PEDAGOGICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL APPROACHES OF VIOLENCE IN SCHOOL

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There are main theoretical approaches that try to explain perverted behavior and through it the phenomenon of violence. The field of school discipline has been researched extensively in the past years, mostly due to an increase in schools' violence levels and decrease in teachers' authority over pupils. Study of philosophical, psychological and pedagogical approaches to implementing discipline in school brings up a number of main attitudes for this significant field in a school.

Keywords: violence, aggression, behavior, school, climate.

ABORDĂRI PEDAGOGICE ŞI PSIHOLOGICE ALE VIOLENŢEI ÎN ŞCOALĂ

Există abordări teoretice de bază care încearcă să explice comportamentul pervertit şi, prin aceasta, fenomenul violenţei. Ca disciplină şcolară, acest fenomen a fost pe larg cercetat în ultimii ani, mai ales din cauza creşterii gradului de violenţă şi diminuării autorităţii profesorilor, respectiv, a influenţei a lor asupra elevilor. Studiul abordărilor filosofice, psihologice şi pedagogice ce ţin de implementarea disciplinei în şcoală generează atitudini principiale faţă de acest fenomen ce a luat amploare în mediul şcolar.

Keywords: violenţă, agresivitate, comportament, şcoală, climat psihologic.

1. Psychological approaches of violence in school

The main approaches for explaining the phenomenon are: the psycho-dynamic approach, which sees violence and behavior problems as birth character derived from instincts, and the social-study approach which determines that this behavior is being affected and taught by the environment [25].

a. The psycho-dynamic approach

Freud, who represents this approach, has assumed that there are two main congenital instincts that guide a person's behavior: the erus, life instincts, and the tantus, death instinct. The erus drives a person to actions of construction and renewal, and the tantus drives a person to actions of destruction, violence and aggression. Often, aggression is unconscious and it drives the person to acts of destruction and hate towards himself and towards others. The accumulating unconscious aggression requires ways of allowing for a release of the accumulating pressure. In absence of a valve the system might collapse. Channeling the aggressive forces to contribution both for one and for society channels, enables prevention of aggression [22]. To his opinion, the aggressive urges' release as the pressure grows. This is a desired situation, as it prevents a collapse of the system.

b. Behavioral Theories

Behaviour theory maintains that all human behaviour – including violent behaviour – is learned through interaction with the social environment. Behaviourists argue that people are not born with a violent disposition. Rather, they learn to think and act violently as a result of their day-to-day experiences [6]. These experiences, proponents of the behaviorist tradition maintain, might include observing friends or family being rewarded for violent behaviour, or even observing the glorification of violence in the media. Studies of family life, for example, show that aggressive children often model the violent behaviours of their parents. Studies have also found that people who live in violent communities learn to model the aggressive behaviour of their neighbours [7].

Behavioural theorists have argued that the following four factors help produce violence: 1) a stressful event or stimulus – like a threat, challenge or assault – that heightens arousal; 2) aggressive skills or techniques learned through observing others; 3) a belief that aggression or violence will be socially rewarded (by, for example, reducing frustration, enhancing self-esteem, providing material goods or earning the praise of other people); and 4) a value system that condones violent acts within certain social contexts. Early empirical tests of these four principles were promising [7]. As a result, behavioral theory directly contributed to the development of social learning theories of deviance (differential association theory, sub-cultural theory, neutralization theory etc.).

c. **The social-study approach**

Bandura and Aron claimed that the external surrounding has a strong impact on one's behavior. Bandura maintains that violence, or to be precise non-violence, is a learned behavior in means of punishment and retaliation mechanisms. If a certain behavior gets punished, this behavior might not repeat itself. Also, behavior can be acquired by watching an influential model like parents, teachers, pupils or movie stars. Behavior that has brought about positive results to the aggressive model, would be particularly imitated. The continuation of violence depends on environment reinforcements: violence will not persist as long as there is no reinforcement. Bandura claims that the mechanism of social study is controlled by positive reinforcement, and the urge of violence derives from negative reinforcement or aggressive conditions [18].

Goldstein has summed up his interpretations to the learning theory in relation to violence under three headlines:

1. *Acquisition:* the process of acquiring of violent behavior is influenced by the biological infrastructure of a person: hormones, central nervous system and physical elements. Every person has the neuropsychological capability to acquire violent behavior and to assimilate it in his behavior repertoire [15].

2. *Conductive stimulation:* when the violent repertoire exists in a person, there are several causes of violent behavior and activating this repertoire such as frustration, unjust life difficulties and physical or verbal threats. Additional active causes are watching violent behaviors that bring about weakening of barriers and emotional arousing [16].

3. *Violence maintenance:* violence will keep existing should it be supported by a direct external or class stimulation, or recognition of being right. The violent person, might also reinforce himself by justifying his actions or by transferring the responsibility to another. There might be an additional reinforcement when the violent person is satisfied when another is being punished and suffering greatly for his deeds [16].

Frustration

Noymeir was practically the first to analyze aggression in motivational terms. In his opinion, the main variable that leads to aggressive behavior is frustration [22]. Frustration is emotional unpleasant situation caused by desires that cannot be realized. External factors block an individual's attempts to achieve his goals. Frustration awakens the aggression implanted in a person; therefore, every time the person feels frustrated, aggression shall follow.

Frustration model – aggression can be considered as a private case of more general motivational model: emotional arousal – aggression. This model predicts that unpleasant and harming situations, including frustration circumstances, create aggressive conditions. These factors bring about high emotional arousal, that is often called anger. This arousal is the motivation that drives a person towards aggressive behavior. According to this attitude, aggression is rarely formed due to unpleasant or harmed circumstances. The question whether aggression would occur, is related to several factors related to information process [11].

Loneliness

Many a researcher has defined loneliness as an unpleasant experience, accompanied by negative emotions and representing awareness of a gap in the perception between patterns of desired social connections and actual existing connection patterns [23]. Shpitzberg and Hart have defined loneliness as an absence of interpersonal relationships that leads to dissatisfaction with the social relations [26].

A feeling of loneliness is conceived as a general characteristic to mentally disabled children/teenagers. They can be considered as a population at risk of developing social hardships and awareness of their interpersonal difficulties. One of the active styles of dealing with pain and frustration of the social alienation is use of aggressive expressions [20].

Positive feedback

The theory of operative conditioning determines that aggressive behavior is taught, as any other learning, by reinforcements given for this behavior. Bandura emphasized the reinforcement concept. He predicts that people would be more aggressive when their violent behavior is rewarded by positive reinforcements [5].

In difference from operant conditioning theory, he claims, that Man can conclude such a conclusion without himself being aggressive. Meaning, also by watching other's aggressive behavior being paid off, meaning, a positive reinforcement is received following it. The theory of social study emphasizes the importance of cognitive processes involved in data processing: when the aggressive model receives a punishment, in actual fact, an individual will avoid acting aggressively. Most learning related to aggression is specific.

People learn to act aggressively in a one situation but not in another, towards a particular person and not another one [25]. According to Bandura the primary learning mechanism is imitation. Every person, all the more so a child, has a tendency to imitate others. When an aggressive model is rewarded, imitation tendency rises; and when he is punished, the extent of aggression declines markedly. Reward legitimates aggression. When legitimacy is absent no aggression shall occur [5].

d. **GAAM - General Affective Aggression Model**

This modern attitude to violence has been suggested by Craig Anderson. In difference from previous theories, modern theories, as this one, do not focus on a single element as the main reason for violence, but rather they take into consideration numerous psychological fields in order to get a profound understanding of the factors that play part in a violent behavior. According to the theory, aggression is activated by a broad range of variables in a situation and in a person's personal tendencies in a given situation. Environmental variables include frustration, some attack from someone else as an insult, an exposure to other people's aggressive behaviors and an exposure to stimulations that cause discomfort to a person. Personal differences include aggressive tendency, certain points that raise the probability of violent behavior and skills that raise the probability of such behavior, as a skill of use of weapon. According to GAAM, these variables can lead to violence by impacting three basic processes: by raising the physical perceived arousal of man, awakening hostile feelings and physical characteristic of aggression such as facial expressions and encouraging a person for hostile thinking or remembering unpleasant memories that raise violent behavior probability, meaning, cognitive influence [2].

e. **Absence of social skills**

Social skills have been defined as a complex of learned behaviors that aimed at achieving specific goals, while being controlled by rules and shaped by specific environments [15]. They change according to social situations in which they occur and include cognitive and emotional elements that aid in the awakening of positive social responses and avoiding negative social responses [9].

The conceptualization of social skills has been developed on the basis of an assumption that they serve as a base for social competence, and interpersonal difficulties shall develop in situations where there is a wrong or incomplete repertoire of these social skills [20].

Many a researcher thinks that absence of social skills brings about a violent behavior. In a comparative study between aggressive boys and non-aggressive boys, a significant difference has been found between the two groups in level of social interaction skill [1]. Similar findings have been found in the mentally retarded population [13]. The study has examined two groups of mentally retarded men, one with violent behavior and the second of those who are not violent. The violent group members examined, had suggested violent solutions to social conflict situations significantly more than the non-violent group, this is because of in an absence of skills of processing of social information, there is a greater tendency to choose violent solutions.

Amit, claims that a school should have its pupils acquire social skills which are relevant to prevention of violence, and that it should practice its pupils in them. The greater number of effective violence prevention programs in Israel emphasizes this feature under various names. What is meant here is programs such as "ways of life – best education climate", "the democratic children society", "peace imposers" [2].

f. **Lack of balance**

Additional theory, related to social study approach, perceives violence from a viewpoint of lack of balance or imbalance [25]. A person's control over someone else's life can drive the other person to actions that shall return to him his control over his life. Usually, this is the last means that is left for him in his effort to reach a balance of forces.

j. **The ecological framework**

The ecological framework is based on evidence that no single factor can explain why some people or groups are at higher risk of interpersonal violence, while others are more protected from it. This framework views interpersonal violence as the outcome of interaction among many factors at four levels – the individual, the relationship, the community, and the societal.

- At the **individual level**, personal history and biological factors influence how individuals behave and increase their likelihood of becoming a victim or a perpetrator of violence. Among these factors are being a victim of child maltreatment, psychological or personality disorders, alcohol and/or substance abuse and a history of behaving aggressively or having experienced abuse.

- Personal **relationships** such as family, friends, intimate partners and peers may influence the risks of becoming a victim or perpetrator of violence. For example, having violent friends may influence whether a young person engages in or becomes a victim of violence.
- **Community** contexts, in which social relationships occur, such as schools, neighbourhoods and workplaces, also influence violence. Risk factors here may include the level of unemployment, population density, mobility and the existence of a local drug or gun trade.
- **Societal** factors influence whether violence is encouraged or inhibited. These include economic and social policies that maintain socioeconomic inequalities between people, the availability of weapons, and social and cultural norms such as those around male dominance over women, parental dominance over children and cultural norms that endorse violence as an acceptable method to resolve conflicts.

The ecological framework treats the interaction between factors at the different levels with equal importance to the influence of factors within a single level. For example, longitudinal studies suggest that complications associated with pregnancy and delivery, perhaps because they lead to neurological damage and psychological or personality disorder, seem to predict violence in youth and young adulthood mainly when they occur in combination with other problems within the family, such as poor parenting practices. The ecological framework helps explain the result –violence later in life – as the interaction of an individual risk factor, the consequences of complications during birth, and a relationship risk factor, the experience of poor parenting. This framework is also useful to identify and cluster intervention strategies based on the ecological level in which they act. For example, home visitation interventions act in the relationship level to strengthen the bond between parent and child by supporting positive parenting practices [16].

2. Pedagogical approaches of violence in school

The approaches are divided into main two types; child-focused approaches and parent or teacher-focused approaches. Child-focused approaches usually include psychotherapy and tolerance and non-violence workshops. Parents' and teachers' programs include instructions of behavior shaping and formulation of school programs for an increase of discipline and authority. Every attitude has its shortcomings: child only focused approaches produce slim results in reducing a child's violent and anti-social behavior (for example, Borduin et al., 1995). Discipline and authority only focused programs can lead to alienation and escalation (for example, Goldstein, 1996). Escalation can reach distractive dimensions [8].

a. **The progressive approach**

Those supporting this approach consider discipline to be a marginal subject and invest in the education ideal. The autonomic person has a positive, healthy and critical linkage to society, who learns out of free will and aspiration of self-realization. The pupil's social and moral development is shaped with help of a child's involvement in social life and with maximal social relationships and less with help of specific behavior rules. An outside factor has no right to determine a specific behavior for another. The only limitation on free will is avoidance of one of hurting another. According to this perception, discipline cannot be considered as a means to achieving education targets or a target of its own.

b. **The traditional approach**

Traditionalists consider discipline a central education means and place society in the center. According to this approach, discipline is an important means in life training and accumulating of knowledge, existing values and society's customary behavior norm must be passed from generation to generation. Discipline is necessary for the shaping of a worthy person. It allows study and form a main instrument in a child's socialization process. A teacher is supposed to order students how to behave and the means to impose his will over them are at his disposal, and students are allowed to obey the teacher. The individual must subjugate his will to society's demands. Therefore discipline is a full obedience of an individual to the norms set forth by society and they are fit for achieving of its goals [4].

c. **The reconciliation approach**

This approach reconciles between the poles, it puts an individual in the center without giving him full autonomy in determining proper ways behavior that fit his needs. According to this approach, a teacher, as society's representative, sets forth norms that obligate the child. This is not according to the needs of the adult society, but according to what the society thinks is best for a child [4].

d. **Self-guidance approach**

Self-determination theory (SDT) emphasizes the individual's universal tendency to psychological and developmental growth. The scaffoldings to healthy development are the three basic psychological needs: the need for contact, belonging and security, the need for senses of capability and the need for autonomy, that are congenital and universal and the fulfillment thereof contributes to optimal internal motivation, to wellbeing and to social adjustment [12].

According to Asor, the need for contact, belonging and security is the need to sustain close relations, for sense of capability as a person's need for experiencing himself as capable of realizing plans goals and purposes that are not easy to achieve, and to feel effective. The need for intimacy is a person's need for directing and adjusting his actions, the need for self-expression, discipline, independence and free choice. In a deep level, it is a person's need to realize abilities and tendencies and to actively formulate goals, positions, values and plans, meaning, formulating his identity [3].

The social environment can support an individual's natural tendencies of active involvement and growth. Behavior of parents and of other significant figures, influences the extent to which learning and learning environment are conceived as satisfying the three needs [12].

3. School-based theories

Peterson and Skiba have focused in their study on five main approaches to improvement of school climate, which purpose s prevention of violence. The five approaches are:

a. **Parents' involvement and community**

Parents' involvement can assist in improvement of communication between home and school and make schools become more attentive and safe. Parents' involvement can be expressed in their involvement in study that takes place at home, in giving opportunities for volunteering in school and involvement in decision making circles in school and community [24].

b. **Character education**

Educational programs for character emphasize values such as integrity, loyalty, respect, responsibility, decency, caring and citizenship. Increase of violence and behavior problems at home and the community bring about a deterioration of values. Character education program are programs aimed at handling precisely these problems and thus their importance and necessity.

Study programs for prevention of violence and resolving conflicts – conflict resolving programs focus on the understanding of conflicts and teach pupils ways of responding based on negotiation skills. Violence prevention programs emphasize enhancement of knowledge of pupils regarding violence and teach them alternatives for violent quarrels. There is no doubt that in the face of a reality of violence that takes over schools and society, lies a great importance of study programs that instill pupils with perceptions and skills that would assist them in avoiding violence [24].

c. **Peer-mediation**

Peer-mediation is a strategy based on negotiation that teaches pupils strategies of mediation that can assist in resolving conflicts amongst their peers. Peer-mediation instills pupils with an alternative series of skills which they can apply in conflict situations. It is advisable to integrate mediation programs in a more comprehensive program such as life skills program or violence prevention program, in order to enhance its effectiveness [24].

d. **Bullying prevention program**

In the last three years, the level of awareness has risen to the level of bullying. Bullying prevention programs should be done in a school level and must deliver a clear message that bullying is not acceptable and the school would adopt a policy of zero tolerance of instances of bullying. Effective programs should include awareness and involvement of parents and teachers, and a creation of warm, supportive environment. Research knowledge indicates that good bullying prevention programs can decrease and even prevent bullying problems and improve the school climate.

In a study conducted by Dennis, it turns out that for the purpose of creation of a positive climate it is important to make limits, for example with a school code and a class code, that would define clear and applicable rules and regulations, that would focus and guide. In designing of limits, the intention is not to hurt the independence of pupils, and they can be included in the formulation of codes. A school code formulates unified rules of behavior that define limits and red lines which cannot be crossed, including treating of

behaviors related to physical and verbal violence and corruption of property. Creation of a class code is performed according to same principles of designing of a school code. It defines the rules and regulation in a class and is intended to instill pupils with normative behavior that is acceptable in a class. It has been found in the studied that with the help of a code a class can be navigated in a most effective way [10].

Another factor that contributes to a positive climate is the use of positive reinforcements. Positive feedbacks, encouraging body language and signs of acceptance increase pupils' alertness to desirable behaviors, contribute to the formation of a positive atmosphere is a class and increase the enjoyment of all participants in the educational act [10].

Summary

During the past years, many schools are involved in incidents of violence. They search for different approaches and dimensions of neutralizing this problem. In this chapter the researcher has reviewed the pedagogical dimensions, educational psychological and social attitudes that explain the problem of violence in the schools and that are affecting an optimal educational climate. The review indicates different approaches and perceptions that attempt to define the reasons for violence. Some indicate heredity and personality structure as a main reason. Others talk about home and society. Others see a school as a significant violence cause.

We tend to see the factors in an eclectic way, assigning importance to each of the factors. Additionally, we tend to accept the ecological approach, which considers behavior as an interaction between an individual and its environment. School is a significant environment for a pupil as such. In examination of professionals (psychology counselors), violence has been defined by the interviewed subjects as lack of respect, lack of tolerance, lack of mutual appreciation, ignoring individual rights, ignoring social norms, denying an individual's right for sense of security, lack of communicational coordination. Meaning, the factors mentioned are situations of absence, and not of existence, and they seem more difficult to be measured, as they are rather generalized and abstract.

Many studies have been conducted over the years, trying to examine each of the mentioned approaches. It has been found that none can explain and/or predict violent behavior on its own. Only when a number of attitudes and variables join together, violent aggressive behavior can be predicted [19].

Later studies emphasize that combining of the personal system (cognitive and emotional) with the ecological system explains the sprouting and growth of violent aggressive behavior [21]. According to these studies, a number of ecological conditions, mostly common in distress neighborhoods, encourage violent aggressive behavior, and those are:

- An environment in which a teenager receives reinforcement by violent behavior [24].
- An environment in which a teenager has many opportunities to see [19].
- An environment in which a teenager has experienced personal violence, daily.
- An environment in which there are not too many opportunities of developing positive and significant social and emotional relationships with others.

Alongside with the ecological system, it has been found that an individual's cognitive system has much influence on predicting of violence. Amongst violent teenagers, a consistent tendency of attributing loathing intentions (hatred and hostility) to others has been identified [19].

The researchers have found a relation between violent behavior and a number of beliefs held by those who adopt violent behavior:

- A belief of their ability to express aggressiveness.
- A belief about the legitimacy of aggressiveness and its acceptance.
- A belief about the positive results stemming from aggressiveness, including rewards stemming from it.
- A belief about raising their status and their self-esteem following a violent behavior.

There is a claim that in addition to the cognitive factor and ecological system, the situation (timing, place, climate) has significance and dynamics as well, that encourage or restrain violent behaviors evolvement [17].

Huesmann adds that teenager's violent behavior is usually accompanied by "an incident pattern" (a scenario he knows from his past). This pattern dictates the teenager "in this incident you will behave like this, in another incident you will behave differently and so on". In this situation the scenario has much influence over the form and way a teenager will react, according to life experience and the past known reactions' repertoire [19].

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