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Obsah

PETER TIRPÁK – MAREK VALENTÝNI <i>Catechesis in a School Setting</i>	5
JURIJ POPOVIČ – ANDRIANA SHYSHAK <i>Resolving online conflicts of primary school students through school mediation</i>	22
MAREK KWIATOSZ – AUGUSTYNA ZEYKAN – GHISLAIN LOIC NGOPA <i>Socjalizacja religijna młodzieży w perspektywie kryzysu ponowoczesności I</i>	40
MAREK KWIATOSZ – AUGUSTYNA ZEYKAN – RAOUL MGBEBON <i>Socjalizacja religijna młodzieży w perspektywie kryzysu ponowoczesności II</i>	50
PETER TIRPÁK – MAREK KWIATOSZ <i>Etyka a moralność na tle przemian kulturowych epoki postprzemysłowej</i>	62
GABRIEL PAŁA – ANDRZEJ NAROJCZYK <i>Dynamika kapitału kulturowego w społeczeństwie konsumpcji</i>	71
MÁRIA KARDIS – JAROSŁAW ORKISZEWSKI <i>Nauczanie społeczne Kościoła wobec kryzysu aksjologii i płynnej tożsamości</i>	85
MARTIN TKÁČ <i>Cieľ človeka nebo. Katechéza o význame modlitby za zomrelých pre stredoškolskú mládež</i>	97

Resolving online conflicts of primary school students through school mediation¹

Jurij Popovič – Andriana Shyshak

Abstract: *At any age, people experience conflicts, which can have many causes. In particular, primary school students are often involved in clashes of opposing interests that can develop both offline and online. Given that in the era of digitalisation of public spheres, primary school students spend a significant part of their personal time in the online space, it is advisable to focus on virtual conflicts of primary school students and mediation work aimed at resolving them. The article reflects the essence of the concept of 'conflict', the differences between the terms 'conflict' ('online conflict') and 'bullying' ('cyberbullying'); describes the causes and forms of conflicts of primary school students in the online space, possible reactions to them; the definition of school mediation as a social tool for the effective prevention and resolution of disputes and clashes among primary school students, including online, is substantiated; the characteristics of the five main stages of school mediation are presented, taking into account the specifics of the online form of conflict and the age of primary school students.*

Keywords: *Conflict. Online conflict. Mediation. School mediation. Mediator. Primary school. Online space. Digitalisation. Primary school age. Primary school students.*

Introduction

An argument with a classmate, a snide remark from a classmate, a swear word from an upperclassman, or just poorly chosen words or an act motivated by good intentions that had an unexpected negative consequence. All of these are characteristic of the conflicts that are part of everyday life, but also of school life. They are difficult but also simple life situations that prepare pupils for their future. The sooner they understand this, the sooner they will understand themselves and their surroundings. Conflicts can teach pupils a lot, but only if they are willing to understand them. School peer mediation can also be a path to understanding.

The main area of work is the school and the school environment, focusing on the classroom and school climate and the interrelation-

¹ The paper is part of the project Innovations in the Probation Study Programme and Mediation Work in the form of e-technologies KEGA 043PU-4/2022.

ships of all those involved in creating it. Pupils and students are entering a new space, a new collective and getting to know new authorities, which means that there are hitherto unknown conflict situations between them that they will have to deal with, which is why we have focused on school and peer mediation. School and peer mediation would be a great help to students, teachers, and parents alike. It would be their link bridge in resolving any disagreements and would also be a safe harbour where they could anchor in case of any insecurity or incipient conflict.

Conflict as the basic subject of mediation

The term conflict comes from the Latin term *conflictus* - clash. Conflict is also defined as the split of two or more opposing forces that disrupt harmony. In today's understanding, the concept of conflict is understood as disharmony between people.² But conflict can also be an asset. It can reveal hidden tensions, point to needed change and encourage us to behave in a pro-social, empathetic way. It has three levels. The first level is relational and values conflicts. It is the initial level, the moment when conflict begins to reveal itself. In the second level, it is already a direct conflict in which we observe negatively disturbed relationships. The essence of the third level of conflict is value conflicts. It is known that everyone has a different set of values, and everyone considers theirs to be the right one. Since there are different ways and approaches in which conflict can be examined, we have selected those that are most frequently mentioned.³

These are internal intrapersonal conflicts that take place at the individual level of an individual's experience. Another group are interpersonal conflicts occurring in two or more persons who have disagreements with each other. A third group is conflicts taking place within a particular group. The fourth group of conflicts are intergroup conflicts, which involve different attitudes of groups on the same issue. Individual-group conflict is also very common.⁴

² Porov. HALAGOVÁ, E. – VOLKOVÁ, N.: *Kompendium mediácie*. Prešov : Prešovská univerzita v Prešove, Gréckokatolícka teologická fakulta, 2017. s. 7.

³ Porov. GREŠKOVIČOVÁ, K. – HENNELOVÁ, K. – LISÁ, E.: *Ako na konflikty*. Bratislava : Paneurópska vysoká škola, 2021. s. 14-16.

⁴ Porov. HALAGOVÁ, E. – VOLKOVÁ, N.: *Kompendium mediácie*. Prešov : Prešovská univerzita v Prešove, Gréckokatolícka teologická fakulta, 2017. s. 9.

Not every awkward moment has to be a conflict. Conflict is spoken of as an innate and natural human need and also as a desire for identity and for recognition. Conflict is a threat to interests. Conflicts and disputes are a struggle for identity and their role is to bring about a constructive win-win outcome. Conflict is meant to be a source of positive change, to stimulate actors to find new and effective solutions, to ease tensions, to remove stagnation and to prevent further conflicts. Emotions are a natural part of conflict. The purpose of conflict is to learn to know oneself and to control and direct one's emotions and feelings in such a way as to create a sense of release in the participants in the conflict. The phases and types of conflict are derived from attitudes.⁵

Relational conflicts are based on resistance or aversion to the other person. In our work, these were mainly personal conflicts of pupils towards other classmates and hostility between girls. The conflict of values lies in the individual understanding of the actions of good and evil. Conflicts of interest were often explored, especially among high school students who were preparing a graduation ceremony. Conflicts of information were more prevalent among elementary school students. Structural conflicts related to power imbalances were moderately observed only in pupils' statements about the teaching staff.⁶

The phases of conflict in the school environment were defined by mediator Dušan Bielešová. The first phase is the initial disagreements and the feeling of non-compliance. Tension is present and space opens up for an open and honest conversation in which equality of parties should prevail. A common and incorrect phenomenon in this first phase is the suppression of the first signs of conflict. The first phase is the most important because the subsequent resolution process depends on it. After the phase of disagreement and disagreement, polarisation sets in. The polarisation phase is characterised by the parties not being able to communicate and not being able to cooperate with each other. Negative emotions prevail and the parties lack a constructive realistic view of the situation. This also includes a lack of empathy and under-

⁵ Porov. BEDNAŘÍK, A.: *Riešenie konfliktov: príručka pre pedagógov a pracovníkov s mládežou*. Bratislava : Centrum prevencie a riešenia konfliktov, 2003. s. 17-23.

⁶ Porov. HALAGOVÁ, E. – VOLKOVÁ, N.: *Kompendium mediácie*. Prešov : Prešovská univerzita v Prešove, Gréckokatolícka teologická fakulta, 2017, s. 11.

standing. Everyone is only asserting their subjective position and the actors are unable to take an objective position. Polarisation and the parties' reluctance to cooperate in resolving the conflict escalate to unnecessary aggression and the conflict passes into a phase of alienation and stagnation. At this stage, the parties to the conflict avoid communicating with each other. It is a time for reflection, for calming down the situation and a time for a possible shift in conflict resolution. After the alienation phase, the destruction phase, i.e. the attack phase, may follow. The destructive phase is the culmination of polarisation. The parties to the conflict lose control. Emotions prevail and reason and objectivity take a back seat. The conflict deepens and a solution is in sight. Destruction is followed by exhaustion, frustration and fatigue. Actors are not interested in conflict resolution, lose motivation and desire a peaceful atmosphere. At this stage, burnout may occur and health problems emerge as a reaction to the stress. However, this last phase offers two possibilities. One is a re-cycle from disagreement, alienation, destruction, exhaustion to complete stagnation and a breakdown of all communication. The other possibility is for both parties to meet, aware of the mistakes that have been made during the conflict resolution process and ready to attempt reconciliation. If the parties are unable to reach an agreement despite their mutual efforts, there is a third option, which is mediation.⁷

Online conflicts between younger students, their causes, forms and reactions to them

Situational manifestations of conflict are quite typical for primary school age. It is important to provide primary school students with timely assistance in resolving conflicts in order to prevent them from turning into persistent personal formations. Students often face conflicts in the student-student system. The absence of their resolution leads to an increase in emotional tension, an increase in anxiety among participants in the educational process, a deterioration in the social and psychological climate in the school community and, as a result, the formation of

⁷ Porov. BIELESZOVÁ, D.: *Školská a rovesnícka mediácia*. Bratislava : Wolters Kluwer, 2017. s. 56 – 59.

a conflictogenic educational environment, which affects the formation of a conflict orientation of the individual.⁸

Conflict is a 'clash of opposing interests and views, tension and extreme aggravation of contradictions, which leads to active actions, complications, and struggle.'⁹ Conflicts between younger students can be caused by various factors, which are often based on their psychological characteristics. In particular, students aged 6 - 10 are emotionally vulnerable, which affects the active development of a sense of self-love and an angry response to humiliation of their personality. Also, conflicts among primary school students may be caused by the adoption of behavioural patterns in their families.¹⁰

It is important to understand that, in addition to the concept of conflict, there is the term bullying. There is a difference between these definitions. Bullying is described as repeated aggressive behaviour that causes physical or psychological harm to the same child and in which the perpetrator and victim have unequal power. This allows a stronger student to bully a weaker one and understand that there will be no retribution. The types of bullying are: physical (hitting, pushing, tripping), verbal (swearing, teasing), social (spreading rumours, exclusion from

⁸ NAZAROVA, D. V.: Психолого-педагогічне вирішення конфліктних ситуацій серед молодших школярів [Psychological and pedagogical resolution of conflict situations among younger schoolchildren]. In: *Вісник Національного технічного університету України «Київський політехнічний інститут»*. Філософія. Психологія. Педагогіка, 2010, № 3, р. 164.

⁹ МАТОКХНИУК, Л. О. – IVANIUK, I. S.: Психологічні особливості конфліктів в колективі молодших школярів та шляхи їх подолання [Psychological features of conflicts in the team of younger schoolchildren and ways to overcome them]. In: МАТОКХНИУК, Л. О. (ed.): *Психологічні засади розвитку, психодіагностики та корекції особистості в системі безперервної освіти: збірник матеріалів Всеукраїнської науково-практичної конференції з міжнародною участю (29 – 30 жовтня 2021 року)*, 2021, № 32, р. 136. <https://docs.academia.vn.ua/handle/123456789/379?show=full> (12.06.2024).

¹⁰ МАТОКХНИУК, Л. О. – IVANIUK, I. S.: Психологічні особливості конфліктів в колективі молодших школярів та шляхи їх подолання [Psychological features of conflicts in the team of younger schoolchildren and ways to overcome them]. In: МАТОКХНИУК, Л. О. (ed.): *Психологічні засади розвитку, психодіагностики та корекції особистості в системі безперервної освіти: збірник матеріалів Всеукраїнської науково-практичної конференції з міжнародною участю (29 – 30 жовтня 2021 року)*, 2021, № 32, р. 138. <https://docs.academia.vn.ua/handle/123456789/379?show=full> (12.06.2024).

the group, damaging the victim's property). Bullying that takes place through the use of digital technologies is called cyberbullying.¹¹ Cyberbullying can be manifested as 'spreading lies about someone or posting compromising photos of someone on social media; sending messages or threats that are offensive or likely to harm someone through messaging platforms; impersonating someone else and sending messages to other people on their behalf'.¹² When we talk about conflict, in particular online, we mean a clash of interests, a dispute where the parties have equal power: everyone can do something and thus influence the situation.¹³ It should be borne in mind that if a conflict is not resolved, it can turn into bullying, taking on the typical features of the latter: systematic (repetitive) nature of the act; presence of parties - offender (bully), victim (victim of bullying), observers (if any); actions or inaction of the offender, which result in mental and/or physical harm, humiliation, fear, anxiety, subordination of the victim to the interests of the offender, and/or social isolation of the victim.¹⁴ In order to avoid situations of bullying or cyberbullying, constructive conflict resolution, including online conflict resolution, should be promoted among younger students.

Therefore, when both parties are on equal footing, online conflicts in the context of the digitalisation of public spheres can take the following forms:

- flaming is the exchange of short angry and inflammatory remarks between two or more participants using information and communication technologies, which takes place in chats, forums, groups, etc;

¹¹ KVASHA, A. S.: Булінг: поняття і сутність [Bullying: concept and essence]. In: *Актуальні питання гуманітарних наук*, 2021, вип. 45, т. 2, р. 123.

¹² LIVINGSTONE, S. – THIRD, A.: Кібербулінг – що це та як це зупинити? 10 фактів, які підлітки хочуть знати про кібербулінг [Cyberbullying – what is it and how to stop it? 10 facts teens want to know about cyberbullying]. In: *Unicef Ukraine*. <https://www.unicef.org/ukraine/cyberbullying#8> (10.06.2024).

¹³ DERZHAVNA USTANOVA «URIADOVYI KONTAKTNYI TSENTR»: Протидія насильству стосовно дітей питання - відповіді [Combating violence against children questions - answers], 2018. In: <https://1547.ukc.gov.ua/knowledge/yak-vidri-znyty-buling-vid-konfliktu/> (02.06.2024).

¹⁴ KVASHA, A. S.: Булінг: поняття і сутність [Bullying: concept and essence]. In: *Актуальні питання гуманітарних наук*, 2021, вип. 45, т. 2, р. 123.

- defamation – dissemination of humiliating false information using information and communication technologies in the form of text messages, photos or audio;
- impersonation – gaining access to the opponent’s social media account, mail, messengers, etc. and conducting negative communication on their behalf;
- fraud – obtaining personal information in interpersonal communication and transmitting it (texts, photos, videos) to the public space of the Internet or by mail to those to whom it was not intended; etc.¹⁵

It is important to understand that absolute equality between the parties to a conflict is rare in life. If it is characteristic at the beginning of such a situation, i.e. the parties are able to confront each other more or less equally, then over time, the weaker party to the conflict may become a victim of bullying. This suggests that it is appropriate to resolve destructive conflicts at the stage of their inception. This is also due to the fact that today there is a significant acceleration of children’s development, so younger students show aspects of adolescent behaviour typical of the adolescent crisis, which can significantly exacerbate the situation.

Conflicts involving younger students can be caused by name-calling. It is very common among this age group. Primary school students use external differences between children (weight, clothing, ethnicity, etc.) as the basis for name-calling. As a rule, in the event of such conflicts, assistance should be provided to both parties: the victim and the offender. Assistance to the victim involves support in resolving the situation, and to the aggressor - helping to make them aware of the inappropriateness and inadmissibility of discriminatory behaviour, as well as the existence of punishment for it.¹⁶ Since in the era of digital transformation of society, younger students spend a lot of time on digital devices on the Internet, name-calling is moving into the online format. It can take

¹⁵ LUBENETS, I.: Кібернасільство (кібербулінг) серед учнів загальноосвітніх навчальних закладів [Cyber violence (cyberbullying) among students of general educational institutions]. In: *Jurnalul juridic national: teorie și practică*, 2016, № 19 (3), p. 170 – 171.

¹⁶ LAWRENCE, E.: Conflict Resolution and Peer Mediation in Primary Schools. In: LIEBMANN, M. (ed.): *Mediation in context*. London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2000, p. 54 – 55.

the form of mutual negative comments under photos, in private messages or group chats. Online conflicts among primary school students can also develop on the basis of differences in tastes, interests, views on a particular situation, manner of communication and behaviour, learning difficulties, jealousy, envy, spreading rumours and lies, etc. The most common causes of conflict are rudeness, disrespect, unwillingness to listen to the other person, emotional instability, and rejection of the views of others.¹⁷ Increasing the scale of the conflict stimulates the formulation of hasty conclusions, personal insults, lack of listening, threats and accusations.¹⁸

It is worth noting that younger students are able to transfer conflicts from real life to virtual life and vice versa. If children have had an argument at school, for example, during a game activity, they may continue to discuss their positions on the correctness of their own actions on the Internet. Also, if, say, an inappropriate comment is posted under a photo, a conflict between primary school students can develop in person. Conflicts that arise or develop between younger students on the Internet still need to be resolved in real life, using methods designed for this purpose.

The Internet is a common environment for conflicts among primary school students. This is due to the fact that they spend a significant part of their lives there: playing online games with available chats, communicating in social networks, and using instant messengers. Awareness of the possibilities that distinguish the Global Network from reality often encourages children to actively express their negative emotions: wide accessibility, intensity of information, the possibility of anonymity, which weakens the understanding of social responsibility due to the lack of empathy and direct contact with the opponent.¹⁹

¹⁷ ROMANYSHYNA, I. M.: Медіація як ефективний метод вирішення конфліктів у шкільній практиці [Mediation as an effective method of conflict resolution in school practice]. In: *Таврійський вісник освіти*, 2014, № 3(47), p. 253. http://nbuv.gov.ua/UJRN/Tvo_2014_3_42 (16.06.2024).

¹⁸ LAWRENCE, E.: Conflict Resolution and Peer Mediation in Primary Schools. In: LIEBMANN, M. (ed.): *Mediation in context*. London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2000, p. 55.

¹⁹ MALASHKEVYCH, T. Yu.: Проблема виникнення та розгортання конфліктів у мережі Інтернет [The problem of the emergence and deployment of conflicts on

Children, like adults, can demonstrate three reactions to conflict situations online. The first reaction is a manifestation of aggression: during a virtual dispute, a younger student tries to prove the truth of his or her position using offensive language, devaluing the opinion of another Internet user. Such a reaction to a conflict online can have a destructive continuation during a meeting either at school or on the street during joint games: students of the first grade may quarrel or even get into a fight. The second reaction is ignoring: a younger student may not respond to an opinion expressed on the Global Network that differs from his or her own. However, this way of avoiding conflict can lead to long internal reflections on the situation. In the case of the first and second reactions to online conflicts, there is a high probability of deterioration of relationships between children, which is especially important when younger students are classmates. This will lead to a negative atmosphere in the classroom, which will affect the level of learning and cognitive activity of primary school students. And the third reaction that should be used during conflicts is cooperation.²⁰ While adults, under the influence of the need to reach a single common decision in work or domestic matters, are mostly able to negotiate, primary school children should be taught to do so with the help of a mediator. Thus, online conflicts among primary school students can be resolved through the use of school mediation.

School mediation as a means of resolving online conflicts between primary school students

School mediation is a social tool that allows for effective prevention and resolution of disputes and conflicts, creating a safe environment for all participants in the educational process.²¹ Mediation for conflict resolu-

the Internet]. In: *Соціологічні дискурси: Матеріли III Всеукраїнської наукової конференції молодих учених (м. Дніпро, 11 грудня 2019 року)*, 2019, р. 105.

²⁰ LAWRENCE, E.: Conflict Resolution and Peer Mediation in Primary Schools. In: LIEBMANN, M. (ed.): *Mediation in context*. London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2000, p. 55.

²¹ BILYK, N. M.: *Соціально-педагогічна технологія медіаторства у вирішенні конфліктів між молодшими підлітками (дис. ... канд. пед. наук) [Socio-pedagogical technology of mediation in resolving conflicts between younger teenagers (Thesis for getting the scientific degree of Candidate of Pedagogical Sciences (Ph.D))]*. Чернівці, Київ : Чернівецький національний університет імені Юрія

tion is implemented through the involvement of a mediator from outside or specially trained within the school, providing for the resolution of conflicts and disputes through reconciliation. Such a specialist helps to ease tension in the classroom and strengthen interpersonal relationships among students, which is primarily based on trust.²² A mediator is a third party, independent and impartial, who helps the parties identify their interests, encourages them to find a common practical solution to the problem, promotes constructive changes in people's attitudes to ways of solving problems in a social environment that encourages the involvement of all parties in decision-making processes based on human values of justice, awareness of responsibilities, openness, honesty and ethical behaviour.²³ A mediator in primary school is most often a specially trained teacher or school psychologist.

When a conflict arises on the Internet, a primary school teacher can immediately find out about it if he or she is in a group with the participants or has them as friends on social media. If a conflict situation arises in any of the messengers (Viber, Telegram, WhatsApp), it is recommended to create a separate group to discuss it with the participants. When the first signals of a dispute are noticeable, it is advisable to suggest that the opponents stop communicating in the general group and move to the level of interpersonal communication: it is better to use the video call function or make an appointment to meet in person so that the parties to the conflict can use not only verbal but also non-verbal means of communication, which will involve students' awareness of the interlocutor's emotions and adjustment of the situation. If a teacher enters a group chat when a quarrel between younger students has already begun, it is appropriate to explain to the participants that their public conflict is unpleasant for other group members, offering to move to a separate chat

Федьковича; Національний педагогічний університет імені М.П.Драгоманова, МОН України, 2017, р. 78. In: <http://enpuir.npu.edu.ua/handle/123456789/18235> (23.05.2024).

²² BUZALA, O.: Školská mediácia ako spôsob riešenia medzifudských sporov a konfliktov. In: *Sociálno-zdravotnicke spektrum, Social Health Spectrum*, 2021, p. 2. https://www.szspektrum.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Buzala_2.pdf (30.05.2024)

²³ BUZALA, O.: Školská mediácia ako spôsob riešenia medzifudských sporov a konfliktov. In: *Sociálno-zdravotnicke spektrum, Social Health Spectrum*, 2021, p. 8. https://www.szspektrum.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Buzala_2.pdf (30.05.2024)

or contact via a call to resolve the conflict constructively. If the conflict is not resolved, you can temporarily remove the parties to the discussion from the chat and talk to each of them individually and then together, using school mediation techniques.²⁴

If the conflict situation arose in private online communication, the teacher or school psychologist is not aware of it at first. However, given the age-specific characteristics of younger students, including their inability to hide personal emotions, a teacher can notice problems in the communication of children in the classroom by asking a few questions. Sometimes it may be that these younger students will share the details of the situation with the teacher, or other children who are also aware of it will do so. In this case, you should start the mediation process without jumping to any conclusions and be open to all opinions.

The process of mediation with primary school children, as well as with adults, includes five main stages:

- Stage 1: introduction, outlining the role of the mediator, setting the ground rules (no interruptions, no humiliation, no swearing or name-calling, trying to be open and honest, etc.);
- Stage 2: each party tells their story and expresses their feelings in full and uninterrupted;
- Stage 3: the parties formulate questions for each other, discussing the problems in the situation;
- Stage 4: the parties propose options for effective solutions;
- Stage 5: the parties agree to one or more solutions, which is evidenced by a written agreement signed by the parties and the mediator.²⁵

The resolution of online conflicts between primary school students through school mediation is implemented by following certain stages. Let us describe their specifics in this case.

²⁴ OSVITORIA MEDIA: Як не забанити всіх у батьківському чаті: інструкція для подолання конфліктів [How not to ban everyone in the parent chat: instructions for overcoming conflicts]. 2022. In: <https://osvitoria.media/experience/yak-ne-zabanyty-vsih-u-batkivskomu-chati-instruksiya-dlya-podolannya-konfliktiv/> (20.06.2024)

²⁵ LAWRENCE, E.: Conflict Resolution and Peer Mediation in Primary Schools. In: LIEBMANN, M. (ed.): *Mediation in context*. London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2000, p. 63.

At the first stage, it is appropriate for the mediator to explain to primary school students the basics of the mediation process, his/her role as a mediator, discuss with the parties whether their participation is voluntary and explain to them why it is necessary. In an atmosphere of trust, it is appropriate to propose requirements for mediation, such as those described by O. Buzala, explaining what each of them means:

- to build the process of discussing conflict situations by using the 'questions and answers' scheme (the process of making the right decision in any situation is impossible without clarifying all important aspects that can only be learned in the process of discussion);
- be interested in the other person's opinion and try to understand it (if you do not try to understand the opponent's position during a conflict, it will be impossible to resolve it constructively, because the right decision is not always one option out of two, but sometimes a combination of important theses from two points of view);
- use jointly agreed rules (emotions often prevail in conflicts, which prevents them from being resolved constructively, so the main theses should be adopted and followed in order to regulate communication in a quality manner);
- actively listen and empathise (everyone understands that these skills are the norm of behaviour, but in moments of confrontation of ideas they are often devalued and omitted, so it is worth listening and empathising with the interlocutor);
- to be aware of the right to disagree with the opinion of another person (each party to the conflict should understand that it is their right to disagree with the position of the other, but 'No' should be clearly argued based on a critical assessment of all relevant information);
- think critically and avoid spontaneous judgements (making decisions without clarifying all the circumstances can lead to false conclusions or situations in which one of the parties may feel devalued and offended);

- be open (each party to the conflict should be ready to listen to the other's views, discuss and analyse them, and constructively reach a joint decision).²⁶

At the second stage, each party has to tell the story and details of the conflict that has arisen. Here, it is important for the mediator to give everyone the same amount of time in turn and to ensure that they behave with dignity. If there are difficulties in expressing opinions, the mediator can ask clarifying questions to help them tell the fullest story of what happened. It is important for children to understand not only each other's position but also to feel the emotions and feelings that the opponents had at the time of their clash, as virtual interaction mostly excludes the perception of the other person's emotional sphere due to the lack of personal contact. Therefore, empathy is often impossible during an online conflict, which contributes to its escalation.

The third stage is characterised by the parties discussing the situation, asking each other questions that concern them. In online conflict resolution, this time is intended to allow opponents to determine what is important to them, not to the public on social media. Because younger students often worsen the conflict not because they want to, but because they try to appear 'cooler' to online observers than their opponent. When they are alone, they ask only those questions about the problem that are of interest to them, which speeds up the resolution of the conflict. For younger students, it can be difficult to know what to ask, so the mediator teacher is essential to help them do so: he or she encourages students to look for common values, opinions and needs, using techniques such as paraphrasing, mirroring feelings, asking questions, summarising and helping to identify the disputed points of the conflict.

The fourth step is to obtain optimal solutions. Initially, the parties may propose a lot of them, then discuss them, evaluate them and choose the best ones to implement. If younger students find it difficult to verbally propose solutions, you can give them some time to think on their own and suggest using digital tools to quickly collect ideas: IdeaBoardz, which allows you to create a virtual whiteboard and use stickers to add

²⁶ BUZALA, O.: Školská mediácia ako spôsob riešenia medziludských sporov a konfliktov. In: *Sociálno-zdravotnícke spektrum, Social Health Spectrum*, 2021, p. 9. https://www.szspektrum.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Buzala_2.pdf (30.05.2024)

your ideas; Lucidspark, which uses stickers, shapes, and handwritten annotations to display thoughts; MindMeister, which helps to showcase a variety of perspectives on problem solving; and others. Even if solutions to problems are generated with the help of digital tools, they must be discussed and the pros and cons identified.

The fifth stage involves the parties making one or more joint decisions, which are recorded in the agreement. At this stage, the primary school teacher or school psychologist, as mediators, should make sure that the content of the agreement is specific, realistic and achievable, and that the individual items intended to be implemented by the mediation participants are measurable and time-bound. It is also equally important that the agreement for younger students be formulated in simple words that children aged 6-10 can understand. This is facilitated by a joint discussion of all the clauses of the document and by encouraging children to formulate them. The agreement is read over and signed by the parties, which indicates that they agree to the provisions. It is also signed by the mediator, who summarises the process in his or her closing remarks, assessing the outcome and efforts of the parties; if necessary, a follow-up meeting is scheduled to check whether the agreement is being implemented.²⁷ Successful implementation of school mediation in resolving conflicts that have arisen or developed on the Global Network will involve eliminating their manifestations on the Internet, including deleting negative comments, messages, posts, etc. and keeping a promise not to allow such actions to occur again.

It is important to note that a mediator can be not only a specially trained teacher or school psychologist, but also a peer or senior student. All of them should have the following traits: emotional stability; flexibility and creativity of thinking; high morality; social skills; willingness to help; ability to get to know people easily; ability to notice not differences but what people have in common; desire to protect others when the situation requires it; ability to establish communication, speak and encourage; skills of polite and respectful communication; reliability; ability to inspire trust; etc. Of course, a mediator needs to have a considerable sys-

²⁷ VAŇOVÁ, M. S.: Úloha školského psychológa pri príprave a supervízii rovesníckych mediátorov v základnej škole. In: *Školský psychológ/Školní psychology*, 2019, № 20(2), p. 37 – 38.

tem of knowledge and developed competences to be able to encourage younger students to resolve conflicts constructively.²⁸ Therefore, in our opinion, the role of a mediator for primary school students is still too difficult. They can be prepared for this by using special interactive exercises and tasks that will develop their ability to actively listen, look for common ground in the positions of the parties, the ability to negotiate, be empathetic, the ability to formulate questions, etc.

High school students who have been trained and supervised by a mediator-supervisor in a school-based mediation service can work with younger students as mediators. However, it is important to establish a trusting relationship first, so that primary school students can tell their concerns without withholding details.

Conclusions

Thus, primary school students are often involved in conflict situations that arise and develop both offline and online. Conflicts on the Internet can take the form of flaming, mutual slander, impersonation, deception, etc. They are caused by the emotional immaturity of children aged 6-10, duplication of family behaviour, name-calling, rudeness, disrespect, unwillingness to listen to the interlocutor, rejection of the views of others, jumping to conclusions, personal insults, threats and accusations, emphasis on differences between children, learning difficulties, jealousy, envy, spreading rumours and lies, and so on. This can cause different reactions in primary school students: aggression, ignoring or seeking to cooperate to resolve the conflict. If left unresolved, this situation can turn into school bullying or cyberbullying.

The use of school mediation as a social tool for effective prevention and resolution of disputes and clashes can help to resolve online conflicts between younger students. In this case, a mediator can be a specially trained primary school teacher, school psychologist or high school student who has all the necessary qualities and skills to mediate.

²⁸ VAŇOVÁ, M. S.: Úloha školského psychológa pri príprave a supervízii rovesníckych mediátorov v základnej škole. In: *Školský psychológ/Školní psychology*, 2019, № 20(2), p. 39 - 40.

The process of mediation with primary school students includes five main stages, each of which should take into account the specifics of the online conflict and the age of the children:

- Stage 1: introduction, outlining the role of the mediator, and adoption of ground rules (all points should be explained in a way that is easy to understand for younger students);
- Stage 2: each party tells their story and expresses their feelings without interruption and in full (it is important to show emotions and feelings, to notice them in the other person, as this was impossible in the virtual conflict);
- Stage 3: the parties formulate questions for each other, discussing the problems in the situation (it is necessary to focus on the fact that the resolution of an online conflict is the responsibility of its participants; and being a winner in the eyes of the online public does not help to overcome the problem situation, but rather exacerbates it);
- Stage 4: the parties propose options for effective solutions (digital tools can be used to formulate ideas for resolving the conflict, but they must be discussed together);
- Stage 5: the parties agree on one or more solutions, which is certified by a written agreement signed by the parties and the mediator (the content of the agreement should be specific, realistic, achievable and understandable for children aged 6-10, and its points for implementation should be measurable and time-bound; for online conflicts, it is important to voluntarily delete negative comments, messages, posts, etc. and to keep a promise not to allow such actions to occur again).

We see prospects for further research in the development of interactive exercises and tasks that will help prepare younger students for the future role of a school mediator.

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