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THE ESSENCE OF DEVELOPING CONFLICT-FREE INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AMONG STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract. This article states in the Law “On Education” that “discipline in an educational institution is maintained on the basis of respect for the human dignity of students, pupils, and educators” [Law on Education]. The educational environment of a higher education institution involves students interacting within and outside of an academic group; this allows for the assimilation of acquired experience and the application of knowledge not only in the educational process but also in life situations. Such practice is important when a young specialist enters labor relations in a new team with established rules and requirements, i.e., with a formed corporate culture. During the educational process, it is important to foster conflict-free relationships and a culture of behavior among students so that a graduate who is just beginning their career can quickly adapt to the labor collective.

Keywords. Conflictology, culturology, pedagogy, psychology, sociology, “Teacher-student”, youth crisis, professional crisis, identity crisis.

Introduction. When analyzing the curricula of higher education institutions, it was found that each level of higher education (specialist degree, bachelor’s degree, master’s degree, and doctoral studies) предусматривает the study of various disciplines aimed at developing students’ general cultural and general professional competencies, including conflictology, cultural studies, pedagogy, psychology, sociology, and other related subjects. However, despite the growing relevance of the problem of increasing conflict potential in modern society, these disciplines do not specifically aim to develop students’ competencies in conflict-free interpersonal interaction. This situation is confirmed by the research of numerous scholars, including N.Grishina and Y.A.Zamedlina, who identify differences between people-physiological, psychological, social, and others as the primary causes of conflicts[1]. In enterprises, schools, and other organizations, the responsibility for regulating disputes and resolving conflict situations is assigned to staff psychologists, teachers, and managers who have studied relevant specialized disciplines or completed retraining and professional development courses. However, such specialists are not available everywhere.

It should also be noted that leadership positions in various organizations are often occupied by specialists who lack specialized education and training in conflict prevention and resolution. Furthermore, the position of a staff psychologist is not always provided for in an enterprise’s staffing structure. Therefore, the pedagogical conditions for conflict-free interpersonal interaction proposed by us can be incorporated into the training of students in various fields of study during the period of adulthood when their personal characteristics remain amenable to correction and development. This should be regarded as one of the priority objectives of higher education.

Analysis and results. The subjects of the educational process are teachers and students who are united by the educational environment of a particular educational institution and the process of developing competencies defined by the State Educational Standards. Students’ activities are aimed at understanding learning objectives; acquiring new competencies; analyzing, synthesizing, comparing, contrasting, and systematizing the knowledge they have acquired; understanding cause-and-effect relationships; independently solving emerging problems; exercising self-control; and evaluating their own achievements. The “student–student” interaction is one of the key areas examined in this dissertation research. First-year students deserve particular attention because,

when academic groups are formed, collective rules and norms have not yet been established. Behavioral patterns acquired at school tend to prevail, while new behavioral patterns are only beginning to develop.

As a subject of the educational process, the teacher performs the role of a facilitator. The teacher explains the aims and objectives of learning; motivates students; provides new subject-specific knowledge; and guides the processes of understanding and acquiring competencies, learning scientific principles and laws, transitioning from theory to practice, organizing learners' independent and creative activities, and monitoring and evaluating changes in their levels of knowledge and development.

In the process of "teacher–student" interaction, the teacher assumes the leading role by organizing students' cognitive activities and encouraging cooperation, mutual assistance, mutual monitoring, and coordinated evaluation of the activities being performed. Through conflict-free interpersonal interaction, the teacher also helps overcome cognitive and emotional barriers that arise during classes. Students constitute a social group of young people who possess the social activity necessary to engage in social practice and are united by the common goal of acquiring a professional qualification at a higher or specialized secondary educational institution

The student age period is generally considered to range from 17 to 23 years and is regarded as one of the most productive stages for intellectual and professional development, the formation of moral and aesthetic feelings, the stabilization of character, and the acquisition of social roles, including professional, occupational, civil, and legal roles. Young people actively engage in independent activities, establish families, and participate in the political life of their country. At the same time, student life is also a period of intense emotional experiences associated with establishing relationships within new social groups, finding one's place in the chosen profession, and testing the quality of acquired competencies in practice.

At higher education institutions, young people are exposed to factors that may negatively affect their socialization. These factors will be examined in greater detail below. First, fatigue. Students face various contradictions, including the conflict between their need for self-respect and self-realization and their financial dependence on their parents. To improve their living conditions, including their access to food, clothing, and leisure, some students take additional jobs as cleaners, bartenders, sanitation workers, and in similar occupations. Consequently, working students may attend classes in a state of reduced functional capacity, which affects their cognitive and emotional functioning and complicates interpersonal interaction. Second, new socioeconomic conditions. The new socioeconomic circumstances encountered by young people involve changes in their work and rest schedules, as well as greater independence in decision-making away from their parental families. Students adapt to adult life and gradually assume responsibility for their own lives. However, some learners are not prepared to overcome the difficulties they encounter. Increased academic workloads and excessive exertion of willpower can lead to heightened nervous system tension, affecting young people's ability to regulate their emotional and behavioral responses. This may result in unrestrained verbal reactions in the academic environment and difficulties in interpersonal relationships. Third, the impact of crises. Student life is a period characterized by various crises, including age-related, professional, and identity crises. During this stage, behavioral patterns acquired at school may no longer be appropriate for the higher education environment, while new patterns have not yet been fully established. The process of self-understanding and finding one's place in life is often accompanied by negative emotional experiences that may develop into conflicts with others, particularly because students have not yet accumulated sufficient life experience due to their age. Therefore, it is important to create specific pedagogical conditions that facilitate the development of conflict-free interpersonal interaction among students. Such conditions contribute to the improvement of young people's inner culture and reduce the likelihood of crises escalating. Fourth, value orientations related to successful adaptation and

professional relationships. Scholars regard value orientations directed toward successful adaptation and integration into professional relationships including first-year students' integration into the academic environment and graduates' integration into work teams as a form of social recognition and self-realization.

According to the findings of O.T.Bogomolov and A.G.Zapesotskiy, material well-being is the primary life goal for 70% of young people, while "the value of work has lost its relevance." This suggests that the desire to obtain material benefits with minimal physical and intellectual effort may outweigh the willingness to invest effort and energy in achieving them. Such tendencies can contribute to the emergence of conflicts among the subjects of the educational process. It is well known that contradictions constitute the basis of conflicts; therefore, the problem of developing conflict-free interpersonal interaction among students in higher education institutions is becoming increasingly relevant. It should be emphasized that a stable worldview develops and the fundamental personality traits take shape precisely during the student years. If an individual is exposed to antisocial influences during this period, including development within a conflict-prone social environment, modifying their behavior in the future may prove difficult. This is because young people develop behavioral patterns and models that may become destructive when dealing with conflict situations.

Through pedagogical interventions aimed at developing conflict-free interpersonal interaction, learners can remain engaged in activities that are meaningful to them while acquiring valuable experience in regulating relationships within the academic environment.

Creating pedagogical conditions for developing conflict-free interpersonal interaction among students in higher education institutions is essential for fostering well-rounded individuals and training professionals capable of resolving educational and workplace-related tasks in a humane manner. To improve the quality of conflict-free interaction, it is important to clarify its concept and constituent components. In 2000, A.Y.Antsupov and A.I.Shipilov proposed the following definition: "Social conflict is the most acute method of resolving significant contradictions that arise in the process of social interaction. It manifests itself through mutual opposition between the subjects involved and is accompanied by negative emotions experienced by each party toward the other." The same authors later modified this definition slightly: "Social conflict is the most destructive way of developing and resolving the most significant contradictions that arise in the process of social interaction, as well as a struggle between the structures of the individual's psyche." Conflict presupposes the existence of contradictions that arise in the process of social interaction and are resolved through "extreme methods," with certain consequences. In other words, when contradictions exist, social interaction takes the form of conflictual interaction. S. Zamedlina defines "conflictual interaction" as opposition between parties, that is, actions directed against one another. In his research, S.A. Saryov emphasizes that "the value of conflicts lies in their ability to reveal unpleasant truths, prevent stagnation within a school's educational system, sometimes pave the way for innovation, and encourage a constructive approach to patterns of aggressive behavior."

Thus, the recognition of the principle of the "unity of communication and activity" within the national scholarly tradition is particularly important for understanding the process of interaction between people. According to L.P.Buyeva, "activity and communication are two interrelated, relatively independent, but unequal aspects of a single process of life, both at the individual and social levels." G.M.Andreyeva describes communication as a process of establishing contact between people that involves exchanging information, developing common approaches to interaction, and perceiving and understanding one another. B.G. Ananyev argued that communication could be regarded as "one of the types of activity, alongside labor and cognition." A.L.Leontiev defined communication as a specific form of people's joint activity. However, B.F.Lomov criticized this viewpoint, arguing that "communication cannot be reduced solely to

joint activity." A.A.Rean emphasized that "communication can also function as a process that serves as an end in itself."

An analysis of the scholarly literature suggests that interaction is a combination of communication components interconnected with people's joint activities. Interaction is a multifaceted, interactive process of communication that includes communicative (information transmission) and perceptual (mutual perception and understanding of people) aspects. According to scholarly sources, the components of communication include verbal elements (linguistic signs), nonverbal elements (gestures, facial expressions, and body movements), and paraverbal elements (vocal sounds, pauses between words, and intonation). Participants in a conversation use these components simultaneously. In other words, interlocutors listen to each other's verbal messages while also observing one another's gestures and body language. This indicates that mutual behavioral monitoring is essential for constructive interaction. Agreeing with V. Krisko's understanding of communication as a process involving the direct or indirect influence of subjects on one another, thereby establishing mutual interdependence and connections between them, we consider interaction to involve communication between people through the exchange of the outcomes of their psychological and spiritual activities. These outcomes include acquired information, thoughts, opinions, evaluations, emotions, experiences, and attitudes. In other words, communication and interaction are interdependent processes between people through which a common outcome is achieved. Therefore, conflict-free interaction is essential for improving the quality of interpersonal relationships and their outcomes, and it should be regarded as a competence.

The problem of professional competencies has been studied by the following scholars: I.S.Batrakova, A.A.Verbitsky, E.Zeyer, I.A.Zimnyaya, O.Y.Lebedev, A. V.Khutorskoy, and others. The State Educational Standard for medical professionals does not include a definition of the competencies of "conflict-free interpersonal interaction" or "conflict resolution," although these competencies may be required in professional practice. A student at a higher education institution who is preparing to become a physician must acquire competencies in conflict-free interpersonal interaction. The ability to analyze conflicts, identify the underlying causes and patterns that determine conflictual interactions, find ways out of difficult situations, and, even more importantly, prevent critical incidents is a key factor in the personal success of any professional and the organization in which they work.

For this process to function effectively, pedagogical conditions are necessary to foster conflict-free interpersonal interaction and strengthen a humanistic orientation, which can have a significant positive impact on the development of society as a whole. Students who receive training in conflict-free interpersonal interaction can convey their acquired knowledge to society and actively influence people's behavior.

The teacher is entrusted with developing and preserving the humanistic orientation of future professionals and protecting it against moral decline. Conflict-free interpersonal interaction is a significant moral and spiritual achievement that, through repeated practice, becomes a tradition that promotes enlightenment throughout society. When students enter an educational environment, that environment itself assumes the role of a teacher and educator. By observing established rules and reproducing the interpersonal relationships and traditions of the higher education institution in their daily lives, learners internalize the experience of conflict-free interpersonal interaction.

To develop conflict-free interpersonal interaction among students in higher education institutions, it is necessary to substantiate the components, levels, and diagnostic criteria that determine the specific characteristics of this competency. The primary purpose of these competencies is to anticipate the risk of conflictual relationships during teaching and educational activities and to prepare students for independent professional practice by developing essential professional qualities, including the ability to engage in conflict-free interpersonal interaction.

Teachers play a significant role in fostering conflict-free interpersonal interaction within the academic environment. They deliberately organize interactions among learners through pedagogical conflict management, creating conditions for studying individual behavioral strategies in "high-tension" situations and promoting positive changes in interpersonal relationships throughout the learning process. In our view, the most effective theoretical and methodological approach in the theory and practice of higher professional education is the value-oriented approach, which focuses on developing the moral and spiritual values of a humanistic society. This approach has been presented in the works of V.G.Zakirova, O.I.Istrafilova, L.V.Pavlova, N.A.Chitalin, I.E.Yarmakeev, and others. The expected outcome of this approach is particularly significant: employers gain professionals who are not only theoretically well-prepared but also capable of making decisions in highly tense situations. In other words, the components of the value-oriented approach involve values directed toward a specific purpose and an integrated level of knowledge, skills, and abilities aimed at developing future professionals' capacity for conflict-free interpersonal interaction. These competencies enable professionals to more readily accept and internalize the behavioral norms of the organizations in which they work.

A review of the literature revealed that conflicts occur less frequently in work teams where behavioral norms are valued. This can be explained by the fact that such norms are intended to prevent the escalation of tense situations and, when clashes of interests are inevitable, to ensure that conflicts are resolved more quickly and with minimal losses. Behavioral standards for employees, as established in an organization's regulations, serve as mechanisms for regulating professional relationships.

When contradictions arise within an organization, adherence to ethical standards can transform relationships throughout the enterprise as a result of the conflict. This represents the paradoxical nature of conflict: under appropriate conditions, it can lead to constructive change. Therefore, the presence of contradictions in interactions among the subjects of the educational process may contribute to improving the quality of patient care, enhancing the reputation of outpatient clinics, and strengthening the standing of the organization, as well as that of the ministries responsible for healthcare and education as a whole.

The fundamental principles of conflict-free interpersonal interaction include the timely recognition of tension within a social group; identifying conflict-generating factors and determining the degree of personal involvement in the process; developing the ability to express one's interests without provoking the other party; being able to clarify a situation democratically while taking into account the interests of all those involved; understanding the limits of one's own competence; and being able to reconsider one's point of view by adopting alternative positions and perspectives.

An analysis of the components of conflict-free interpersonal interaction makes it possible to describe the specific structural components of such interaction among students in higher education institutions and to identify the distinctive features of its development. These features include establishing and developing social relationships among the subjects of the educational process on the basis of generally accepted behavioral norms, self-discipline, attentive and empathetic perception of others, a responsible and conscientious attitude toward mutual respect and reputation, analysis of the situations that arise, and the internalization of the experience gained.

Each participant in the interaction process must understand their own goals and motives, what aspects of the relationship can or cannot be changed, the forms in which such changes may be made, and whether any changes are necessary at all. In other words, establishing social relationships involves several stages, which may appropriately include the following: collecting initial information by observing a person's behavior, appearance, and manner of greeting; determining the relevance and purpose of the meeting; understanding the events taking place, including the underlying motivation and expectations associated with the meeting; accepting

responsibility for one's words, behavior, and the outcome of the conversation; and subsequently developing the social relationship.

Thus, social interaction presupposes conflict-free interpersonal relationships. The development of social relationships is achieved through communicative activity, which can be defined as "a distinctive cultural form of communication involving the exchange of real-time information between people through signs and symbols. Information is transmitted purposefully and received selectively, while interaction is carried out in accordance with specific rules and norms and the level of social intelligence of the participants in the communication process."

In addition to awareness and responsibility, the social intelligence of the interlocutors also plays an important role in establishing and developing conflict-free interpersonal interaction. Social intelligence has been extensively studied and is currently regarded as "a multidimensional ability of an individual that enables the understanding of other people's actions and behavior at both conscious and unconscious levels, thereby facilitating effective interaction and successful adaptation to society."

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