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**IMPLEMENTATION OF SCHOOL RECONCILIATION SERVICES  
IN RUSSIAN FEDERATION**

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**Abstract**

The paper analyses the issues, which arise when the school reconciliation services start acting in educational institutions in the Russian Federation. The purpose of the article is to find the ways to overcome the existing problems in the system of education. On the basis of the expert review, the authors identify the issues related to implementation of school reconciliation services in the Russian Federation and justify the need for special training of school reconciliation service managers. The authors establish values and principles to be used as guidelines for training of such specialists. Special attention is paid to the need for restoration of relationships in the course of conflict settlement in the school environment. The principal task of experimental work on the training program for school reconciliation service managers is to establish psychological innovations that will help the conflicting subjects to find mutually acceptable solutions and restore their relationships. The article also evaluates the efficiency of the experimental work. The conclusions made in the present paper allow the authors to state that they have found efficient ways to solve the most critical tasks related to implementation of school reconciliation services in the educational institutions.

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**Keywords:** Pedagogical conflicts, mediation, school reconciliation service.

## 1. Introduction

In the modern world, all spheres of life are filled with contradictions which create the basis of various conflicts and conflict situations. Their number keeps growing in the permanent crisis conditions of the modern society.

To a large extent, conflict situations and conflicts in the educational system can be attributed to special characteristics of the pedagogical system management that exists in Russia today. The ongoing economic



and social transformations change the concept and functions of education and, naturally, form new tasks for this important field of human activity. The most important tasks: development of student tolerance; formation and the introduction of new methods for resolution of contradictions and conflicts in the school environment; establishment and development of the system for school conflict settlement, as well as training of specialists who will be able to practically implement the new approaches in conflict settlement.

The list of literature on conflicts includes a significant number of fundamental papers, thesis studies, monographs and, especially, articles in philosophy, sociology, psychology and pedagogics.

The investigators have analyzed a huge number of works on pedagogical conflict and have come to the conclusion that Russian scientists show an increased interest in this topic. Konovalov, (2014) has an interest in conflictology, as well as in searching for conceptual mechanisms and efficient means for conflict situation management. This interest is explained by the specific features of conflict interaction in the school environment. During the years of reforms in the Russian society in general, and modernization of the educational system in particular, there have been major changes in the nature of the process and consequences of conflicts, which take place between various subjects in educational institutions. We observe a trend here: teachers' actions become more and more amicable; but children and teens tend to use the strong arm behavior models in conflict situations, both with teachers and peers.

In the meantime, the growth of aggression in the adolescent environment reflects one of the most burning issues of our society where we can observe a sharp rise in the number of deviations in the recent years. Regretfully, we have to state: as the human civilization develops, the number of behavioral deviations grows. New types of deviations emerge; asocial and antisocial subcultures become more active. The number of crimes in the developed countries has tripled in the last 30 years (Zinchenko, 2011; Zmanovskaya & Rybnikov, 2010). As the practical experience shows Petushkova et. al., (2015), very often unsolved school conflicts become triggers of deviant behavior.

### **1.1. Literature overview**

Conflict management technologies have appeared in the Russian Federation. They are called ADS (alternative dispute settlement). This tendency is also true for the Russian educational system. At present the Russian Federation has introduced the laws, which allow to implement new ways and methods of conflict settlement in the school environment. First, we need to mention Federal Law №193 “On alternative dispute settlement procedure with participation of an intermediary (the mediator)”, which regulates the activity of professional and nonprofessional intermediaries (mediators), and Federal Law №273 “On education in the Russian Federation”, which introduces a new approach to settlement of conflict situations between the teacher and the student (students).

Russian scientists (Konovalov, 2014) studied the works of their foreign colleagues (Baird, Peter D., et al., 2008; Boule & Nestic, 2010; Fast, 2010; Hibbert, 2008; Leutenberg, 2010; Mercer & Wennechuk, 2010). They have begun to develop the conflict management technologies via a special procedure called «mediation» (intermediation). In February, 2013, the Federal Mediation Institute was established. In accordance with the state assignment, this Institute conducts research activities in a few areas which relate to practical and theoretical issues of use and development of mediation, and other alternative ways of

dispute settlement. They have developed such professional standards as “Specialist in the field of mediation (mediator)”. RF Government’s order dd. 30 July, 2014, №1430-r approved “The concept of the mediation service network development for the period till 2017 with the purpose of implementation of restorative justice in respect of children, including those who committed socially dangerous acts, but who have not achieved the age of criminal discretion in RF”.

Implementation of the mediation practice in the school environment is related to the activity of such a structure as “the School Reconciliation Service” (SRS). The practice of this service is based on the idea of restorative justice, and in a broader way – on the approach which provides for restoration of relationships that were destroyed during conflicts, violence and criminal acts. This approach is being developed and implemented by the Court & Legal Reform Center and its partners. For a decade, this Center has been designing “School Reconciliation Services” as the Russian mediation model (Konovalov, 2014).

Such services have already started their work in the Russian Federation: in Moscow and Volgograd; in Krasnoyarsk, Moscow, Samara and Perm regions, in Sakha Republic (Yakutia) and in Chuvash Republic. Konovalov, (2014) and other researchers describe the experience of SRS and identify the following problems: prescriptive management in the majority of schools and weak support of the SRS structure, lack of training for members of reconciliation services, difficulties in settlement of teacher/student, teacher/parent conflicts.

SRS have also been introduced in Magnitogorsk. With the support of the City Administration, in 2014-2015, a major number of schools started to implement this modern technology of conflict settlement in educational institutions.

The roundtable discussion in Magnitogorsk, Chelyabinsk region (as a part of the conference “The right for childhood: preventive measures and protection of children from the abuse in educational institutions and families”, 26 November, 2014), organized by the Youth Affairs Department, showed that practical implementation of school reconciliation services encounters a few issues.

Yet, city schools have no specialists trained at mediator courses. Thus, the reconciliation process gets much more complicated as it is based on searching for a mutually acceptable solution by the conflicting parties. Therefore, the school environment turned out to be unprepared to discuss conflicts which are often linked to external criminal situations.

It is extremely important to have a professional manager of the school reconciliation service, and we should have special requirements for his/her personality. In educational institutions, this function is often imposed onto the social worker (teacher). In the Russian Federation, he/she is the specialist whose task is to join efforts of the family, school and community to render assistance to the child. Actually, the competence of the social worker includes intermediary activities in solving of various problems (and conflicts) of students.

However, we see the global collision: the state programs encourage the teaching staff to use democratic methods for settlement of conflicts and disputes, but in reality, those involved in the educational process are not ready to adopt new technologies of conflict settlement and implement the state policy. That is why, we have decided to have a poll in order to find out if social teachers are ready to manage school reconciliation services.

## 1.2. Diagnostic Stage

In September, 2014, we conducted a survey among 25 social teachers employed at the educational institutions in Magnitogorsk; their work experience was of 1 to 18 years. We considered them an expert group and asked them to fill out a questionnaire to evaluate the situation related to conflict settlement in educational institutions.

The survey showed that conflicts in the school environment occur on a daily basis (39% of respondents), while 61 % of the respondents said that such situations occurred from time to time. So, all experts admitted, that conflicts exist in educational institutions. This evaluation supported the last decade's view of conflicts as a natural phenomenon in education process. Although, during our research in 2001, teachers denied the existence of conflict-provoking situations in the city schools.

With the help of multiple-choice questions in the questionnaire, we were able to identify subjects of conflict situations. The respondents named teachers and parents (92.3 %); teachers and students(84.2 %), as well as peer conflicts between students (76.9 %). Besides, they pointed out, that there may be conflicts between teachers only, and between teachers and school administration (30.7 %). Therefore, the majority of conflicts does not have pedagogical nature, but they are actually related to the school environment.

According to the social workers who participated in our survey, conflicts in educational institutions have the following causes: violation of order by students during lessons (84.6 %); weak preparation for classes and unfair grades (61.5 %); noncompliance with the teacher's requirements and insults of teachers by students (4.1 %). Less than 10 % mentioned violation of subordination and order by teachers as a cause of school conflicts. This analysis allows us to conclude that the experts give one-sided assessment of conflict causes, blaming students as initiators. The teachers state that the causes of conflicts are the students' failure to comply with requirements of the adults, bad behavior and lack of diligence. Thus, the respondents demonstrate a dominant position "I am older and know what is right", "You are younger and have to obey".

Most commonly, conflicts evolve as quarrels (76.9 %), disputes (53.8 %) or scandals (46.1%). However, there are such psycho-traumatic forms of conflicts as: fights (38.4 %), showdowns(23.0 %), bullying (15.3 %), boycott (7.6 %), and feud (7.6 %). i.e., in the absence of proper management, conflicts with stressful consequences can represent a serious threat for life and mental health of both students and teachers. The proof can be found in mass media – stories about school conflicts, which ended with deaths of participants of the education process. Cases that reflect the change of the vector of aggression and violence have been registered in the Russian Federation: students become aggressors with increasing frequency.

Today the experts identify the typical ways of settlement of such disputes with participation of third parties: parents, school administration, social teachers (92.3 %); psychologists (38.2 %); in more than half of cases conflicts are settled by the teachers (53.2 %). We believe that the fact of conflict settlement by the teacher will have a positive effect, only if the conflict-solving party knows how to use the modern methodology of conflict settlement. Otherwise, there is a risk of putting pressure on the student.

All the experts (100 %) who took part in the survey noted that if a school conflict occurred, the social teacher would resolve it; 69.3% believe that the deputy principal for discipline must assume this role; the

same number of respondents thinks that it is the psychologist's duty; and 61.5 % are confident that the teacher is quite capable of doing it.

Are there special services which function is to resolve conflicts? 48.3 % of respondents said that such services do not exist, while 51.7 % confirmed that such services are available in their institutions. However, none of the respondents was able to name specific structures, special people or services that deal with conflict resolution in educational institutions. Moreover, the respondents could not mention any method of alternative settlement of school conflicts and disputes.

We found complete absence of any knowledge on this matter. The respondents have no idea what mediation is; they are not aware that it is a democratic mechanism of conflicts resolution, which ensures equal rights of the parties and their social activity; besides, they do not share values of peer relationships (subject/subject).

To identify the routes for solution of the issues found during the theoretical analysis and our own research, we believe it is necessary to describe the values to which the manager and the members of the school reconciliation services must stick. In our opinion, these values are:

- recognition of the value of each individual participant of the mediation process. This implies: taking the participant as he/she is; an individual approach to participants; unbiased assessment of the situation; nonjudgmental attitude to the mediation process participants; respect of the participant's right for his/her identity formation; belief in human ability to change, grow and improve etc.;
- the value of the social nature of the mediation process participant, i.e., awareness of the person's uniqueness in the social system;
- the value of the interests of mediation process participants, i.e.: respect for interests and establishment of trustful relations with them; confidentiality; commitment to act in the participant's interests;
- humanity, mercifulness, fairness, dignity and other moral values which promote empathy and emotional openness with complete self-control.

In our formative experiment with participation of the students of the Institute of Pedagogics, Psychology and Social Work at G.I. Nosov MSTU, we shaped the basic values, understanding and acceptance of the values and principles of mediation activity. The reference group was composed of 25 students who attended traditional lectures, seminars and practice classes. The experimental group included 20 students who took the course in Pedagogical Conflictology. The course was based on the training program for school reconciliation service managers. In order to ensure learning of the required minimum content of the training program, and to create conditions for personal growth and development, to shape psychological and pedagogical values and behavioral experience in school conflicts, as well as to provide for competent management, the following blocks were implemented in the sequence.

The first block (psychological) was focused on the participants' awareness of some personal peculiarities, which are expressed in conflict behavior, and based on the optimization of interpersonal relationships.

The second block (technological) facilitated the participants' self-consciousness in the professional activity system. It was also focused on shaping knowledge in the field of mediation, and on relevant procedures and documentation.

The third block (personal) was focused on creation of personal innovations through understanding of various activity components and raising of the level of self-consciousness.

While implementing the training methodology, we were also creating conditions for personal development of every student in order to go beyond the existing experience, make new assessments of the available personal resources and resources of the society to build new conflict interaction models on the basis of higher self-consciousness.

In the experimental group, the training methodology targeted formation of personal innovations which would allow the students to creatively process the academic knowledge and the social experience with regard to the future activity needs.

The training objective was achieved with the help of interactive teaching methods: heuristic talks, discussions, roundtables, business and role-playing games. Social and psychological training was the main teaching format. From September, 2014, and till May, 2015, the investigators were conducting a research work to help the students form new conflict-resolution skills. The research was based on the restoration approach and was conducted in different Institutes of Nosov MSTU.

## 2. Research methods

In our work, we applied the following research methods: Study Management Method; Cross-Sectional Research; Data Collection Methods: questionnaires, tests, surveys; Statistical Data Processing Methods: G-test, Chi-square test ( $\chi^2$ ).

Professional knowledge was assessed for completeness and integrity on the basis of our own level test programs; psychological and pedagogical values were defined via standard methodologies: "Communicative Orientation Diagnostics Methodology", "General Communicative Tolerance Level", "Style of Teacher's Interaction with Students", "Empathy Level Diagnostics Methodology". Conflict situation behavioral experience was measured on the basis of "Conflict Mode Questionnaire" and via talks about the degree of reasonability for their acts. Well-formedness of there flexive position was assessed with the help of the Personality Factors Test (Q3 factor), as well as on the basis of our methodology of self-evaluation of personal qualities required for settlement of pedagogical conflicts, and via test assignments.

## 3. Results and discussion

In our experimental study, we verified the hypothesis with the help of statistical criterion  $\chi^2$  (Chi-square), which allows us to answer the question: Is there a statistically significant difference between the students of the experimental and reference groups in the level of preparedness for conflict settlement, and what are the causes of this difference, if any? But the increase in the preparedness level could occur due to accidental factors or because of targeted pedagogical impact. For the calculated results of the  $\chi^2$  criterion, see table 1.

**Table 1.**  $\chi^2$  criterion calculation table

Levels	Experimental group no. ( $f_1$ )	Reference group no. ( $f_2$ )	( $f_1 - f_2$ )	( $f_1 - f_2$ ) <sup>2</sup>	( $f_1 + f_2$ )	$\frac{(f_1 - f_2)^2}{(f_1 + f_2)}$
High	10	5	5	25	15	1,67
Medium	5	14	-9	81	19	4,26

Low	5	6	-1	1	11	0,09
Total	20	25		$\chi^2_{crit}=5,991$		$\chi^2_{obs}=6,02$

The results demonstrate that the preparation of future social teachers to conflict settlement on the basis of the restorative approach within the framework of the school reconciliation service activity ensures achievement of the objective of our study – raising the level of students’ preparedness.

## 4. Conclusion

On the basis of the results of this study, we can make the following generalizations:

1. Recent years turned out to be highly stressful for the Russian Education System. Among other problems, it is facing the need to train specialists who would be able to set up the activities of school reconciliation services on the basis of mediation procedures and relationship restoration ideas. The urgency to establish such services is related to the deepening trend towards destructive conflicts among the pedagogical interaction subjects and to the actual formal approach to conflict settlement structures in the modern Russian educational institutions.
2. The learner-centered approach is the most productive way to train future social teachers, who work as school reconciliation service managers. It provides for development of the personality of the future specialist and his growth during the university studies.
3. The experiment has proven the hypothesis: the process of the future specialists’ preparation for work as school reconciliation service managers will be efficient, if the respective training program consists of three blocks and if the training methodology is based on active teaching methods and social and psychological training.
4. The key component of preparation for conflict settlement and management of a respective structure in educational institution is the practical training based on a multi-professional team.
5. The results of the experiments confirmed the statement that the introduction of the training program and the respective methodology in Higher Pedagogical Education Institutions ensures a sufficient level of preparedness of the future specialists for work as school reconciliation service managers.
6. Our study allowed us to identify a few challenges for implementation of school reconciliation services in Russia.
  - The first issue is the insufficient elaboration of requirements for the personality and professional knowledge of the school reconciliation service managers, as well requirements for his/her practical skills.
  - The second issue (staffing) is the lack of qualified specialists who took the course “school reconciliation service manager”, have mediation experience and are able to manage tasks related to conflict settlement on the basis of restorative technologies.
  - The third issue is the orientation on punitive measures, violence and pressure during conflict settlements, both between teachers and among children/teens.
  - The fourth issue is the shortage of information available to parents and, often to school teachers, about alternative settlement methods for conflicts and disputes in the school environment.
  - The fifth issue – the insufficient number of programs aimed at preparation of school students to peacemaking.
  - The sixth issue – interdepartmental interaction difficulties.

7. In the experimental work, we made a few steps towards solution of the problems related to implementation of school reconciliation services in the Russian Federation. In particular, a solution was found for the axiological and staffing issue in the process of training of future social teachers. Now, after the training, the specialists are able to apply the values and principles of the mediation process; they have good command of modern technologies which help resolve conflicts in the school environment.

However, some issues still need to be solved, but in the Russian Federation, the steps in this direction are surely done.

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