

Summary of the activities carried out in schools of Armenia in frames of Peace Education project (Gegharkunik marz, Armenia)

(Report on the working meeting with the heads of National Institute of Education, July 17-19, 2015)

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It won't look like opening a secret if I say that the success of conflict management education greatly depends on a teacher's personality. Conflict resolution/conflict management related issues are the ones where a teacher's individual characteristics matter more.

I would like to one by one analyze the questionnaires, teachers' suggestions, specific examples set by the pupils received from different marzes, as well as the reports submitted by NIE directors. Let's start with Gegharkunik marz. At present 50 schools out of marz's 126 schools are included in the project. I should specially mention that during this period Gegharkunik marz has been positively varying from the rest of the marzes; the questionnaires, suggestions and opinions received are really very valuable. It is obvious that the majority of teachers did their work; they did study the theme, instead of filling out the questionnaires just out of formality they analyzed the results getting deep into the theme. This is what we are expecting from the teachers in order to have the desired results. As we have often stated conflict management education can suggest/give a specific prescription for each and every conflict; it can just guide us to the true way of thinking. This is the thing we shall make comprehensible both for teachers and schoolchildren. Now I should try to make a little reference to the content of the questionnaires filled out by the teachers and the pupils.

Here I would also like to state that Gegharkunik is among those marzes in Armenia where people possess character as severe as their nature, even a little bit ruder /as people in Shirak marz/, straightforward, "harsh", a bit more bully. I am listing all those qualities not from the negative point of view, I am just writing down my feelings. You can say something in another marz and receive no response from people, they will just listen to you and that's all; while people here will oppose your views, they will argue fervently and in the end respond in the same fervent way and finally reconcile. Besides, there are many other social issues in this marz that are the main causes of conflicts. By the words of the vice-principle of Lichk secondary school in Gegharkunik marz, Ashot Hokyhikyan "social inequality is the main underlying cause of conflicts and state intervention is the only possible way to overcome it...".

To be frank I was most impressed by the meeting with the teachers and vice-principles held in Martuni territory. I do want to meet them again during the next academic year. We have analyzed all the questionnaires and will try to draw your attention to the results of the analysis and to the most varying opinions available. As to me this will help to form general view on the work done and what is most important, come up with direct suggestions made by our working group, develop the strategy of our future joint activities taking into consideration the suggestions made by the teachers.

1. Let's start with the point that the results of the works done by the class heads mainly depend on the work of the vice-principles, on their supervising, their consistent work /I guess it doesn't matter what topics are discussed/. In schools where vice-principles' consistent work is obvious teachers refer to conflict management education seriously, value its importance in educating children, teachers'/class heads' attitude towards conflict management education in those schools differs, too.
As a result pupils' attitude towards conflict management education and naturally their perception of the theme is positive too. Analysis made by the vice-principles is also essential.
2. When you study the package returned by the school it is quite obvious what work had been carried out at that school; whether it has formal nature, or the teachers really did try to thoroughly understand the theme. To the question "Have you noticed any changes/positive effect among schoolchildren involved in the project", Donara Hakobyan, vice-principal at Noratus school #1, writes, "Changes are visible especially among schoolchildren in grades 6, 7, 8. There are many pupils with varying social backgrounds /socially poor, parentless, parents having left abroad for work/ in those classrooms and one could see how often they were mocked and laughed at. Because of this they often displayed aggressive behavior. As a result of this teaching-learning process the protection of weak pupils and the resolution of conflict situation through consent became a leading position for many schoolchildren. The so called "brawl" among the pupils in the corridors has decreased. You can notice that the elders "control" the youngsters' conduct. Availability of the visual materials was a big asset for the class heads".

To the question whether you believe such education will help pupils in their lifetime at present or future, the vice-principle replies, "It will help not only the pupils. Those frank discussions help teachers to understand conflict causes apparent at this or that

age. While in future, I am sure, pupils will avoid unpleasant, undesirable and dangerous situations due to their experience”.

Donara Hakobyan says she is planning to include those themes into the syllabus of the class-of-head hours, organize class-events with the presence of the parents and teachers of different disciplines.

3. There are teachers who display constructive approach to conflict management themes. For example, in order to evaluate whether the parents notice changes in their children's behavior after the training, a teacher from Gavar school #7 convened a parental meeting and made a special questionnaire for them. The teacher displayed a rather sensitive approach for she was interested to know the opinion of 2 pupils' parents who were more conflictive, but instead she delivered the questionnaires to all the parents. Parents of those 2 children had confirmed the positive change in their children: he is not shouting relevantly or irrelevantly, he is not offending his elder sister, he is calmer now, but he used to get angry and irritated more easily before/5th grade/.
4. Based on the pupils' questionnaires you can not only understand the child's perception of the theme, but also how the teacher has conducted the class and how well the children have understood the material. For example, a pupil from Gavar school #7 in his example about conflict clearly explains what skills were used that helped to solve the conflict, while in the following example he states the reasons why the conflict wasn't resolved /listening to each other, not expanding the disputable issue,.../.

There are examples, where children explain their failure in conflict resolution due to their parents' intervention. In her example, Ghazaryan Diana from school # 7 describes how she has quarreled with her sister because of the table /it was a big table the sisters wanted to do their homework on/. Later on the child says that their father has intervened in the quarrel and both of them had to do their homework in another place. “Father listened to neither me nor my sister. In case he had listened to us he might have come up with a more reasonable solution”.

Negative example

Sometimes teachers think that just filling out a paper and sending it /and possibly many papers/ “is a proof of their excellent” work. Similarly there are examples, when all the pupils in the class have written about the same conflict in their questionnaires /grade 9b of Noratus school # 1/.

4. Of course not all the pupils have clearly defined their examples; nevertheless you often see questionnaires, where there is a clear analysis of the specific conflict cause, peaceful resolution of the specific conflict, as well as analysis on why it wasn't possible to resolve the conflict. For example, Karen Ohanyan from Noratus school explains the reason why the conflict between the boy from their yard and himself wasn't resolved saying, "It wasn't resolved because the opposite party hadn't learned lessons from the previous conflicts of the same kind..."

Another example is the conflict described by Nune Poghosyan from Noratus school #1, grade 9. In her questionnaire Nune describes the conflict between her friend and herself. The cause of the conflict was a song that Nune was to perform during a class event. It turned out that her classmate wanted to sing the song instead. The girls had quarreled over the matter, and as Nune states, after a while they were in cold terms with each other and ignored one another. Later on we realized that the song shouldn't be a reason for quitting our friendship. The conflict was even used to solve our problem; we decided to perform the song jointly. This is a great example of resolving the conflict through collaboration.

The same girl brings another example, where she describes a conflict, which she wasn't able to solve herself; and what is most important she explains why she wasn't able to do so. "I was in the 1st grade. I had just started going to school, but I could already read and write. I wanted my teacher to know about this. I wrote my name and surname on the blackboard. Before my teacher entered the classroom one of my classmates cleaned the blackboard. /Afterwards I learned that my teacher had instructed to keep the blackboard clean/. We quarreled and I slapped my classmate on the face. I was talking to almost none of my classmates during the whole academic year. The girl who I had quarreled with didn't allow anybody to communicate with me. I think the reason for this was the absence of mature thinking, lack of understanding each other, the state of easily getting irritated, as well as "the tendency of being "the best". Especially, I was most interested in this example. Why? In fact similar conflict arises among children in the classroom, let alone in the 1st grade, one of the pupils is isolated from the rest for a whole academic year, while the teacher doesn't notice it and doesn't try to understand what has happened. The whole matter is that in case the teacher had been a bit more attentive, she could have helped the children in resolving this problem. What she needed was just to listen to the two sides, and most importantly create such an atmosphere that would enable children to

understand the true causes of their actions. This example once again comes to prove how important it is to talk about this with the teachers, train them and teach children from very early age.

- Another interesting example: 10th grade, Noratus school #1 /teacher Karine Grigoryan, pupil- Barseghyan Leyli/. “Once my friend and I quarreled for a doll in the kindergarten. We quarreled and bet each other. The teacher scolded us and without asking the reason of our fight made us reconcile. All the same none of us apologized. The conflict wasn’t solved for the teacher didn’t ask us for its cause; she didn’t try to analyze the situation...” It should be noted that the child remembers this conflict 10 years later and observes that the cause was the teacher’s non-professional approach to the problem. Often we interfere in children’s problems without getting into their depth, without trying to understand what has actually happened.

4. When analyzing pupils’ questionnaires you will notice the impact of the examples set by the teachers. Many of them try to explain the theme the way their teachers do. In fact questionnaires allow us to conclude how the theme was interpreted by this or that teacher.

Sometimes schoolchildren use such terminology in their questionnaires that are not included in our training course like tolerance, adjustability, self-control, indulgence, reconciliation skills, etc. This proves once more that each teacher, each pupil interprets the theme through his/her prism and while presenting it uses his/her terminology and vocabulary. This is normal too, just it is necessary to be attentive that the meaning is not changed due to the use of different terms.

Often are the cases when the teachers themselves don’t completely understand the theme. During conflict management many of them put the main stress on unilateral concession or on compromise, at best. Generally, they don’t concentrate on the importance of the usage of different types of behavior. Thus, it is necessary to pay great attention to this fact during the training courses held for teachers. It is necessary to provide a more comprehensive discussion about the topics on the usage of different types of behavior during the conflicts and try to justify this or that type of behavior by concrete examples, the pros and cons of behaving in this or that concrete situation. Reconciliation is an essential characteristic for conflict management though it should be used when you have completely understood the situation. Analysis should be done to understand what we gain and what we lose, etc in the particular situation. ***Nevertheless, the vision always to be kept in mind is that through this education it is***

our task to bring up a generation able to protect their rights, respect those of others, a generation who have their own views and meantime respect those of the rest and not a generation ready to obey and accept any situation

In a considerable number of questionnaires the child clearly describes the conflict situation, analyzes it guided by the particular skills gained during conflict management education training course. For example, "... once I had an acute conflict with my neighbor. She persisted that on my way I had pushed aside her son, who was only a 1st grade pupil. I tried to explain to her that I did it by accident and not deliberately, but she didn't accept my excuses considering them just a tale. I wasn't able to solve the conflict for my neighbor kept on using insulting words, referring to other people in her speech and all the time repeating "you never...", "you always...". Pupil from Zolakar school #2, Gegharkunik marz.

Questionnaires filled out by the boys

I think this theme might also be used to carry out psychological analysis. /e.g. many of the pupils in 6th grade write, "I kicked my friend down and went away, I hit my friend and there was a bruise on his eye..." /Noratus school, 6th grade/.

Sometimes boys get into conflict, moreover continue expanding it, use their fists to show the opposite party they are not timid /Avetisyan Arayik, Tsakkar secondary school/

Another example described by a boy in his questionnaire, which he was able to solve peacefully; he says. "... I think the conflict would be solved without possessing those skills as well, though they also help in solving them, but it is not always possible to use them..." /Arayik Avetisyan, Tsakkar secondary school/

The next pupil writes, "Well, not easily, but I could admit my mistake and the conflict was resolved".

The same pupil writes, "Conflict wasn't resolved, for we thought that admitting our own mistakes and apologizing for them was a humiliation for us". Harut Sargsyan, Madina secondary school.

As a conclusion, I want to state once again that the project in Gegharkunik marz, partially in the rural areas of the marz was a success. What is left to do is to find exact leverages, be consistent in integrating it into school culture and as stated by the teachers and vice-principals themselves let it have permanent nature.