Chapter 8

Detecting Problems of Coexistence: Giving Voice to Students

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ABSTRACT

Coexistence, democracy, citizenship, peace, tolerance, respect, cooperation, empathy and other similar terms are some concepts that make up the principles and aims of present education. For this reason, education managers design, develop and assess processes that try to reduce problems of coexistence. The main aim of this chapter is to show strategies for detecting problems of coexistence at school and to analyze the students’ role in these processes. The background of the chapter is based on the following topics: school as a conflictive place, types of problems in coexistence, definitions and characteristics of the term conflict and models to improve coexistence at schools. After considering these ideas, the next step involves the analysis of some strategies for detecting problems of school coexistence. An important part of these strategies emphasizes student role in this task. However, students are often not properly trained to detect problems of coexistence at schools. Consequently, there are some processes for creating a school context based on democratic resolution of conflicts.

INTRODUCTION

Among the most important characteristics of current societies is a market globalization with its international control of institutions that want to compete in this context. The real background of discussion about social services in the last years, making free market compatible with democratic societies, is a
salient problem. Differences between rich and poor persons, a great characteristic of modern occidental societies, tend to be large in postmodern societies. However, social discourse upgrades messages based on education for democratic citizenship where rights and duties are prime between all persons. This problem is an educational paradox to consider.

Coexistence, democracy, citizenship, peace, tolerance, respect, cooperation, empathy and other similar terms are some concepts that make up the principles and aims of present education. In an ultramodern world, where all people are interconnected, there is an obligation to educate students in these values. In this way, Marina (2001) proposes some ideas for new/ultramodern teachers, figures who must: (a) conceive education as a project in ethics (b) be experts in education, (c) enjoy action, (d) be experts in collaboration, (e) adopt an active role and (f) be good propagandists of education.

For this reason, education systems managers (including teachers as classroom managers, headmasters as schools managers, governments as educational policy managers, etc.) design, develop and assess the processes that try to reduce problems of coexistence. Torrego (2008) assumes that, among others, teachers act in three main areas: (1) learning facilitation, (2) coexistence management and (3) as members of an organization. Specifically, teachers as coexistence managers must:

- Develop a role according to this position: assertive/democratic.
- Function as group facilitators:
  - Be affective, esteemed and promote safe relationships;
  - Define and share group goals;
  - Structure roles;
  - Create own rules within the group;
  - Demonstrate quality in communication;
  - Show a sense to ownership; and
  - Care for life group processes.
- Identify strategies for the peaceful resolution of conflicts:
  - Understand and accept procedures for constructive conflict management;
  - Practice these procedures until they became a natural response toward different situations and relationships in school life;
  - Reflect on the rules of coexistence at schools; and
  - Enhance values of collaboration in classrooms, overcoming individuality and competitiveness.

Problems of coexistence have always been present in society. An important thing happens when they become meaningful incidents inside an educational context. Scientific literature illustrates that problems of coexistence have become one of teachers’ main concerns, and students sometimes share this same concern. There are many cases demonstrating the problems of coexistence at schools, many known to the entire world. For example, in the United States of America there are murders in Secondary Schools (often started by students, with several victims) that are shown on all news stations in Europe. Mortal attacks in Palestinian schools, suicides due to bullying in Spanish schools, political assassinations of students in Mexican schools, etc. are some examples of violence in educational contexts. The case of the USA is particularly relevant for all people, in general and special to education (Hartley et al., 2015; Swearer et al., 2012), for children and adolescents (Brown, Birch, & Kancherla, 2005), within current and past media (Ruddock, 2012), in relation to crime and safety (Dinkes et al., 2006), etc.; the list of topics about problems of coexistence at schools within the USA is unlimited.