd assessment	1st assessment	2nd assessment	1st assessment	2nd assessment
Social relating	12	9	14	6	13	12
Social problem solving	8	3	9	2	8	7
Total	20	12	23	8	21	19

To highlight the evolution of all three classes, Charts 1 and 2 highlight these types of undesirable social behaviours compared to the first assessment. We have taken into account the interpersonal social behaviour (social relating and social problem solving).

The frequency of dysfunctions regarding social relating in all three classes for both assessments is revealed by chart 1:

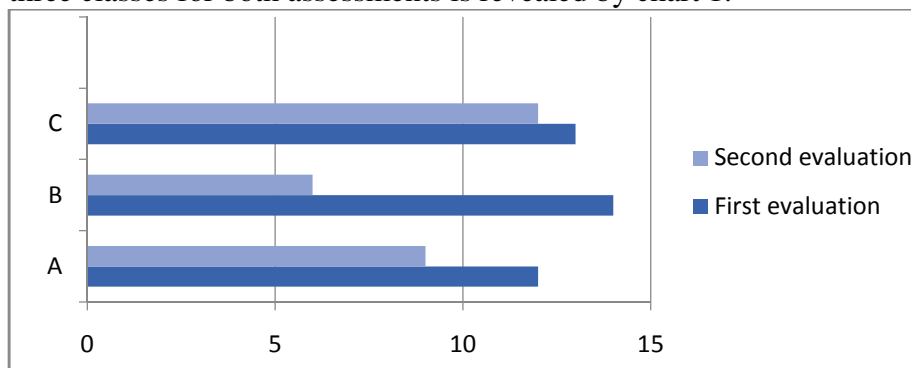


Chart 1. The evolution of dysfunctions regarding social relationing in all three classes for both assessments

The analysis of the chart and the digits show a reduction of undesirable social behaviours in classes where we have applied the independent variables as compared to the control class. The frequency of dysfunctions is significantly reduced in classes A and B with statistically significant differences between assessments of $p < .01$. It proves that the methods used throughout the experiment were effective. The pupils benefited from modern teaching methods that involved continuous and constructive interaction between pupils and between the class and the teacher. This situation brought about control of emotions and the tendency towards self-control. A team spirit was developed among the project teams and interpersonal relationships had strengthened. Pupils learnt that the team should cooperate and behave in a manner that would help them fulfil their tasks and obtain the best results. The frequency of difficulties encountered in social task solving is presented comparatively for all three classes in both assessments by Figure no 2.

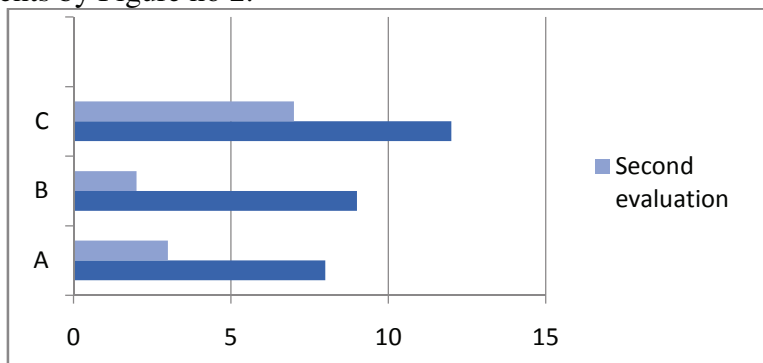


Chart no 2. The evolution of conflict situations in all three classes for both assessments

We notice considerable improvement in conflict management in the class that took up counselling sessions. During these sessions, they have learnt games, exercises and techniques of self-control and conflict management. If children practice these strategies in different experimental situations in order to control them in stressful or unpleasant moments, they will possess better self-control skills in their behaviour inside the group. The acquisition of conflict management techniques such as amiable conflict solving, contributed to a reduction of aggressive behaviour. The difference between the frequency of conflict situations in the experimental classes (calculated with chi square method) are statistically significant with a threshold of $p < .01$.

The most important changes were registered in class B when two independent variables had been introduced. It means that in practice it is more effective to use two variables together to obtain more significant results.

The fact that the progress was insignificant in control class C underlines that the methods used by us proved their effectiveness in practice.

Conclusions

The results of the study confirm that the assumption of an emotional literacy should be taken into consideration not just at home, but especially at school. Our studies prove that children who are emotionally well trained set positive relations with children of similar age have less behavioural problems and recover faster from a negative experience. A stimulating climate has developed in experimental classes, contributing to the improvement of school results. After applying the experiment, we consider that the methods used for teaching should be revised; a counselling programme in emotional literacy should be introduced in schools. During this programme, children should be allowed to experiment games, exercises and techniques of emotion recognitions, control, self-control and emotional regulation

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