

## Social Versus the Aggressive Behavior of the Students in the School Context: the Theoretical Approaches

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### Abstract

The progressively higher cognitive criteria, which modern school starting from the yearly school years, imposes on students, demand greater individual engagement by the teachers in the affective component. In function of the right management of the education, the determined social climate in the class is a necessary pre-condition. The basic structural components of this climate are the interactions of the students themselves, which reflect mainly through two opposed tendencies: pro-social and aggressive behavior. In this article, we analyze these two components of the social climate from the aspect of the theoretical studies, i.e. their reflection in the school practice. Also, we pay attention to the strategies which have been proven to be efficient in the control of the aggressive behavior. We conclude by discussing key findings and identifying areas for further research to create a vital, open and democratic educational culture of tolerance and by arguing that the prevention of youth violence should be a national priority.

**Keywords:** pro-social behavior; motivational components, altruism, methods of reducing aggression.

### Introduction

The actuality and importance of the studying of pro-sociality and aggression in children is characteristic in conditions when we have many cases of violent behavior, conflicts among the youth etc. in the society. Hence, the treatment of this issue is of extreme importance for the decrease of violence in the schools, and we need consolidation of the non-violence i.e. the pro-social behavior.

The modern educational psychology in this context, without doubt stresses the dynamic i.e. motivational elements of the wider psychological ambient in the classroom, but with its significance and influence, the elements of the affective sphere are also important position in this domain. The series of classical studies form the second half of the previous century promotes several important affective aspects of the functioning of the school formal groups, such as the attraction and repulsion of the members of the group (Baron, 1951; Hollander & Webb, 1955; Byrne, 1961; Aronson, Willerman & Floyd: 1966; Duck & Spencer, 1976; Scofield & Sagar, 1977; etc.), the altruism and pro-social behavior (Krebs, 1975; Knight & Kagan, 1977; Lamb, 1982; Ladd, Lange & Stremmel, 1983; Kaplan, 1984 etc.) and the aggressive and asocial behavior (Bandura, 1961, 1963, 1967, 1971; Baron, 1972, 1973, 1979; Turner, Layton & Simons, 1975; Cohen & Felson, 1979 etc.).

The greatest part of the mentioned studies confirm the important influence of the affective ambivalent factors of the school environment on the behavior of the individual. The agents of the early family socialization and the affective aspects of the functioning of the school groups, on the other hand, without doubt offer a wider range of opportunities for an analytical approach. Our choice in this article are the manifestations of the pro-social and aggressive behavior of the students, as well as the strategies which recommend building of pro-social behavior.

### 1. Pro-Social behavior

One of the most common characteristics of the pro-social behavior refers to its nature as a sum of conscious actions directed towards helping or creating, in favor of the interest of an individual or a group (Eisenberg and Mussen, 1989, according to Knickerbocker, 2003). In other words, they are acts of behavior, in which the categories of empathy, solidarity, collaboration, ethics and other constitute the dominant affective component which involves care, sharing and support of the interest of the others, when the need arises even giving priority to them in front of one's own interest (Rabotegic, 1995).

The notion of pro-social behavior refers to the acts themselves or to be more exact the results i.e. the consequences of the same, rather than the motivation which lies in its background.

The pro-sociality as a general principle of behavior may be put into action through many close forms of manifestation such as helping, sharing, giving, consoling, giving support, collaboration etc. (Popovski, 2005 according to Surbanovska, 2009).

Ontogenetically, the forms of pro-sociality occur very early, in the early childhood, approximately in the second year of life. There are opinions that the signs of such behavior occur even in the pre-natal development of the child. Most often, the first acts of pro-social behavior are the presenting and sharing of toys to the parents, without obvious reward or other obvious benefit.

### 1.1. Motivational premises of the pro-social behavior

The motivation on which the pro-social behaviors are based may be quite various. Four categories of motives which are in the background are stressed in the literature (Surbanovska, 2009): a) monitoring the general human values such as humanism, trust in people, justice, equality, prosperity of the others etc.; b) affective factors, such as love, empathy, compassion, joy, but also the need to avoid disturbance and unpleasantness; c) conformism, in the sense that the destructive behavior is expected or demanded by the environment, i.e. that we are not resentful, if we do not help, or simply because the others help as well; d) expecting some sort of personal benefit, regardless whether it is material or social – psychological. The mentioned four forms of motivation according to the degree of the altruism – selfishness may be graded in a sort of continuum, in which at one end we have the values such as the category least selfish, because they consider the well being of the other as most important, followed by the emotions, in whose content we may identify a certain degree of orientation towards oneself and one's own interest, then the conformism, which is even more full of one's interest, and at the other end we have the explicitly egoistic category of expecting personal benefit. In one of the more recent theories (Benabou & Tirole, 2005), the quality, frequency and the consistency of the pro-social behavior in the individual are treated as a dynamic product of the influence of three main categories of motives: altruism (inner motivation), selfishness (eccentric i.e. outer motivation) and the care for one's own reputation (self-respect).

Apart from the motivation, the pro - social behavior in different situations can be determined by a wide range of biological (gender, age) and social – cultural (education, personal experiences, tradition) factors, affective constants (general level of adaptation, satisfaction with one self) etc. Thereby, the mentioned determinants of the pro – sociality do not act independently from one another, yet, they are mutually interconnected and intertwined in complex combinations of different factors which sometimes also have a mutual contradictory influence, which may also result in conflict states.

## 2. Asocial and aggressive behavior

The asocial, aggressive and destructive behavior of the students in the school is an important social problem which significantly influences the social development of the children and is connected to a great number of subsequent serious problems in the area of the social pathology, starting from the deficits in the cognitive, affective and the social development of the individual, through the various shapes of delinquent behavior and social problems, all the way to problems with the mental health.

The theoretical concepts of the aggression can be divided into five groups (Žužul, 1989). The instinctivism theories consider aggression for natural, authentic human behavior and an integral part of the human nature. A typical instinctivism understanding of aggression is the theory of Freud, which explains the aggressive behavior through the working of the both basic instincts, one of life (Eros) and the other of death (Thanatos). The frustration theories come from the area of the neobehaviorist theoreticians such as Dollard, Miller, Maurer, Sears, Berkowitz and others (according to Žužul, 1989), and their basic platform is the treatment of aggression as gained, i.e. learned response (reaction) of frustrating situations, i.e. stimuli. Dollard says that aggression appears when the individual is stopped in a given planned action which has a specific goal, and the intensity of the aggression rises with the rise of the motivation (the expected reward) and with the degree of interruptions in the fulfilment of the goal. Berkowitz emphasizes that the frustration does not directly lead to an act of aggression, yet that between these two instances there is an emotion of anger, whose intensity depends on the characteristics of the external situation, and which may, but does not necessarily end in aggression. The social theory of aggression is connected to the name of the American theoretician Albert Bandura (Bandura, 1969). His basic platform for the nature of the aggression is also behaviorist, however, based on the standpoint that it may occur without any instinctive or frustration foundation, yet as an expression of the previously learned behavior. Most frequently it is about social learning

based on the so called observational (vicarious) conditioning. In this sense, with the social theory of the aggression, one may explain the influence of the aggressive scenes in the movies and the violent video games as generators of real aggressive behavior in the children. Namely, children identify with the aggressive heroes and are accustomed to aggression, thus completely altering the value prism for aggression by not perceiving it as an undesirable and destructive behavior (according to Aronson, Wilson & Akert, 2002). The attribution theory considers that aggression has a cognitive background, and that the possibility for the frustration to grow into an act of aggression depends on the assessment (attribution) of the intention of the instigator of the frustration. An aggressive act will not appear if there are sufficient relaxing, alleviating circumstances known at the moment of provocation. The biological – physiological theories place the possible reasons for aggression in three directions: genetics, sub - cortical sectors of the brain and endocrine system.

## 2.1. Strategies for controlling aggression

Taking into consideration the fact that scientists still do not sufficiently understand the mechanism for asocial behavior, the attempts for controlling it by using psychological and educational methods are yet to offer the desirable results ( Kazdin, 1987). We will discuss some of these methods which are most renowned in this area.

**2.1.1 Catharsis:** The psychoanalytic theory explains the processes of catharsis in the function of controlling the aggression. Students, by watching a certain movie with examples of violent behavior or by doing programmed physical activity may release their aggressive energy (Feshbach & Singer, 1971).

**2.1.2 Parent training:** The goal is to train parents in dealing with the aggressive behavior of their children, whereby they are educated to not employ physical punishments yet to replace them with psychological remarks. On the other hand, they should reduce the negative remarks such as threats and commands, and instead to more frequently use oral approval for pro – social behavior (Kazdin, 1987; Home& Sayger, 1990).

**2.1.3. Cognitive methods:** The cognitive processes may contribute in reducing the aggression. These processes are different in the children which are known to be aggressive. Based on the significance of these factors, the so called programmes for increasing the empathy in the child have been built, whereby the children are taught to take into consideration the opinions and the feeling of the other children. In this way, good results have been achieved in the decrease of the aggression and in the reduction of the conflicts (Gibbs, 1987). Another technique is to enable the children (students) to apply techniques for problem solving called "let's think out loud". In this way they learn how to solve problems in a rational way without emotional outbursts. (Guerra & Slaby, 1988).

These techniques are recommended for use in both pre - school and school education. We believe that through their use, the aggressive behavior of the young will somewhat be reduced. Of course, an important precondition for this is the thoughtful and tolerant attitude of the teachers and the parents towards the children.

## Resume

There is a network of factors which reflect on the general behavior of the students. We mostly chose the cognitive and affective determinants of the pro – social against the asocial behavior of the young. The pro – social behavior reflects in building mutual connection between the children, and its important motivational components are the humanistic values; the affective factors; the conformism and the social – psychological expectations.

The asocial behavior may result from a range of factors, of which the following are the most important: biological, the situation (frustration) and personal – social.

The following methods are efficient for the decrease of the aggressive behavior and are applicable for the students with uncontrolled behavior: Catharsis; education of the parents and the cognitive.

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