

**EDU WORLD 2022****Edu World International Conference Education Facing Contemporary World Issues****PREVENTING AND REDUCING VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS BY  
FORMING PROSOCIAL BEHAVIORS**

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**Abstract**

The general aim of this paper is to form and develop prosocial behaviors in order to prevent school failure and to promote a unified and positive school environment, with no social exclusion, with the purpose of improving students' academic and social results. Recent research shows that educational institutions should concentrate not only on students' cognitive development but also their socio-emotional skills. In doing so, teachers consistently aim developing student socio-emotional competences therefore building a positive learning environment favorable to academic learning. Social and emotional development should be on the teacher's agenda, they need to understand the great importance of social competence, and the strong link between cognitive, emotional and social competences to better implement them will foster the development of a healthy and inclusive educational climate. In other words, students that are not happy in school are not able to easily focus or learn. Results show how such projects that develop social skills and behaviors are necessary and implicitly lead to school performance.

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## 1. Introduction

Seen in society, and especially in the educational environments all over the world, violence is a phenomenon on the rise particularly in Romania, where social changes have favoured an emergence and spread of new patterns of aggressive acts. Traditional approaches on school discipline continue to be mostly based on punitive and exclusion policies. While teachers used to be perceived as authority, now their authority is questioned, and they face a series of problems especially when dealing with these students that contest their authority. When dealing with students' challenging behaviours, traditional education uses punitive actions and reactive practices, in other words discipline was associated with punishment. As we seek to assure inclusive and positive learning environments, the views and positions regarding disciplining students must evolve. In modern society, teaching students should focus on the process, on the path that leads them to success and responsibility. This is based on the belief that positive behavior, the socially appropriate behavior can be taught.

At school level, the new teaching philosophy aims to positively discipline students, therefore fostering an inclusive and positive educational settings and climate that supports the students' emotional social and cognitive growth and development. Disciplining consists of teaching strategies, aiming at preventing and correcting the present paradigm on education, it is a new approach on behavior management, replacing the traditional paradigm that is founded on punishment, harassment, angst, intimidation, or any kind of aggression (Constantinescu et al., 2017).

Using behavior corrective and preventive techniques, educators are able to impede the acceleration of conflicts in classrooms with students that have socio-emotional and behavioral problems (Folostina et al., 2022). In these situations, it is the educator's task to concentrate on students' energy in positive activities, towards proper, socially appropriate behaviors for the rest of their life. Engaging students in various activities will have positive effects, by reducing disruptive behaviors resulting from lack of activity (Dumitru Tăbăcaru, 2021). Discipline does not mean sanctioning the child, and its long-term purpose is that of helping the child to self-control is and making them understand boundaries, showing them the right path, following us as a sign of love and determination, not just to avoid the pain and the punishment. To positively discipline a child means to apply some fundamental principles and deeds (actions), some to encourage and other to correct. It specifies the boundaries and the limits in a firm but loving manner. Positive and inclusive approach to discipline process praises good behavior and corrects bad behavior, encourages respect for the child, for every child's uniqueness, it assumes understanding the needs, the temper and habits of the child without trying to change them too much.

Under the influence of social consequences most children show change in their behavior. Also, it was shown that, when social changes are applied by a hostile person, the chance for a positive influence is reduced. For example, when a student makes a mistake and the teacher is not satisfied to disapprove using fair methods, but uses aggressive and offensive methods, it may lead to opposite results, the student thus "becoming troublesome".

### **1.1. Prosocial behaviors – meaning and definition of the concept**

When talking about prosocial behavior, we find a wide range of conducts, defined within the interaction between individual and society, manifested by people in their social activity based on social norms and values. Our behaviours have more or less direct consequences for others, and depending on these results they can be prosocial (in case of a positive result) or antisocial (in case of a negative result). Those who do not bother through their behavior, but on the contrary, they strengthen social norms and values, are defined as people that have a prosocial behavior.

In the broad sense of the word, prosocial conduit represents a positive social conduct as opposed to an antisocial one. The phenomenon of helping behavior generates a series of fundamental problems, such as discovering relationships that make people behave in a prosocial manner, ways that can raise the level of prosociality in common groups and communities, identifying ways to encourage alternatives to selfishness (so that selfishness no longer seems normal, and selflessness becomes deviant), outlining some patterns that encourage prosocial attitudes in such forms as mutual assistance, philanthropy, charity, intervention in urgent situations, discovering factors that inhibit helping behaviors, and how people develop a sense of responsibility for others and for society.

The psychosocial issue of prosocial behavior is presented by Chelcea (1998), Chelcea and Iluț (2003). Analyzed within the social action theory, it is worth noting that Chelcea (2008) offers a new perspective on prosocial behaviour considered to be the most adequate analysis of this type of behaviour.

Prosocial conduct is one of the most noble behaviours in the repertoire of human activities (Evertson & Neal, 2006). Sometimes, people act in a manner that apparently goes against their own interests. The phenomenon of helping behavior generates a series of fundamental problems, such as discovering relationships that make people behave in a prosocial manner, ways that can elevate the level of prosociality in common groups and communities, identifying ways to encourage alternatives to selfishness (so that selfishness no longer seems normal, and selflessness becomes deviant), outlining some patterns that stimulate prosocial attitudes in such forms as mutual assistance, philanthropy, charity, intervention in urgent situations, discovering factors that inhibit helping behaviors, the ways in which the sense of responsibility for others and for society develops. Also, the prosocial behavior refers to some of the most diverse actions: starting with the least important, such as greeting, helping an old man get off the bus, etc., continuing with other more important, such as risking their own life to save someone from drowning or from a fire.

Prosocial behaviour includes the helping behaviour, selfless behaviour, interpersonal attraction, trust, sympathy, sacrifice, cooperation. One thing that these actions have in common is their purpose, which is helping the ones around us, the prosocial behaviour targeting to protect and support the others without waiting for external rewards.

According to Constantinescu (2004), through prosocial behaviours we understand those meaningful actions that would have positive consequences for others, without an anticipated reward. To these actions, (Giblin, 2000, p. 113) adds “two more conditions that are necessary to identifying prosocial behaviours, such as: intent (the intention of helping others); freedom of choice, offering help outside professional obligations, without waiting for external rewards”.

Other specialists in the field of psycho-sociology (Constantinescu et al., 2017) consider that this type of behaviour can be defined as the action that only brings benefits to the person receiving the help. Therefore, prosocial behaviour could be understood as being “that intentional behaviour, performed outside professional obligations and oriented towards supporting, preserving and promoting social values” (Chelcea, 1998, p. 439).

Defined as such, the term prosocial behaviour indicates a wider category, that includes both the helping conduct and selflessness and it refers to deeds positively valued by society, it acquires a greater extension, comprising very varied forms: helping others, property protection, self-sacrifice for freedom, for the independence of the homeland. However, helping, protecting and supporting others are the central elements in the system of prosocial behaviours.

Within prosocial behaviour, the act of helping others occupies a central spot. This - has both biological roots and sociocultural significance - is, unlike unilateral help, a type of prosocial conduct that is based on mutual, simultaneous or alternative granting of benefits and services between two or more interaction partners. Help may be insignificant, like when we help pick up an object that someone dropped on the floor, or may be significant, when a person is risking their life by repeatedly returning to a burning house to save children and adults inside. It can be voluntary – through a series of actions to raise charitable funds – or instinctive, when someone runs and dives in the water to save somebody from drowning. Human behavior annalists try to explain its prosocial dimension and, particularly selflessness. The latter refers to the helping conduct that benefits other people, but which requires self-sacrifice from the helper: to grant someone help, as in the parable of the good Samaritan, who was beaten, robbed of all his belongings, by taking care of his wounds and transporting him to the nearest inn where he was hosted on his expense. Altruism refers to some good deeds that are done not out of an obligation imposed by the law, but from an inner sense, which does not allow you to do otherwise when someone's fate depends on your own actions. The cost is high and the results of such selfless deeds appear only for the benefit of the partner.

In terms of scope of the term “prosocial behavior”, we believe that it should not be restricted only to supporting other people, but it should comprise all actions meant to preserve and develop social values, among which, of course, man is the central value.

## **1.2. Forming and developing prosocial behaviors in the educational environment**

In the specialty literature there are numerous studies and research on reducing violence in schools, concern for explaining its causes and effects. In our approach to the implementation of a framework support program for teachers and parents, we relied on specialized studies such as the research conducted by authors specializing in the field (Constantinescu & Constantinescu, 2006).

We foresee the following results in a school that successfully implements the system: learning outcomes increase, school climate becomes positive and enjoyable, families actively participate in school life, teachers express satisfaction with their work, classroom management for discipline improves, students are happy in school as shown in the programs The decrease of violence among children. We can choose! (Fraser et al., 2010).

Every school must have a vision that defines its purpose. School should respond to the needs of all students in order to help them develop social behaviors and cognitive skills. School values contribute to creating a clear, positive and consistent academic culture on the basis of which students' social behavior is formed.

As an institutionalized environment for socialization, school environment must participate not only in cognitive development activities but also in activities that encourage the creation of interpersonal relationships by carrying out activities with a socializing role, promoting social interactions and training students in social skills.

According to Golu (2000) the force relation between students' intellectual development and social development must be balanced by participating not only in cognitive development activities, but also in processes that establish interpersonal relationships, by carrying out activities with a socializing role, promoting social interactions and training students in social skills.

In school we work with the class of students, a social group made up of a number of members equal between themselves and a coordinator, by following common rules and principles. Unlike other social groups, the class of students is an educational group par excellence and aims to meet the needs of all students, in the sense that it proposes structured activities to stimulate development in the social, cognitive, affective and career fields. The interaction in the school group aims at forming behaviors that allow the student to explore their personality traits and specific abilities, to take responsibility for personal behavior, to develop a positive attitude towards themselves and the way of harmoniously interacting with others throughout life.

From a methodological perspective, in the context of the new educational paradigm, where the student represents, according to Neacsu (2018), together with the teacher, one of the agents of educational action, social skills refer to the student's relationship with peers, teacher, family, society and aims to develop the capacity for action and appreciation in the social fields, through a range of social and life skills.

Life skills highlight the development level of the individual's personality, his emotional intelligence, directly related to social and thinking skills. With the help of social skills, we integrate ourselves in different group formations; social development highlights the fact that individuals have acquired appropriate behaviors that are fit to initiate and maintain relationships with others, and reach goals. The immaturity of social interactions leads to poor perception of social indices, to difficulties in regulating emotions and behaviors, to limited understanding of social risks, to immature social judgments. Throughout life we need the social skills in order to: communicate, know ourselves, listen, exert influences on other people, collaborate and cooperate with others, work in a team, maintain relations.

In the category of social skills that are formed and developed at school age, we can list:

- i. approaching other people in a positive and agreeable way.
- ii. free expression of desires and preferences as well as the tendency to act.
- iii. expressing both positive and negative feelings in a clear way, but without directing them towards someone ("not taking it out on others").
- iv. gaining access, receiving and offering invitations to play with other children.

- v. making outstanding contributions to a group project, a play idea or an activity carried out with others.
- vi. showing interest in obtaining information, in order to know more, finding out new aspects, from as many fields as possible.
- vii. being capable to work and perform an activity in a group that is not homogeneous in terms of ethnicity, religion or age.
- viii. being capable to express oneself non-verbally (through gestures, facial expressions, posture).

According to Neacșu (2018), social skills are skills acquired through an extremely complex process, in which the behavioral model has a decisive role, and the role of teachers is to create opportunities for students, to help them have inner freedom and the ability of conducting themselves in their own way (autonomy), taking into account the rules set in the social environment.

Didactic activities are put into value by using active-participatory methods, able to mobilize the student's energies, to focus their attention, to make them follow the lesson with interest and curiosity, to gain their logical adherence and affection towards the new teachings, able to urge them to put into play their imagination, understanding, anticipatory power, memory and strategies that involve teamwork, cooperation, coordination, division of tasks and produces interactive contexts, in which experience is gained and skills are formed based on social abilities: communication, empathy, emotional intelligence, social intelligence.

### **1.3. Controlling and preventing antisocial behaviors in school**

More and more professionals in the field of education claim that a universal trend of the current generation of children is to have many more emotional problems than in the past (Giblin, 2000). They are lonelier and more depressed, angrier and more out of control, more emotional and more inclined to become anxious about anything, more impulsive and aggressive.

The solution depends on how we consider preparing young people for life. It is becoming more and more obvious that the school leaves to chance the emotional education of students, unilaterally overbidding (only the cognitive component) academic instruction.

Therefore, a new vision is needed, a new curriculum regarding what schools can do to ensure a complete training of students that will allow them to better adapt to everyday realities. Unlike aptitudes, abilities are the product of activity and learning. Ability is also “a quality synonymous with skill, dexterity, handiness, highlighting the ease, speed, accuracy with which the student, the man performs certain activities, involving self-organization appropriate to the specific task, supple and efficient adaptation” (Giddens, 2000, p. 198).

Competence is a set of interrelated skills and abilities in a particular field.

Social skills are those that facilitate group interactions.

Starting with social skills, one can develop *social competence*, defined as the characteristic of people capable to produce desirable social influence on other people. Social competence is a type of behavior that leads to social performance (Chelcea, 1998). Being socially competent means being sensitive, especially having the ability to get positive feedback from others; being flexible, including the

ability to adapt to both the primary and to the dominant culture, having empathy, communication skills, and a sense of humor.

In the opinion of Bandura (1989), social learning aims to assimilate certain behavioral patterns, new behavioral patterns, new forms and outlines of interpersonal interaction and thus new personality traits. In a broad sense, all human learning is social because it takes place in cultural contexts and is guided by educational standards. In the narrow sense there is a social learning specialized in making the experience of connection with reality, with the interpsychological values and norms. Regarding the applicability of this learning pattern for the educational act, it goes from the acquisition of some verbal behaviors to the assimilation of some motor skills and to the achievement of some social behaviors, of some attitudes, by identifying with the appreciated adult.

In school, prosocial behaviors are based on the following patterns:

- i. the learning pattern of prosocial behavior through imitation,
- ii. through observation,
- iii. through cooperation and working in groups or teams,
- iv. the model of the good Samaritan,
- v. by watching movies with altruistic language and content,
- vi. by organizing team games, in groups of students,
- vii. by presenting positive, desirable examples, actions and social facts (in family, at school)

Aggression is learned through a process called behavioral modeling. The individual itself does not inherit these violent tendencies but shapes them.

In most cases, children learn violent reactions by observing others, personally or through the environment and the media. Referring to patterns and imitating the observable behavior of the model is a form of learning, present from an early age, being later encountered in various contexts of everyday life. In the childhood cycle (3-10/11 years), the models are significantly represented by adults (parents, family members, teachers). Starting with pre-adolescence (11-14/15 years) and later in adolescence (14/15-18/19 years), family models step into the background, being replaced by the same age group (classmates, friends), which gives them specific rules, benchmarks and opinions. Often, teenagers choose models amongst the most popular celebrities of everyday life (sports, music or media). Models can be real, but also symbolic (words, ideas, behavioral acts that are socially valued, images or events with a certain cultural impact). Bandura was able to establish an exact number of steps in this behavioral modeling process:

- i. shaping social processes;
- ii. attention, including modeled events (affective valence, complexity, functional value) and observer characteristics (physical and sensory abilities, level of perception);
- iii. memory, including symbolic coding, cognitive organization;
- iv. reproduction: physical abilities, self-observation, accuracy of feedback;
- v. external and temporary motivation or reward.

Prosocial behaviors serve four main purposes:

1. Contribute to our personal well-being.
2. Aim to increase status and social approval.

3. Aim to protect self-esteem.
4. They allow you to adjust your emotional state.

## **2. Problem Statement**

Teacher-student interaction has a strong impact on the climate school and on the student's academic performance. If the interaction is positive, build up on a mutual respect and trust, students improve their mindset on the learning process and on the attitude towards school. School success is supported by the academic involvement of students. "Managing disruptive behaviors in the classroom to ensure a positive school climate is a concern expressed by teachers in Romanian schools, confirming the growth of problematic behaviors and the need to seriously address them" (Constantinescu et al., 2019, p. 161).

## **3. Research Questions**

- i. Will school results and prosocial skills improve if the values and expectations of prosocial skills are defined in a clearer manner?
- ii. Are inappropriate, unwanted behaviors expected to decrease, if specific social skills are taught to and mastered by students?
- iii. If teachers implement the principles of the framework programs to support appropriate behaviors, are those expected to increase and inappropriate behaviors to decrease?

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The research purpose was to prevent school failure and to promote a positive, unified school environment, without social exclusion, in order to improve the academic and social results of students.

The general objective: Optimizing the educational climate by implementing an experimental program aimed at training social skills and behaviors in the school environment.

Specific objectives:

- i. Preventing unwanted behaviors and improving the educational environment turning it into a positive and safe one by implementing an experimental program, a support system for positive behavior in order to reduce aggression / violence in school.
- ii. Building and developing a vision of the school and clearly defining common values and expectations regarding social behaviors in the educational institution.
- iii. Monitoring the implementation quality of the framework system (adequate and quality procedures).

## **5. Research Methods**

We used the sociological survey based on the questionnaire as research method. The research design is experimental for the development of students' social skills and is based on a framework program to support teachers in developing students' social skills. The assessment of the initial situation is based on



the evaluating sociological survey which establishes the existence of social skills in school, how to learn the social rules and norms (within the school) and was applied to a group of 300 students and 40 teachers from two schools. The two variables work in the experiment: the independent variable (the experimental program) and the dependent variable (the learning outcomes following the implementation of the framework program). If teachers implement the principles of the framework programs to support appropriate behavior, it is expected that good behavior will increase and inappropriate, violent, aggressive behavior will decrease. Teachers are taught to repeat with students the basic values of the school (respect, tolerance, responsibility), to master and apply them through a desirable behavior.

## **6. Findings**

The scientific process foresaw some main moments. In a first phase, was achieved a documentary analysis of the theoretical studies concerning the

The scientific approach provided some key moments. In a first stage, we carried out the documentary analysis of the theoretical studies on the manifestation of the phenomenon of violence with a certain thematic grid that aimed: the explanatory theories of aggressive, violent behavior, focusing on understanding the etiology of the phenomenon, the types and forms of manifestation, the actors involved and the methods of reduction and prevention; the analysis of the main international and national programs, aiming to identify directions for addressing and managing aggressive behavior that disrupts the learning environment; the analysis of the main ways of detecting and identifying the aggressive potential. In order to carry out the proposed research and aiming to achieve the targeted goals, we used a series of research methods to gather relevant data that would support the confirmation or refutation of the established hypotheses.

The sociological survey through questionnaire, a method chosen for its efficiency in probing and evaluating the size of the educational climate at classroom and respectively school level, by reaching a significant number of students, teachers and parents. The aim of these questionnaires was to obtain a diagnosis and to understand how school environment is affected by the educational actors.

There were created and applied two questionnaires:

- i. The questionnaire for students; “Students’ perception of the school where they learn” was created within the research, based on documentary analysis, focusing on the following aspects: students’ behaviors in school, students’ behavior’s during study classes, their opinion about the school where they study, student-teacher relationships, parent-school relationships. The questionnaire was made of 42 items, mainly closed type, using a Lickert-type scale (where 1 was lowest and 5 highest) because the interest was to detect the appearance frequency of a behavior.
- ii. The questionnaire for teachers; “Teachers’ perception of the working climate in school” was created within the research, based on documentary analysis, focusing on the following aspects: teaching experience, function, working environment, school climate, the support of the institution/community, managing inappropriate behaviors among students. The questionnaire aimed to identify, with the help of the practitioners, different prevention and management

measures of aggressive behaviors. The questionnaire was made of 42 closed Lickert-type scale items (where 1 was lowest and 5 highest).

The questionnaires, applied to a number of 350 students in two schools and 30 teachers, aimed to understand and acknowledge behavioral norms in educational institutions, by operationalizing the values established at school level, and to identify ways of intervention and prevention at a socio-educational level. After applying the questionnaires, we continued by teaching and consolidating students' socio-emotional skills by creating positive relationships with them in the classrooms, where the emphasis should be on positive behaviors.

The aim was to develop a positive learning environment in the classrooms by:

- i. Teaching appropriate social behaviors (e.g., how to be an active listener, to follow given instructions and wait for their turn);
- ii. Systematic recognition of the behaviors expected from the student and instructive correction of inappropriate ones;
- iii. Requiring parents to become positive role models in school (e.g., if an adult speaks loudly to students, they are more likely to imitate such a verbal behavior).

Thus, the aim was to teach certain skills, such as speaking nicely or waiting their turn. These behaviors allowed them to develop a sense of belonging to the school and to become more independent in their learning.

At the end of the program, it should be noted whether the initial result will be changed, improved, if good relationships are established between teachers, parents become participants in school life, students feel safe and happy, learning outcomes increase, aggressive behaviors among students decrease, teachers express satisfaction and support for their work. Results showed us that such projects for the development of social skills are needed, implicitly leading to school performance.

A study that captures the effects of implementing a positive behavioral approach promotes the achievement of a healthy learning environment, because it is often positively correlated with a positive school climate (Constantinescu et al., 2019).

It was found that, by developing social skills and behaviors, through the creation of a solid approach focused on the duality of theory – research, based on the implementation within an experiment, of a framework program in which support is provided for positive behavior at school level, a positive work environment is achieved at class level. The implementation of this research project aims at primary prevention, in terms of improving students' social behaviors and, therefore, creating a positive school climate and improving students' cognitive performance. Primary prevention focuses on creating a behavioral language, common among adults, students and families, in behavior management. The research project aims to reduce behavioral problems among the student population and at the same time, aims to improve the educational climate, in order to build a positive and safe school environment for all as well as to improve school performance.

Behavior management techniques are useful for educators especially when working with students with vulnerabilities, such as students with emotional-behavioral issues or problematic behaviors (Dumitru Tăbăcaru & Ciobanu, 2021). To positively discipline a child means to apply some fundamental principles and deeds (actions), some to encourage and other to correct. Positive approach is effective in preventing

disruptive behaviors, encourages respect for the child, for every child's uniqueness, it assumes understanding the needs, the temper and habits of the child without trying to change them too much.

It was found that most students had practice deficits in social behaviors. To reduce the frequency of inappropriate social behavior (e.g., screaming in the classroom) and to increase the frequency of appropriate behavior (e.g., the use of an appropriate voice level), students need practice, exercise, repetition (Dumitru & Ciucă, 2019).

If in a school the values are operationalized through positive, social behaviors then the work environment becomes optimal for learning, teaching and assessing knowledge.

The determination, that underpinned the idea of conducting this research, is the belief that any education system can be improved by implementing programs or by finding appropriate ways to change.

## 7. Conclusions

The proposed study is based on the analysis of education from a microsociological perspective, this being emphasized on the one hand by highlighting the main ideas of ethnomethodology that offers "a special microsociological approach to the phenomenon of education and on the other hand by capitalizing on microsociology in the activity of (re)defining the school organization and the class of students (Constantinescu, 2018).

At present, schools are considered both an "educational space for personal development, transfer and preservation of knowledge" and an "educational institution, a protected environment, a living space, a realm of experience, a socializing authority, a selection tool and an institution for the reproduction of the company" Gorun (2006, p. 120). Discussions with professionals, concerned with the well-being and safety of students, confirmed the need for further research into the problems that children face.

Within the research project our concern is to minimize the imbalance by emphasizing both sides of the child's needs, based on a systemic sociological approach. In this sense, we list some of the representative sociological theories about education: the theory of systemic analysis, the theory of structural analysis, symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology. The first two are representative theories of macrosociology, which try to provide an explanation of education from an institutional perspective, while symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology are theories in the field of microsociology, concerned with the study of student-student interactions; students - teachers etc. in contexts and sequences of life, of concrete education, which we will also try to achieve in the sociological research undertaking undertaken.

The determination that underpinned the idea of conducting this research is the belief that any education system can be improved by implementing programs or by finding appropriate ways to change.

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