Interpersonal Conflicts between Children as Difficult Situations in Teaching

Abstract

Interpersonal conflicts arising between children are not only difficult for children themselves, but also for teachers responsible for conducting educational and didactic activities with children. Empirical studies (based on the diagnostic survey method: interviews with children, questionnaires for teachers) conducted among one hundred preschool teachers working with six-year-olds, and among one hundred preschoolers, have revealed that a considerable percentage of the surveyed teachers underestimate the importance of children's conflict situations in their educational activities. The teachers are mostly unaware of the developmental dimension of conflicts, and they emphasise mainly the negative impact of such situations on children (46%), often punishing their pupils – as claimed by six-year-olds – for becoming engaged in a dispute (48%). The teachers also fail, to a significant extent, to reflect upon incidents of conflict, be it reflection upon the situation in the course of action or reflection upon the action with the benefit of hindsight. Results obtained in the studies demonstrate that the teachers do not show their pupils what a constructive dispute is about, and do not teach them any ways to resolve a conflict situation in an integrative manner – in cooperation with other interaction partners. They also fail to explain the meaning of dialogue in the conflict process to children, despite claiming to do so (81%). The findings may imply that although teachers know which constructive procedures should be used in situations of conflict between children, they do not put their knowledge into practice because, e.g., they are not competent enough to do so.

Keywords: interpersonal conflict, difficult situation, reflective actions of teachers, destructive and constructive meaning of conflicts, strategy of punitive behaviours in conflict, dialogue in conflict situations, culture of conflict.