

DEVALUATION ACTS OF LEARNERS AGAINST TEACHERS AT SLOVAK SCHOOLS

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The paper is a partial result of the project KEGA no. 007KU-4/2017 entitled „Devaluation acts of learners against teachers – manifestations, reasons, prevention”.

Abstract: The contribution deals with the issue of devaluation behaviour of pupils towards teachers. It maps the factors stimulating the onset of bullying teachers by pupils, manifestations of bullying and of aggressive behaviour and it introduces individual selected researches that were implemented within the field of bullying, aggression, undesirable behaviour of pupils towards teachers.

Keywords: Teacher. Pupil. Devaluation of a Teacher. Bullying.

1 Introduction

Nowadays many acts of disrespect against teachers are visible at schools as well as undesirable behaviour of learners not only to their fellows, but also to teachers. This has become an everyday reality and part of dealing with pedagogical situations. The most frequently occurring phenomena are bullying and cyberbullying, aggressiveness, drug addiction, verbal and non-verbal attacks (psychical and physical) on both sides of pedagogical communication. There may be several reasons for this, connected, for example, with the authority of the teacher, unsuitable interaction relations between teachers and learners which may even result into devaluation acts of learners against teachers, etc. As G. Siváková (2016, p. 9) has it, the loosening of school discipline that has occurred in recent years has also contributed to the increase of violence among learners, aggressivity and bullying, which often target teachers as well.

1.1 Devaluation as a social pathological phenomena in schools

As teachers, we may describe such acts, or can characterise them, but it must be clearly said that they are not systematically elaborated. The fact is that educators and psychologists have begun to pay a more systematic attention to this area only in recent years. The impulses for the elaboration of the area in our country can be found in the work of such authors as, for example, J. Hroncová (2016), I. Emmerová (2011, 2016), C. Határ (2007), in the Czech Republic Z. Martinek (2015).

It is the so-called devaluation actions from the side of learners, under which one may understand, for example, the disruption of educational process by various undesirable activities of the learners, including the devaluation attitudes and acts towards the teacher.

The concept of devaluation means, in a wider sense of the word, the depreciation. In educational reality it is more suitable to think about the concept of social devaluation, pedagogical devaluation, school devaluation, depreciation, expressing disrespect towards the participant of the educational process. The devaluation is the decreasing of self-confidence, a measure of disrespect towards a human being, humiliation. It affects the core of our personality and, therefore, it is perceived more painfully than whatever else. Its opposite is evaluation, which is announcing to oneself that one has certain measure, level of respect and reputability, or respectability.

Under the concept of devaluation at school may fall any undesirable behaviour which in any way depreciates pedagogical reality. The devaluation issues will therefore include any risky behaviour of an individual, various manifestations of unfriendly behaviour, psychical torture, interfering with an activity, offending, humiliating, failing to observe required rules, anger,

aggressiveness, aggression, bullying, cyberbullying, a whole set of various social-pathological phenomena, etc. As devaluation acts may be considered any acts related to the devaluation of a personality. If such, or similar acts occur in educational process, they may have extremely negative impact on its performance and results. Practically, it happens that teachers, especially women, often leave teaching profession especially because of such and similar undesirable acts of pupils.

1.2 Research of bullying, aggression, undesirable behaviour of pupils towards teachers

In 2018, the Department of Education and Special Pedagogy, Faculty of Education of the Catholic University in Ružomberok conducted a research focused on the devaluation behaviour of learners towards teachers in the Slovak Republic. The research sample was made up by 401 teachers, of which 82.78 % were women and 17.2 % men. Relatively balanced was the representation of teachers regarding the type of school they work at. 50.4 % respondents taught at elementary schools and 49.6 % at secondary schools. The research sample of teachers came from all regions of the Slovak Republic. Of the respondents who taught at elementary schools, 50.5 % were from the elementary schools, 49.5 % from the secondary schools. Of the secondary school teachers, 27.2 % taught at secondary grammar schools, 39.0 % at secondary vocational schools – study fields. At secondary vocational schools – study fields 6.7 % and 27.2 % at music conservatory. The respondents filled in a questionnaire with 22 examples of improper behaviour, having the Likert Scale with the following options: never, rarely, at times, often, very often. Table no. 1 “The most frequent acts of aggressive behaviour of learners toward teachers” shows the rotated factor matrix consisting of individual items related to improper behaviour. The KMO test result was 0.845 and the Barlett’s Sphericity test was statistically significant ($\chi^2=3628.312$, $p<0.000$).

Three relevant factors were identified: factor 1 which was because of the nature of the associated items named verbal aggression, such as improper loud comments, ignoring, making fun, threatening, etc., factor 2 which was called social aggression (cyberbullying), as, for example, spreading humiliating, ridiculing or embarrassing videos, photos, sound recordings, blackmailing through the internet, etc., and factor 3 which was named physical aggression, as physical assaults, threatening by physical assault or an attempt for a physical assault. Together all the factors explain 45.076% of the whole variants.

Tab. no. 1 The most frequent acts of aggressive behaviour of learners toward teachers

	Factors aggression:		
	Verbal	Social	Physical
Improper comments towards myself	.805		
Ignoring	.774		
Humiliating	.768		
Ridiculing	.764		
Verbal abuses, invectives or vulgarisms	.747		
Demonstrative rejection of an answer or a set task (writing, reading, and so on.)	.724		
Slandering	.682		
Threatening to destroy personal property	.536		
Threatening to use influential acquaintances	.462		
Spreading humiliating, ridiculing or embarrassing videos		.790	
Spreading humiliating, ridiculing or embarrassing photos		.787	
Spreading humiliating, ridiculing or embarrassing sound recordings		.730	
Verbal assaults through		.635	

mobile phone and/or internet			
Threats or intimidations through mobile telephone and/or internet		.598	
Hacking an electronic account (e-mail, social net accounts, etc.)		.549	
Creation of the teacher's fake profile on a social network		.532	
Blackmailing through internet or mobile telephone		.351	
Physical assault			.896
Attempt at a physical assault			.872
Threatening to use physical violence			.734

The research showed that, on average, the teachers most often come into contact with an improper behaviour related to the learners' demonstrative rejection to answer or to do a set task, ignoring, slandering and improper loud comments towards themselves. Less frequently also with verbal insults/abuses/vulgarisms, ridiculing. Least frequently there occur molestation, internet or mobile phone blackmailing, or hacking into an electronic account.

Furthermore, we were interested in finding out whether there is a relation between individual types of improper behaviour and the length of the teacher's practice. From the length of the teacher's practice was expected a better orientation in important areas related to, for example, identification – helping a learner to identify the aim of improper behaviour; stopping learner's improper behaviour; searching for ways of encouraging the learner; how to preserve the teacher's natural authority, and so on. A significant relation was recorded only between the age/length of practice and the demonstrative refusal to answer, or to do the required task. It is a weak, negative relation, which means that the older the teacher is, or the longer practice he/she has, the lesser he/she is confronted with this improper behaviour. Then a significant relationship was identified with the variable of purposeful damaging of personal property at school, reported more by older teachers, or teachers with longer practice. It is also a weak, positive relation. The last significant relation was identified with sexual harassment, the older the teacher is, or the longer practice he/she has, the lesser occurrence the phenomenon has. It is a weak, negative relation.

Subsequently, we focused on the comparison of such acts of improper behaviour as verbal aggression, cyberbullying and physical aggression on the teacher's sex. This fact was verified by the Mann-Whitney U-test for two independent selections and its result is given in Table 2. Based on the significance value ($p > 0.05$), it is possible to claim that there is no statistically significant difference in the factors of improper behaviour between men and women. Men and women are similarly confronted with individual factors.

Tab. no. 2 Improper behaviour with regard to the teacher's sex

sex		N	Average order	U-test	p-value
Verbal aggression	Woman	332	203.13	10415.500	0.313
	Man	68	187.67		
Cyber-bullying	Woman	332	199.12	10828.500	0.471
	Man	68	207.26		
Physical aggression	Woman	332	199.35	10907.500	0.405
	Man	68	206.10		

Then we focused on the difference in the factors of improper behaviour according to the type of school. We verified it by Mann-Whitney U-test for two independent selections and its result is given in Table 3. Based on the value of significance, it may be stated that a statistically significant difference ($p < 0.05$) is only in the factor of cyberbullying. There is no statistically significant difference ($p > 0.05$) in case of verbal aggression and physical aggression. From the data about average order and the

average may result that there is more cyberbullying at secondary schools.

Tab. no. 3 Improper behaviour according to the type of school

sex		N	Average order	U-test	p-value
Verbal aggression	ES	92	85.86	3621.500	0.142
	SS	90	97.26		
Cyberbullying	ES	92	90.41	4040.000	0.671
	SS	90	92.61		
Physical aggression	ES	92	96.04	3722.000	0.034

2 Pedagogical and didactic aspects of teacher work related to devaluation pedagogical issues

According to M. Vágnerová (2004), the problems in the area of behaviour must be solved as soon as possible and it is necessary for the teachers to be able to assess the essence and reason of improper acts, to try to manage them through usual pedagogical means, best in cooperation with parents, and if their procedure were not sufficiently effective, to know whom to ask for consultations or help. The teacher should become aware that his/her opinion of the problematic behaviour of a certain child does not always have to be absolutely objective, since he/she is personally involved in the situation, a learner harasses and enervates him/her, therefore the teacher may not be able to keep a sufficient distance. The teacher should know that it is a normal, natural response, which does not mean that he/she failed professionally.

B. Kováčová (2014) claims that the occurrence of bullying and aggressive acts in various forms points to the introduction of systematic changes and measures. If they are not observed, it is evident that the system with newly created rules will collapse. It must be taken into account that not the rules, but their strict observing may lead to the required changes in the environment where the bullying takes place. According to K. Tišťanová (2012), the school is responsible if bullying occurs in the school environment. It is necessary to approach the class teacher as the first person, potentially the guidance counsellor, or the headmaster, who must deal with the problem and solve it. Solving the problems between the teacher and the learner may not be done only through orders, prohibitions or directions. What is much more effective is to analyse the problems with learners, to look for solutions and eliminate them. "A good teacher will let students learn from the problem, so that they can avoid it in the future, and will not allow to do the pointless devaluation practices in class" (Petlák, E., 2006, p. 89).

It must be said, however, that not every act of offensive behaviour, invectives, or fights, may be qualified as aggressive behaviour and acting of the child, requiring a professional interference. It is generally known that the aggression is given to a human being internally (instinctively), and it depends on several factors whether it develops in him/her to a form of undesirable behaviour, or to such behaviour which may be, medically, qualified as a health problem (Hanuliaková, J. et al., 2015, p. 32). T. Jablonský (2006) claims that through the development of cooperative skills a natural overcoming of aggressive behaviour may be achieved. The strategies and methods of cooperative learning lead the learners to the development of the empathic behaviour of learners, sensitivity, mutual understanding, development of friendly relations, to the overcoming of interpersonal barriers.

Many incentives on how to optimise the education and relations between teachers and learners can be found also in the T. Gordon's publication (2015). He depicts in it "the education without the defeated at school". The essence of this education is searching for an acceptable solution for both parties, i.e. for

teachers as well as learners. It is a method in which “no one can lose”. This method teaches that cooperation, not competition, contribute to the most effective solution of problems. The solution of the problem requires a multicycle process. According to T. Gordon (2015), a good teacher should observe the following four principles:

1. to learn to listen to and try to understand what is heard,
2. to learn when it is necessary to speak with learners,
3. when addressing the problems, no one must feel to be defeated,
4. it is necessary to create and keep open dialogue with learners.

Researches into the aggressivity of learners against teachers mention not only, generally, aggressivity against teachers, but also focus on why some learners afford more to some teachers and less to other ones”. The essence of these differences lies in several factors, or in the style of the work of the teacher with learners.

In 2017, S. Bellová (2018) also conducted a research focused on the aggressive behaviour of learners against teachers in the region of Orava in the Slovak Republic. From the research, which included 154 respondents (teachers), resulted the most frequent reasons of the aggressive behaviour of learners against teachers, namely, shortages in education and internal defects of learners.

2.1 Legislative framework of bullying in Slovakia

The framework for the solution of the problems of bullying in the school environment as well as certain starting point in the solution in Slovakia is provided by the document issued by the Ministry of Education of the SR Directive no. 36/2018 on the prevention and resolution of bullying of children and pupils in schools and school facilities, which regulates basic features, forms and acts of bullying the children and learners, possibilities of prevention and methods of addressing the bullying of learners following the responsibility of the school and school establishment according to the articles of the School Act. This directive became effective on 1 September 2018. This aim of this methodological guidance is, with regard to the seriousness of bullying, to provide basic information to the staff participating in the educational process about the forms of its acts, proposal for solutions, ways of its preventive impact, and the need of cooperation with learners' parents, and particular institutions. The document is published on the website of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic.

The present, even though it is not directly alarming, requires our pedagogical-psychological attention. Each teacher should have knowledge about certain defensive strategies and ways how to manage conflictual situations occurring at school. Relevant are the questions of prevention and a possibility to forestall such acts of students. What is very important is the first, introductory meeting of the teacher with learners, e. g. at the beginning of the school year. These moments are often underestimated, but we assume that they are crucially important for the creation of the authority of the teacher in class and for the building of good, positive and safe climate in class. M. Sirotová (In <http://www.sikana.org/pdf/sirotova.pdf>, online) maintains “that the problem of bullying must be dealt with already during the university training of future teachers.”

2.2 Conclusion

However, it is always accepted that the question of prevention remains most important one. There has been much discussion about this issue, and its sporadic application at schools often lacks effect. Teachers should be becoming aware of the need to create at school a safe space through the building of positive and pleasant climate in class, apply new and partner approaches to learners, new open, non-violent communication, use effective forms of cooperation. To teach learners to constructively deal

with problems and conflicts, stress situations, to develop social and communicational competences of learners.

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