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DEVELOPING CONSTRUCTIVE CYBERCONFLICT RESOLUTION SKILLS IN SENIOR SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Abstract. This article analyses the socio-psychological dimensions of the skills senior school students need in order to resolve, in a constructive manner, the cyberconflicts that arise during digital communication. It examines the distinctive features that conflicts acquire in the digital environment, the way such conflicts affect students' socio-psychological development, and the psychological conditions under which they can be managed constructively. A psychological and pedagogical approach is also outlined, aimed at cultivating emotional self-regulation, empathy, a culture of digital communication, problem-analysis ability and negotiation skills. The formation of students' conflictological and digital-psychological competencies is substantiated as a key factor in the constructive management of cyberconflicts.

Key words: cyberconflict, senior school students, constructive resolution, digital communication, conflictological competence, empathy, emotional self-regulation, digital culture, cyberbullying, socio-psychological skills.

INTRODUCTION. The rapid advance of digital technologies is today exerting a marked influence on the ways young people communicate, exchange information, express opinions and organise their social relationships. For senior school students in particular, social networks, messengers, online games and various digital platforms are becoming a principal arena for interaction with peers. At the same time, the specific character of communication in virtual settings is giving rise to new forms of interpersonal disagreement. It would be scientifically inaccurate, however, to equate every disagreement occurring in a digital environment with cyberbullying. Cyberconflict is the broader notion: it denotes a contradiction between the interests, views, emotional states or actions of two or more parties, expressed through the means of digital communication. Such a conflict may take the form of a simple misunderstanding, an argument, an insult, an opposition within a group, a dispute originating in private messages, or an open quarrel played out on a social network. What makes cyberconflicts hazardous is that virtual communication usually lacks non-verbal cues such as facial expression, tone of voice and body movement. As a consequence, an ordinary remark or a joke may be received by the other person as an insult. Moreover, although a written message can in principle be reviewed before it is sent, under conditions of heightened emotional strain a student may respond impulsively and thereby cause the conflict to escalate further. Aggressive behaviour and disputes arising online may adversely affect adolescents' emotional state, their relations with peers and their social adjustment. The psychological impact of a conflict is intensified in particular by the speed with which online disagreements reach a wide audience and by their capacity to resurface repeatedly. For this reason, alongside the prevention of cyberconflicts, school psychology must attach considerable importance to equipping students with the ability to recognise such situations, to regulate themselves emotionally and to seek constructive resolutions.

A cyberconflict is a contradiction, disagreement or clash of interests that arises between two or more persons through the means of digital communication. It may manifest itself on social networks, in messengers, in online games, in electronic mail, in group chats and on other virtual platforms. At its root may lie a divergence of opinion, a misreading of intent, a collision of personal interests, an

emotional reaction, group pressure or a communicative error. Cyberconflict differs from conventional conflict by virtue of the properties peculiar to the digital environment. First of all, its rapidity means that messages and replies are exchanged within a very short span of time, which can accelerate the development of the conflict. In addition, an interpersonal disagreement may reach a broad audience, so that a dispute initially confined to two people spreads to a group or to a wider virtual setting. Because non-verbal signals such as facial expression, intonation and gesture are limited in digital communication, the likelihood that messages will be misinterpreted increases. The anonymity available on certain platforms may, for its part, weaken a user's sense of responsibility for his or her own conduct. Furthermore, since correspondence, images and videos persist as a digital trace, the consequences of a conflict may endure for a long time. Another important characteristic of cyberconflict is its capacity to migrate between the virtual and the real social environment: a disagreement at school may continue online, or conversely a quarrel on the internet may affect students' relationships in everyday life.

The notion of resolving a cyberconflict constructively implies neither denying that the conflict exists nor suppressing the opposition by force. Its essential content lies in arriving at a solution that takes account of the mutual interests of those involved, preserves the rights and dignity of the individual and prevents any further deterioration of the relationship. The formation of this skill in senior school students is directly bound up with the characteristics of their age. During this period the significance of relations with peers grows, and the need for social standing and for acceptance by the group becomes stronger. Criticism, indifference, ridicule or exclusion from a group in a virtual setting may therefore be perceived by a student as a serious psychological threat. The development of a cyberconflict may be divided, conditionally, into several stages: the emergence of a conflictogenic situation, its subjective interpretation, the emotional reaction, the responding action, the escalation or de-escalation of the conflict, and the final outcome. At each of these stages the student's psychological competence determines the subsequent course of events.

As a complex psychological competence, the constructive management of cyberconflicts is made up of several interrelated components.

The first component is the skill of emotional self-regulation. On receiving a conflict-laden message, a student must be able to recognise his or her own emotional state before replying. A message sent under the influence of anger, hurt, fear or shame may aggravate the conflict. Teaching the algorithm “stop — recognise — think — respond” is therefore an important psychological tool.

The second component is empathic understanding. Grasping another person's emotional state is more difficult in virtual communication. A student must consequently be able to view a situation not only from his or her own position but also from the standpoint of the other party. The development of empathy may help to reduce insults, mockery and impulsive replies. Studies of cyberbullying identify empathy and emotional intelligence as protective factors.

The third component is digital communicative competence. This denotes a student's ability to express thoughts in a virtual environment clearly, respectfully and responsibly. It includes, among other things, refraining from abusive language, not responding to provocation, not disclosing personal data, not circulating contentious correspondence publicly, and suspending communication temporarily where necessary.

The fourth component is the constructive analysis of the problem. A student must be able to distinguish the outward appearance of a conflict from its underlying cause. For instance, the fact that “he did not reply to my message” is not in itself the cause of the conflict but may merely be its surface sign. The real cause may well lie in a misunderstanding, in competition for standing within a group, in an earlier disagreement or in a communicative error.

The fifth component is the skill of negotiation and compromise. Resolving a conflict constructively presupposes the search for a mutually acceptable solution rather than the outright

victory of one side. Together with stating his or her own demand, a student must learn to take the interests of the other party into account.

The sixth component is the skill of digital safety and boundary-setting. In certain situations, resolving a conflict through dialogue alone proves insufficient. Where insults, threats, the dissemination of personal data or repeated aggressive behaviour occur, strategies such as blocking, reporting, preserving evidence and turning to a trusted adult should be applied.

The use of psychological training carries particular weight in developing the skills required to resolve cyberconflicts constructively. Training turns a student from a passive listener into an active participant and makes it possible to model conflict situations directly. Training sessions may draw on such methods as role play, situational tasks, the "conflict map", the "I-message", the identification of emotions, perspective-taking, the elaboration of alternative responses, and reflective discussion. The "I-message" technique is of particular importance in cyber-communication. For example, instead of an accusation of the form "You are always making fun of people!", communication phrased as "When I read your message I felt uncomfortable, because…" reduces the extent to which the conflict is directed at the person. The technique of the "pause before replying" may likewise prove effective. Its substance consists in teaching the student not to answer a conflict-laden message at once, but first to regulate his or her emotional state, re-read the content of the message and weigh the possible consequences of a reply. Cooperation between parents and teachers is also important in preventing cyberconflict. Scholarly reviews note that, alongside instruction in cyber-safety, the development of communicative and social skills, of empathy and of digital citizenship competencies constitutes an equally essential component.

The senior school years are a period in which self-awareness, the definition of one's standing among peers and the formation of a sense of belonging to a social group proceed intensively. The digital environment becomes an additional social arena for this process. A student's reputation on social networks, the appraisals others give, "likes", comments and standing within a group may all affect his or her self-evaluation. Criticism or rejection in a virtual setting is therefore liable to provoke a stronger emotional reaction than an ordinary disagreement would. One of the key concepts for explaining cyberconflicts is online disinhibition — the tendency for thoughts or actions normally withheld in real life to be expressed more readily in a virtual environment. Several factors may contribute to this: the physical absence of the interlocutor, anonymity, the lack of visual contact, the possibility of delaying a reply, and the comparatively "distanced" nature of the virtual setting. As a result, a student may write freely in a chat a pointed opinion that he or she would find hard to voice face to face. Along with a lowering of communicative barriers, this may lead to an intensification of conflictogenic behaviour.

Table 1. A structural model of the skills senior school students require for the constructive resolution of cyberconflicts

Component of constructive resolution	Content	Manifestation in cyberconflict	Psychological skill to be developed	Assessment criterion
Cognitive component	Understanding the cause of the conflict, its participants and the substance of the situation	Analysing a message without haste; detecting misinterpretation	Analysing the situation and perceiving alternative interpretations	Correct identification of the cause of the conflict

Component of constructive resolution	Content	Manifestation in cyberconflict	Psychological skill to be developed	Assessment criterion
Emotional-regulatory component	Recognising and controlling the emotions that arise during a conflict	Not sending an angry message at once; taking an emotional pause	Self-restraint; impulse control	Control over the emotional reaction
Empathic component	Understanding the emotions and standpoint of the other party	Taking into account the question “How might he or she receive this message?”	Perspective-taking; empathic understanding	Consideration of the other party's position
Communicative component	Expressing thoughts and feelings without aggression, clearly and respectfully	Giving a constructive reply instead of an insult or an accusation	Active listening; the “I-message”; clarifying questions	Constructiveness of the exchange
Conflictological component	Seeking an acceptable solution without escalating the opposition	Resorting to negotiation, compromise and cooperation	Devising alternative solutions	Choice of a constructive strategy
Digital-communicative component	Taking account of the rules specific to the virtual environment	Weighing the consequences of forwarding a message, taking a screenshot or replying publicly	Digital responsibility and communicative prudence	Observance of the norms of digital communication
Reflective component	Analysing one's own actions and their consequences	Answering the question “Did my reply intensify or reduce the conflict?”	Evaluating one's own conduct and drawing conclusions	Critical analysis of one's own activity

The table systematises the principal psychological components of the ability to resolve cyberconflicts constructively, together with the features by which each is manifested in a digital dispute. The mutual coherence of these components determines a student's capacity to comprehend a conflict, to manage his or her emotions, to respond empathically and to select an acceptable solution.

CONCLUSION. Developing in senior school students the skills required for the constructive resolution of cyberconflicts is an essential condition for establishing healthy communication in the digital environment. What matters here is the harmonious development of the abilities to comprehend a conflict, to regulate emotions, to feel empathy, to communicate constructively and to

search for an acceptable solution. Research has also shown that psychological interventions oriented towards empathy help to reduce cyber-aggressive behaviour in adolescents. Teaching students to manage cyberconflicts constructively may therefore be regarded as one of the important directions of psychological and pedagogical work.

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