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PSYCHOLOGICAL CLIMATE OF CLASS – FACTOR FOR PREVENTION AND REDUCTION OF SCHOOL AGGRESSIVENESS

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Current research and studies demonstrate that the problem of bullying-type aggressiveness in school is worsening internationally as well as nationally. Various factors that lead to aggressiveness and violence among students are extensively analyzed, including non-vulnerable factors. In recent decades, the focus has been on addressing the problem of bullying in school that is becoming complex and difficult to realize. In the given article, an attempt is made to address the issue of reducing and preventing student aggression by valorizing the values and functions of the students' class and, above all, the healthy psychological climate. Namely the psychological climate creates a favorable environment for learning and education that strongly influences the behavior of students. The characteristics of psychological climate, the ways of forming a healthy psychological climate, principles and ways of valorizing the classroom climate in preventing and reducing aggressiveness and bullying-type aggressiveness in school are analyzed. Some forms and methods of carrying out this process were also described. The proposed concept opens up new perspectives for preventing and reducing aggressiveness, including bullying in educational institutions.

Keywords: *psychological climate, aggressiveness, violence, bullying, educational environment, emotional state, mental health, school performance.*

CLIMATUL PSIHOLOGIC AL CLASEI - FACTOR DE PREVENIRE ȘI REDUCEREA AGRESIVITĂȚII ȘCOLARE

Cercetările și studiile actuale demonstrează că problema agresivității de tip bullying în școală se agravează pe plan international, dar și national. Se analizează pe larg diferiți factori care duc la agresivitate și violență a elevilor inclusiv și factorii nonvulnerabili. În ultimile decenii accentul se pune pe abordarea problemei bullyingului în școală care devine una complexă și greu de rezolvat. În articolul dat se încearcă de a aborda problema diminuării și prevenirii agresivității elevilor, valorificând valențele și funcțiile clasei de elevi și în primul rând climatul psihologic sănătos. Anume climatul psihologic crează un mediu favorabil de învățare și educație care influențează puternic comportamentul elevilor. Se analizează caracteristicile climatului psihologic, modalitățile de formare a climatului psihologic sănătos, principii și modalități de valorificare a climatului clasei în prevenirea și diminuarea agresivitățiii și agresivității de tip bullying în școală. Se descriu și unele forme și metode de realizare a acestui proces. Conceptul propus deschide noi perspective de prevenire și diminuare a agresivității, inclusiv celei de tip bullying în instituțiile de învățământ.

Cuvinte-cheie: *climat psihologic, agresivitate, violență, bullying, mediu educațional, stare emoțională, sănătate mintală, performanță școlară.*

Introduction

In the last decades, the problem of violence, aggressiveness, including bullying in educational institutions has become a significant one on an international level but also on a national level. This is found in numerous educational policy documents (United Nations Organization, World Health Organization, Council of Europe), but also in various studies [1; 5]. The dimensions of factors that cause violence, aggressiveness, bullying-type aggressiveness, but also the factors to prevent and reduce these phenomena are extensively addressed. As a rule, the focus is on addressing community social factors and educational factors. Namely the collaboration between the school and the family can ensure a safer and more empathetic environment for all its members and, first of all, for the students. A favorable psychological climate in the classroom and in the school necessarily implies a safer and more favorable environment in this sense.

Psychological Climate of Class: Ways to Prevent and Reduce School Aggressiveness

The psychological climate is part of the assembly of educational factors for preventing and reducing school aggressiveness, including bullying. The psychological climate in the classroom and in the school in general refers to the emotional and social environment created in the educational institution that influences the mental health, emotional state and learning outcomes of students. Psychological climate considers student interaction, student-teacher relationships, general classroom and school atmosphere, and institutional policies and practices.

There are also the school climate theories developed by Ron Avi Astur [apud. 1] and Jonathan Cohen who mention the importance of a safe and supportive psychological climate in diminishing and reducing school aggressiveness. Namely psychological climate involves creating an environment where all students feel safe, respected and engaged, and where tolerance and empathy are actively promoted. The creation of psychological climate is largely determined by the concept and functions of the class of students. In this context, education sociology approaches the class of students as a „social microgroup” with its own culture and a psychosocial climate determined by internal (student-student, teacher-student, student-teacher) and external relations. Cristea and Constantinescu propose several models for analyzing the class of students:

- ***The functional-structural model*** involves the realization of social roles and defines the class as a „socialization instance”, it anticipates the evolution of students' personality in the context of these social roles. The realization of social functions largely determines the mode of social behavior, including the „aggressive-nonaggressive” dimension.

- ***The socio-psychological model*** approaches the class of students as a “microstructural, institutional group within the school, active and influential in an open psychosocial field resulting from the interaction between the people who compose it”. It has the function of orienting the relations from inside the class in the direction of assuring cohesion of the collective, regulating intra-individual relations, ensuring the social security of the class members in terms of „psychic comfort”. It is this function of the class that is aimed at reducing the aggressive behavior of students by creating a healthy psychological climate.

- ***The socio-pedagogical model*** is based on group theory, which involves approaching the class of students from the following perspectives: interactionist, dynamic, psychoanalytical. Namely interaction relationships ensure internal balance of the class and create a positive psychological climate.

- ***The socio-communitary model*** approaches the class of students from the perspective of establishing deontological and methodological relationships: recognizing the right of expression of all students, favoring the process of communication/mutual knowledge in group and microgroup conditions, promoting partnership relationships in the school environment [2].

The functions of students' class in relation to the structural functional model, the socio-psychological model, the socio-pedagogical model, the socio-communitary model of the students' class ensure the pedagogical and psychological conditions for the formation of student's personality, but also for the prevention and reduction of violent and aggressive behaviors, including those of bullying. The effective performance of functions of the students' class leads to the creation of a favorable educational environment and a healthy psychological climate. Analyzing the specialized literature we can identify characteristics and various features of the psychological climate of classes/schools.

- *Safety and security*: A healthy psychological climate in the school provides a sense of safety and security for both students and teaching staff. Students need to feel safe in order to focus on learning and development.

- *Emotional and social support*: Students and teachers should receive emotional and social support from colleagues, classmates and the school community as a whole. This support can help manage stress and emotional difficulties.

- *Open and respectful communication:* A healthy psychological climate in the school promotes open and respectful communication between students and between students and teachers. Students should feel free to express their thoughts and feelings without fear of judgment or negative reactions.

- *Positive interpersonal relationships:* The school atmosphere should favor the development of positive interpersonal relationships among students and between students and teachers. Healthy relationships can help improve self-esteem and develop social skills.

- *Inclusion and diversity:* A healthy school psychological climate is inclusive and recognizes diversity in all its forms. Students should feel accepted and valued regardless of their ethnic origin, religion, sexual orientation or other personal characteristics.

- *Positive behavioral management*: Effective behavior management in the classroom and throughout the school is essential for a healthy psychological climate. Approaches based on rewards and positive encouragement are preferable to punishment and criticism.

- *Participation and involvement:* Students should be encouraged to participate actively in school life and feel involved in the decision-making process that affects them. This can improve the sense of belonging and responsibility.

- *Academic and emotional support:* Students should have access to resources and services that support them both academically and emotionally. School counseling, mentoring services and other forms of support can help manage difficulties and improve school performance.

These features help create a positive and stimulating learning environment where students can develop on all levels and reach their full potential. The formation of a positive psychological climate in the school involves a number of factors that can significantly influence the experience of students and teaching staff. Here are some key factors that contribute to creating such a climate:

- *Effective school leadership:* A strong and inspired school leader can set the tone for a positive psychological climate. Principals that promote a culture of respect, trust and collaboration can significantly influence the overall atmosphere of the school.

- *Community involvement and participation*: The wider school community, including parents, guardians and members of the local community, can play an important role in supporting and promoting a positive psychological climate. School-community collaboration can bring additional resources and support for students and teachers.

- *Positive relations between students and teachers:* Positive and respectful interactions between students and teachers are fundamental to the formation of a healthy psychological climate. Teachers who are empathetic, supportive and open to communication can contribute to students' self-esteem and academic success.

- *Promoting a culture of trust and safety:* Students need to feel safe and secure in the school environment in order to focus on learning and development. Implementing effective safety and conflict management measures can help promote a climate of trust and safety.

- *Managing behavior and conflict:* Effective management of behavior and conflict in the school is essential to maintaining a positive psychological climate. Approaches based on prevention, early intervention and peaceful conflict resolution can help reduce tensions and promote cooperation and mutual respect.

- *Promoting diversity and inclusion:* Schools should promote a culture of diversity and inclusion, where all students feel accepted and valued. Addressing issues of discrimination, bullying and other forms of exclusion can help create a more tolerant and fair environment.

- *Adequate resources and support:* Access to educational resources and counseling and emotional support services can be crucial to supporting the well-being and success of students and teaching staff. Investing in additional resources such as school counsellors, psychologists or social workers can provide vital support in managing individual difficulties and needs.

- *Promoting communication and collaboration*: Encouraging open communication and collaboration between students, teachers and parents can strengthen ties within the school community and help create a more stimulating and interactive learning environment.

These factors, together, can play a crucial role in the formation of a positive psychological climate in the school, contributing to academic success and the overall well-being of the school community.

School Aggressiveness as Social and Educational Problem

The phenomenon of aggressiveness and bullying-type aggression is seen as destructive and violent behavior directed at people, behavior that aims to harm or hurt others. Aggressiveness can be viewed from several perspectives: ethological, psychological, social, pedagogical.

The ethological framework approaches aggressiveness as an appropriation characteristic of the animal world. In animals, aggression usually manifests itself in situations of danger. It is found that within human beings, aggressiveness has evolved from an innate trait to a formed destructive and violent behavior.

The psychological framework addresses the issue of aggressiveness as a response to frustration. Aggressiveness cannot occur without frustration as a motivational tool. Aggressive behavior can be generated motivationally by creating states of anger in people. Aggressiveness manifests itself in different forms; verbal; physical, emotional, social.

The social framework approaches aggressiveness as an interaction situation and an action through which prejudices are brought to others (physical, moral, social). Albert Nondura founded the theory of teaching aggressiveness, according to which aggressive behavior is learned in different contexts and through different methods, the class of students and the unhealthy psychological climate can be sources that promote aggressiveness in students [apud. 1].

The pedagogical framework approaches the problem of aggressiveness from the perspective of prevention, reduction in the case of existence of this phenomenon. Most researchers of school aggressiveness and violence focus on the prevention of aggressiveness and violence which can be achieved in three forms:

- primary prevention: the teaching staff values the functions of students' class, the formation of a positive attitude towards each student, the formation of self-confidence. In general, creating the psychological balance of the class is the most effective way to prevent aggressiveness and violence in students [1].
- secondary prevention: school psychologists, social workers, competent authorities are involved in solving cases of aggressiveness by the concrete students and removing the causes that brought the student/ students to that behavior.
- tertiary prevention: direct support offered to students who display aggressive behavior including the bullying-type one.

Within these new forms of preventing aggressiveness in students, valorizing the class factor and healthy psychological balance alongside other factors becomes a significant and effective one.

Principles and Psychological Climate in Reducing and Preventing Aggressiveness and Bullying in School

A positive psychological climate in the school can play a crucial role in reducing and preventing aggressiveness and bullying. By creating a safe, inclusive and empathetic environment, schools can reduce incidents of aggressive behavior and promote healthy relationships between students.

- *The principle of empathy and mutual respect.* A positive psychological climate can encourage the development of empathy and mutual respect among students. Through education and activities that promote understanding and appreciation of diversity, students can develop communication and conflict management skills that reduce aggressive tendencies.
- *The principle of emotional support.* Access to counseling and emotional support services can help students manage their emotions and cope with stress and anxiety, thereby reducing the risk of resorting to aggressive behavior or bullying. School counselors and psychologists can provide strategies and resources to address interpersonal conflicts and problems in a constructive way.
- *The principle of educating students and teaching staff.* Education and training opportunities for students and teachers can increase awareness and understanding of issues related to aggressiveness and bullying. Through educational programs and activities, conflict resolution skills, empathy and respect can be promoted, thereby creating a more peaceful and empathetic school environment.
- *The principle of parental and community involvement*. Involvement of parents and the community in efforts to prevent aggressiveness and bullying can be essential. Through collaboration and partnership between the school, parents and other community organizations, strategies and initiatives can be developed to promote healthy relationships and respect among students.
- *The principle of promoting culture of safety and responsibility.* A positive psychological climate in the school can promote a culture of safety and responsibility, where aggressive behaviors and bullying are re-

jected and sanctioned clearly and consistently. By setting clear expectations and involving the entire school community in promoting these values, tolerance for unacceptable behavior can be reduced.

- *The principle of monitoring and early intervention.* Careful monitoring of interactions between students and early intervention in the event of incidents of aggressiveness or bullying are essential to prevent conflicts from escalating and to protect victims. By implementing effective conflict reporting and management systems, schools can identify and address problems before they become serious.

Valorizing these principles, a positive psychological climate in the school can serve as a protective factor against aggressiveness and bullying, providing students with a safe and supportive environment in which to develop their potential and achieve their academic and personal goals.

Possible Activities and Methods of Valorizing Psychological Climate in Prevention and Reduction of Violence and Aggressiveness in School

There are a variety of activities and methods that schools can implement to leverage the positive psychological climate in preventing and reducing school violence and aggressiveness.

1. Organization of educational programs and activities that increase awareness of issues related to violence and aggressiveness can be effective in preventing these behaviors. These programs may include class discussions, presentations, role plays, and other interactive activities that encourage students to reflect on the impact of their behaviors on others.

2. Developing social skills and conflict resolution techniques can help students manage stressful situations in a constructive and non-violent way. Through practical activities and role-play exercises, students can learn to communicate effectively, express their needs and find peaceful solutions in conflict situations.

3. Activities that promote empathy and mutual respect between students can help create a more empathetic and tolerant school environment. For example, collaborative team projects, discussions about diversity and inclusion or volunteering in the community can foster understanding and appreciation of differences among students and encourage positive relationships among them.

4. Establishing clear and transparent policies and procedures regarding behavior and conflict management can help prevent violence and aggressiveness in school. Students should be aware of the expectations and consequences associated with unacceptable behavior, and teachers should be prepared to intervene appropriately if necessary.

5. Creating a safe, inclusive and respectful school environment can discourage aggressive and violent behaviour. This may include implementing safety measures as well as promoting a school culture that celebrates diversity and encourages the participation and engagement of all students.

6. Parental and community involvement in violence and aggressiveness prevention efforts can be essential. Organizing educational events and programs for parents and the community can strengthen the partnership between the school and families and support joint efforts to prevent behavior problems.

7. Close monitoring of student behaviors and interactions can help identify and intervene early in the event of problems or conflicts. Teachers and school staff should be trained to recognize signs of aggressiveness or bullying and intervene appropriately to prevent situations from escalating.

Psychological Climate of Class Vs Manifestation of Aggressiveness by Students

Establishing the interaction between the psychological climate of the class (school) and the manifestation of aggressiveness by students requires a multi-aspect research despite the complexity of the factors that influence the interaction of psychological climate and school aggressiveness. Considering the content framework of the phenomenon of school aggressiveness and the psychological climate of the class (school), some variables of the interconnection of these phenomena can be deduced: safety and emotional support; open and respectful communication; cohesion and collaboration; positive interpersonal relationships; inclusion and socialization; the frequency of aggression acts.

In relation to these variables, a questionnaire was developed for students and teachers and was applied in two lyceums (high schools) in Romania, with 55 students and 22 teachers as subjects. The results of questionnaire are presented in the following tables.

Table 1. Students' Questioning Results.

Questions	To a large extent	To a sufficient extent	To a small extent	Not at all
Do you think the psychological climate of class ensures your safety and emotional support?	30%	40%	25%	5%
Do you feel comfortable communicating with colleagues?	45%	45%	10%	0%
Do you think cohesion and collaboration among students ensures positive behavior?	60%	40%	0%	0%
Do you think the psychological climate of class favors interpersonal relationships?	70%	30%	0%	0%
Do you think the psychological climate is inclusive for all students?	35%	50%	15%	0%
Do you think the psychological climate of class can have a positive influence on the aggressive behavior of students?	10%	55%	30%	5%
Do you think the aggressive behavior of some students in class negatively influences the psychological climate?	80%	20%	0%	0%

Table 2. Teachers' Questioning Results.

Questions	To a large extent	To a sufficient extent	To a small extent	Not at all
Do you think the psychological climate of class ensures the safety (physical, psychological, social) of students?	70%	30%	0%	0%
Do you think the students in that class feel comfortable communicating with each other?	30%	50%	20%	0%
Do you think cohesion and collaboration among students ensures positive behavior?	80%	20%	0%	0%
Do you think the psychological climate of class favors positive interpersonal relationships?	70%	30%	0%	0%
Do you think the psychological climate of class is inclusive for all students?	60%	30%	10%	0%
Do you call for mechanisms to improve the psychological climate regarding the prevention and reduction of students' aggressiveness?	80%	15%	5%	0%
Does the aggressive behavior of some students negatively influence the psychological climate of class?	80%	20%	0%	0%

The analysis of collected data allows us to find that the students mostly appreciate - the psychological climate of the class in preventing and reducing the aggressiveness of students (certain students in the class). Almost 70% of students (to a large extent/to a sufficient extent) appreciate the psychological climate of the class as safe and only 5% of students mentioned that the climate does not ensure their safety and emotional support at all 70% (to a large extent) and 30% (to a sufficient extent) indicates that the psychological climate favors interpersonal relationships but also comfortable communication 45% (to a large extent) and 45% (to a sufficient extent). However, 30% of students (to a small extent) and 5% (not at all) found that the psychological climate of class cannot influence certain aggressive students, they show bullying-type aggressiveness. And practically 100% of students mentioned that aggressive students in the class strongly influence the psychological climate in the class.

Teachers' assessments of the role of class's psychological climate in preventing and reducing students' aggressiveness in relation to those of students are higher. They believe that 70% (to a large extent) and 30% (to a sufficient extent) the psychological climate of class ensures the physical, psychological, social safety of students. Although students had a different point of view 25% (to a large extent) and 5% (not at all). Teachers believe that most students 30% (to a large extent) 50% (to a sufficient extent) feel comfortable in communicating with each other, 80% (to a large extent) and 20% (to a sufficient extent) appreciate the important role of cohesion and learning effective among students as a factor in reducing and preventing students' aggressiveness. As in the case of students, teachers mention that the aggressive behavior of some students in the class has a negative influence on the psychological climate in general. The important thing is that teachers realize that by improving the psychological climate in the classroom, you can prevent and reduce student aggressiveness. This factor is not sufficiently explored by them. As a rule, students-aggressors are worked with individually.

The results obtained from this study convince us to formulate two particular conclusions:

1. The psychological climate in the classroom (school) must be seen as an important factor in preventing and reducing students' aggressiveness, including bullying-type one.

2. In order for the psychological climate of class to become an important factor in reducing and preventing students' aggressiveness, it must be continuously improved in relation to the peculiarities of manifesting aggressiveness by the students of class (school).

General Conclusions

The analysis of theoretical dimensions regarding the construction of psychological climate of class (school) of students opens new research perspectives on this issue, including from the perspective of preventing and reducing school aggressiveness.

The analysis of conceptual dimensions regarding the prevention and reduction of school aggressiveness allows us to find that the functions of students' class and the psychological climate of class as a reflection of these functions are not fully utilized in solving the problems related to school aggressiveness, including the bullying-type one.

Effective polyaspectual utilization of the psychological climate in the context of classroom functions in the prevention and reduction of school aggressiveness involves deep knowledge of this phenomenon and the factors that cause it.

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