CONFLICT MANGEMENT IN SCHOOLS: THE ONUS OF THE TEACHER AS AN INLOCO-PARENTIS

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INTRODUCTION

Sequel to the variability and dynamism of individual cherished values, core objectives and dire needs which most times do not always go *pari-pasu*, conflict occurrences in organizations like schools becomes aggregately inevitable. Thus, the teacher's onus as an *inloco-parentis* in managing such inevitable conflict becomes grossly unavoidable. However, for the teacher to possess the disposition to manage such conflicts effectively in schools, a clear understanding and interpretation of conflict issues are requisite. Such an understanding is direly needed by the teacher so as to be able to address the given encumbrances which may be spotted out in the interaction among parties.[

Conflict management in schools as it relates to teachers pertains to a given condition whereby teachers acquire programmed and patterned mediums through which they can twig and deal decisively with conflict as a way of embellishing conditions of conflict in schools at all times.

There are paradigms for elucidating the causes of those conflict conditions that require effective management in schools, just as there is cornucopia of avenues available at the teacher through which conflict within the precinct of schools could be managed. Those paradigms are what we shall attempt to explore in this paper.

In the classroom and by extension, school precinct, there are certain students-defiant behaviours that could be tolerated while some are and will remain insufferable, for example; fighting in the classroom, answering of phone calls in the classroom at the peak of the lesson, abusing and physically confronting the teacher, stealing, so many to mention but a few. Although, such conflict causing scenarios could be considered to be an integral part of every school system, the teacher's role in preventing or even ameliorating their occurrences especially the ones that are seen to be internecine remains pivotal.

Conflict in school is said to occur when one party perceives the action of another party as encumbering the opportunity for the attainment of a goal. Hence, for conflict to actually

occur in schools, two salient prerequisites must be satisfied, viz; perceived goal incompatibility and perceived opportunity for interference or blocking Conflict in schools can be objective or subjective, violent or nonviolent and positive or negative. But whatever may be the case, the teacher's rejoinder to them can either be assertive or cooperative in nature. Also, such school conflicts may constitute either a prominent debilitating or enchanting effect on the victims.

The concept of conflict management in schools is perhaps an admission of the reality that conflict in schools is inevitable, but that not all conflicts can always be resolved; therefore, what the teacher can do is to manage and regulate them, thus the teacher's role as an inloco-parentis. It is also worthy of note to assert that School conflict management is inclusive of other discrepant variances of conflict management models which are in most cases at the disposal of the teacher.

In this instance, when we talk about conflict management in school and the role of the teacher, we simply mean those responses that the teacher makes in order to deal with the conditions that can encumber the realization of the aggregate objective of the school and the teacher's instructional and/or behavioural classroom lesson objective.

The classification of conflict as it pertains to internal school systems can be between; students and fellow students, Teachers, non-academic staff and teachers, management and teachers, management, non-academic staff and management, non-academic staff, students and non-academic staff and students and management. But for the purpose of this paper, we shall limit our scope or consideration to conflicts between students, teachers, students and teachers.

In this article, we shall commence with the conceptual and theoretical explication of the key concepts of the discourse which are; conflict management, conflict, school and the teacher. We shall also establish the causes of school conflict, state the reason why we need to manage conflict in schools, express some of the contributory roles the teacher could make in the school conflict management process, advance some specific recommendations and finally present our concluding remarks.

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL EXPLICATION OF KEY CONCEPTS

What is CONFLICT?
Conflict has been variously conceptualized by different scholars at different times depending on their inclinations, for example; we can see conflict as the pursuit of incompatible interests and goals by different groups. But Conflict could be defined as a situation in which people, groups or countries are involved in a serious disagreement or argument.

Following this, we can however, assert that Conflict in schools is fundamentally concerned with the creation and establishment of unjust orders, disorderliness, pandemonium and chaotic conditions amongst people arising from a disagreement or ding-dong.

Therefore, for every system like the school to develop, they must deal with conflict situations decisively and squarely; because conflict enthrones disintegration as it simultaneously dethrones harmony, trust, love and tranquility. Let also note that conflict may arise as a result of the inability of two equal or unequal opposing and/or contradictory ideas or opinions to synergize or harmonize.

From the sociological perspective, we can define conflict as a situation in which we experience social disharmony and antagonism. In the same light, conflict could be regarded as a state of social imperfection and instability characterized by strife, bickering, disagreement, quarrels and violence.

The SCHOOL as a Concept
The School is an institution that collects, organizes and synthesizes human knowledge to be transmitted from one generation to the other. The school can also be seen as an artificial social institution which is established for the conscious management of the process of cultural transmission and social integration. This therefore implies that the school as a miniature society cannot be regarded as a natural institution but a "hand work of man" and if it does not engage in developing the human capital and social structures of the school, it will experience defiant and anti-social behaviours.

The school is the aspect of the society that engages in the character moulding of the child, development of the knowledge of the child and skill training of the child through conscious guidance and supervision. The school is a corporate environment where learning and teaching strives.

The school provides a transformational, theoretical and practical learning experiences for the child by bringing the child out from his personal beliefs to the ideologies and experiences of the modern day society. The school also creates better opportunities where the child can become armed with a broader perspective of life and sundry parts of the environment.

The school is the modern day of the society and modern society is a product of the school. Schools are usually created by the society to maintain, allocate roles, socialize, differentiate and reform society. The school is very sensitive to the dilemmas, contradictions and contests in the society, economic, political, ideological, religious, etc conditions of the society.

It is not just an ordinary place where students and teachers meet, but an educational institution with definite goals; a social organization established by the society to perpetuate its cultural heritage. As an institution, it is not just aware of its social environment, but seeks to include as many elements of the societal cultures as possible in the programme of activities of the schools.

Explaining the Concept of a TEACHER
The Teacher could be seen as an individual who consciously and meticulously attempts to cause a much needed transformation in the learning abilities, attitudes and skills of another individual or group of individuals under his guidance and supervision. A teacher is one who consciously attempts to mould character, transfer knowledge and develop desirable skills in another. In fact, the teacher influences expected change in behaviour as a result of learning experiences.
Encumbrance meticulous willy-nilly
The teacher guides the students/pupils through planned activities so that they may acquire richest learning possible from their experiences (Van Dalen and Brittel, 1959). The teacher also interacts with the students under his/her responsibility in order to bring about the expected change in the student's behaviour (Clark 1995 cited in Awotua-Afubuo, 1999).

In the school, the teacher as an inloco-parentis has a pivotal role to play if effective teaching and learning must take place. He must prepare adequately by arming himself with the appropriate and available lesson contents, instructional materials and aid in order to achieve the desirable learning outcome. The teacher must also put himself in the right temperament suitable for a classroom learning situations.

Usually, the teacher is seeing as an individual who is mostly trained in the arts, science and theories of teaching. He/she is the one who can guide, motivate and inspire the learner through a variety of appropriately selected and sequentially arranged learning experiences towards the achievement of specific goals and objectives of the school for positive changes in the society. The effectiveness of the educational system relies on his adequacy, pedigree and devotion to duty (George, 2011).

The teacher designs the appropriate learning environment in such a way that the pupils are restless until they have satisfied their curiosity by interacting with other components of the instructional system which includes the contents, media, materials, teacher, etc. The teacher is to help the individual learn how to learn, so that he not only knows the how and where to obtain needed information, but also develops the habit of enquiry and

be a life-long learner (Achuonye and Ajoku, 2003).

Conflict Management in Schools

Michael Armstrong (2011) the author of *"How to be an Even Better Manager"* in his concrete exposition on how to manage conflict situations in organizations like the school, proposed that there would be clashes of ideas about tasks and projects among individuals. He went further to express that in the process of managing the conflict, disagreement should not be suppressed. For him, to manage such a conflicting situation, it has to be exposed as that could be the only true process to ensure that the issues that caused the conflicts in the organization are explored and resolved.

One salient and indefatigable idea in school conflict management just as Armstrong (2011) will put it, is to "smooth out" differences amongst conflicting parties and then, emphasize the common ground. In school conflict management, the school constituents are usually wheedled to peacefully and harmoniously co-exist by eschewing strife, rancor, bickering, violence, pandemonium, acrimony and even violence; there is a free movement and exchange of ideas, information and messages.

In the school like every other institution in the contemporary society, the institutionalization of conflict management approaches remains sacrosanct since conflict is inherently inevitable. Still on conflict management, Armstrong (2011) asserted that; "new or modified ideas, insights, approaches and solutions can be generated by a joint re-examination of the different points of view as long as this is based on an objective and rational exchange of information and ideas".

Conflict management in school could be explicated as the deployed conscious and concerted effort by either direct/indirect parties to a conflict or invited parties to take proactive or reactive measures to prevent and contain conflict occurrences. In consonance with the proposition of Shedrack (2007) that conflict management could be broadly categorized as being either proactive or reactive, I would rather perceive conflict management as that which deals with those positively effective pre-containment and post-containment approaches towards the handling of conflict between groups or a group.

The term conflict management is sometimes used synonymously with "Conflict Regulation". It encompasses conflict limitation, conflict containment and conflict litigation. It also involves the entire area of addressing conflict positively at different stages, including those efforts made to prevent conflict, by being proactive. Thus, conflict management is explained as being the way of ameliorating adverse effects of conflict through the parties involved in the conflict (Shedrack Gaya Best, 2007).

Managing or controlling conflict in school can involve interaction, or structuring the forms of interaction or reducing or changing external pressures. By "*preventing*

interaction" we mean the strategy used when emotions are high and it involves keeping the conflicting parties apart in the hope that although the differences still exist, the people involved will have time to cool down and consider more constructive approaches. Another is by *"structuring the forms of interaction"* which is a strategy that can be used when it is not possible to separate the parties. Then the *"personal counseling"* is that approach that does not address the conflict itself but focuses on how the two people are reacting to the situation (Armstrong, 2011).

Causes of School Conflict

Like the other microcosms of the society, there are cornucopias of variables or natural and artificial tendencies that usually culminate into conflict in schools. But we shall attempt to streamline our scope to those ones that causes conflict between students, teachers and teachers and students alike.

It is worthy of note to affirm that what may lead to conflict between parties may not cause conflict in other miniature societies. This may be relatively linked to the locality, the individual themselves, the interest they seek to protect personally and the goals they all pursue at their disparate quotidian endeavours. For instance; in the family what may cause conflict could be the blatant refusal of the first son to equitably distribute the legacies bequeathed to them by their demised father. While in the school, the quest to become a class monitor between two students or the struggle between two teachers over who becomes the next principal/headmistress/head master/H.O.D can be a conflict causing factor.

Generally, the intrinsic, egocentric, raucous, vociferous, high-handed and domineering nature of some members of the school community could always cause conflict in school, thus, making it increasingly inevitable.

Notwithstanding, the following could be specifically stated as the causes of conflict in schools especially as it pertains to the teachers themselves, the students themselves and between students and teachers. They are however, highlighted as follows;

- Relatively unfavourable or favouristic administrative policies.

- Individual indifferences in the co-existent, followership and leadership abilities of the students and/or teachers.

- Personality traits or Psychological make ups.

- Discontentment in the amount of salaries and wages/Poor remuneration.

- Riots and Violent protests.

- Quest for Power, Dominance and Political struggle.

- Family background and Cultural differences.

- Unfavourable learning environment or conditions

- Oppression, Bullying, Dictatorship and Victimization by the superior staff.

- Inadequate training and re-training on effective conflict and conflict management strategies.

- Poor classroom management.

- Inability to meet up with personal basic needs.

- Inequitable reward structure and distribution of resources amongst staff.

Why Conflict Management in Schools?
Since it is usually considered to be cumbersome for effective learning and teaching experiences to take place in an environment of turmoil and bedlam, the utmost need for conflict management in school becomes highly imperative. When a school becomes unable to mange conflicting situations, both human and structural development may elude them. In fact, it may be retrogressive and counter-productive towards the educational, academic, social, moral development of the students and by necessary extension, the teacher.

The importance of school conflict management is analogous to the pertinence of eating which is essential condition precedence for human existence. It is unequivocal to posit that school conflict management provides a clement environmental condition for effective learning and teaching to take place.

Where any modicum of anticipated threats of conflict does not abound in the school, the student tends to learn and move freely without any phobia of anxiety. They freely express themselves and participate actively in the class.

To state specifically however, we need to mange conflicts in school sequel to the following salient points;

- It brings about a clement environmental condition for effective learning and

teaching to take place.

- It helps to establish and maintain peaceful and harmonious co-existence between the human resources of the school.

- It brings about the effective and efficient utilization of the limited/scarce resources of the school.

- It brings integrity to the school, paints it in a positive image in the larger society and then rightly positions and re-positions it in the committee of schools.

- It contributes in the improvement of the school's aggregate productivity.

- It leads to the rise in the demand of the products and services of the school.

- It accentuates the level of peaceful and harmonious co-existence between the constituents of the school community.

- It helps to restore and maintain peace and tranquility in the school.

- It promotes political stability

- It gives the school the requisite disposition to meet up with her social corporate responsibility.

SCHOOL CONFLICT MANAGEMENT: The Role of the Teacher
Let me begin by alternatively hypothesizing that, the onus of the teacher in school conflict containment is critical and at the same time, pivotal. The reasons for my avowal are not far-fetched but copious as the teacher could be considered to be the centre piece of conflict management in schools.

The teacher's responsibility in school as an inloco-parentis goes beyond classroom teaching into the encouragement and promotion of peaceful and affable attitudes in the students through instruction and, guidance and motivation. The teacher is to exemplarily model his life within the school precinct so as to build sustainable harmony and cordiality between him and fellow teachers.

There are five momentous aspects in the behaviour of the teacher through which the teacher can influence group dynamics in the school and also effectively and efficiently discharge his onus of conflict management. Such pertinent areas may include;

- Maintaining good classroom structure which could be either cooperative or

competitive;

- The nature of leadership which the teacher chooses to adopt and such leadership pattern could either be participative, directive or permissive;

- How compatible the goals of the teacher and that of the students are;

- The level of inter-personal relationship which may involve the students-teachers patterns of communication and attraction within the group and

- The kind of sub-groups within the group size and composition (Yelon and Weinstein, 1977:337 cited in Awotua-Efobo, 1999:293).

When a teacher becomes conscious of these important areas and works assiduously to institutionalize them in his quotidian school activity, he invariably works against possible conflict causing occurrences.

In school conflict management situations where the teacher will have to play the role of a third party, he must avoid the temptation of supporting or appearing to be supporting either of those in contention. Rather, the teacher should adopt a counseling approach which involves;

- Active, attentive or effective listening

- Observation as well as listening

- Helping the conflicting parties (students) understand and define the problem by posing pertinent open-ended questions

- Recognizing their personal feelings and allowing them to express them

- Helping them define the problems for themselves

- Encouraging the students to explore alternative solutions

- Getting them develop their own implementation plans and also provide pieces of advice and help should they ask (Armstrong, 2011:154).

Deploying the process of "constructive confrontation" which aims at getting parties involved to understand and explore each other's perceptions and feelings, the teacher can also perform his role of managing conflict in the school by systematically and squarely confronting the issue; but on the basis of a joint analysis of the main issues of the conflict situation and the real attitudes exhibited by the parties involved. He is to allow them

express feelings which will be analyzed with reference to specific events and behaviours rather than mere inferences and speculations about motives (Ibidem, 2011).

The teachers by virtue of their position as *inloco-parentis* and in a bid to contain conflict should have control in order to create conducive teaching/learning environment devoid of rancor and disagreements. That is, the teacher should judiciously administer rewards and punishments in an attempt to manage conflict and maintain the type of environment most conducive so as to realize the classroom instructional objectives, aims and objectives of the school and the general goals of education. Every student must be made to twig those control measures which involves the teacher's "dos" and don'ts and their consequences (Awotua-Efobo, 1993:298).

As part of school conflict management strategies for teachers using realistic control measures, Awotua-Efebo (1999) quoting Perterson (1960) adduced the following key points on classroom control;

- Be businesslike

- Be prepared

- Keep lesson and presentation interesting

- Know when to overlook

- Know when to assert oneself

- Do not bluff

- Be consistent

- Be fair

- Do not pretend that you know everything

- Get to know your students

- Keep your sense of humour

The personality traits or psychological makeup of the teacher should be perceived as the single most pertinent variable in school conflict management as the peaceful and affable quotidian disposition of the teacher in the school environment also affects the student's dispositions to conflict. That is, the teacher's ability to develop an impeccable personality, exhibit axiomatic and legitimate professional competences, communicate his

thoughts and ideas in a decipherable approach, create a harmonious interpersonal relationship and meticulously use the available time at his disposal contributes fundamentally towards the containment and control of chaotic occurrences in the classroom learning environment and by extension, the school precinct.

Also, the teacher's ability to perform his role of managing conflict in school should commence by raising and resolving the fundamental question of how the teachers themselves perceive the conflict in relation to how the other parties to the conflict also perceives the conflict. Hence, working in tandem with the opinion of McGregor (1960) as was alluded to in Weihrich *et al,* (2010), such viewpoint, must require some relative thought that are anchored on the perception of human nature.

In view of the insatiability of human wants and since their continuous quest to attend to these needs at all cost may usually culminate in conflict in schools it behooves on the teacher to deploy his requisite motivation theories such as that of Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (1986), Frederick Herzberg's hygiene theory (two-factor) (1959), Douglas McGregor's theory X and Y (1960), Victor H. Vroom's expectancy theory (1964), Bandura, *et al* (1954). Thus, just as Weihrich *et al,* (2010) will affirm, by deploying those theories of motivation which he/she (the teacher) hopes will lead to the satisfaction of those drives and desires, the teacher has invariably induced into the student the utmost need to eschew those behaviours that could result into conflict thereby, making the student act in a more acceptable and desirable manner.

Similarly, the teacher in a conscious effort to carry out his/her role of conflict containment and regulation, must also provide a conducive learning and teaching atmosphere that will be devoid of disagreements, pandemonium, rancor and even strive by clearly demonstrating a clear understanding of the concept of motivation and effectively applying its core principles especially as it pertains to behaviour modification.

Also, another way through which the teacher can manage conflict in the school is through the use of the equity theory of motivation as propounded by J. Stacy Adams, (1963) which is referred to as an individual's subjective judgment about the fairness of the reward he or she gets, relative to the inputs (which includes factors such as effort, experience, and education), in comparism with the reward of others (Weihrich, 2011:331). This approach is relatively recommendable for the teacher who is playing the role of a conflict manager. This is because; it makes for a balance of the outcomes/inputs relationship for one student in comparison with that of another student and that if the conflicting students continue to perceive the reward for their classroom performance and active participation in school activities/projects as been inequitable or not being evenly distributed, they will tend to be rancorous in behaviour which will in turn, culminate in a

social unrest.

Since in the classroom or school, a breakdown of law and order mostly arises as a result of ineffective classroom management and poor managerial control measures respectively, the teacher's role in this regard is to keep the classroom discussions lively, relatively motivated and all inclusive – all should be carried along. To also contain conflict, it is also necessary for the teacher to be acquainted with his/her students in terms of what Awotuo-Efebo (1999) would regard as their cognitive level (vocabulary understanding level), open-mindedness (willingness to accept ideas), information and techniques that is most likely to gain their attention. Hence, taking their minds away from thoughts that could bring about conflict.

By way of managing conflict in schools, the teacher could also use reinforcement and punishment. Reinforcement according to Slavin (2000) in Vipene (2005), is any consequences that strengthens a behaviour" and those 'reinforcers' could either be negative or positive. While punishment according to Akinade (2001) in Vipene (2005) is an aversive event or stimulus that reduces or checks the continuation of emission or a preceding response" and they include; timeout, response cost and extinction which must ameliorate conflict occurrences and reverse unwanted conflict causing behaviours.

Like some other miniature societies, the teacher in an attempt to manage conflict in school especially as it pertains to him and fellow teachers can also adopt the following Western Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) strategies. These methods under discuss and as has been highlighted by Ojiji (2005) may include the following;

- Problem-solving

- Compromising

- Accommodation

Shedrack (2006) also highlighted certain suggestions which could also be added to the list. They are presented as follows;

- Communication

- Collaboration

- Negotiation

- Conciliation

- Mediation

- Arbitration

- Adjudication

The teacher is meant to be seen applying those conflict resolution strategies in his/her personal life and also instruct and guide the students as they strive to practice conflict prevarication at all cost. More so, since in the school, what one student or group of students perceives as having the potency to create conflict may at the same time, lack the strength to cause conflict for another, the teacher can also make necessary reference to some universal cultural norms and values. This is so because, culture which is regarded as a common good, and as a pertinent indispensable and independent variable can also ascertain the most preferable conflict handling style for the teacher.

CONCLUSION
Right from the inception of this literary piece, our dire desire has been to discuss conflict as it pertains to school environment and also explicate those strategies the teacher can deploy so as to be able to actually handle the conflict. However, from the above exposition, one could actually assert that relatively that desire has been satisfied.

Al though, the teacher is considered as not being the only individual solely saddled with the onus of school conflict management, his momentous role remains key. Considering this onerous task placed on the teacher, he should be supported, encouraged and complemented by both the school management and all other agents of socialization.

Even though conflict is most times regarded as being positive, its adverse effects still remains insufferable, excruciating, unbearable and even debilitating. So, the teacher should also channel his watch light to that flashpoint where conflict may abound.

Both students and teachers must always look in wards in situations of conflict for a proper understanding and judicious utilization of the appropriate conflict management strategies.

In all, the teacher as an *inloco-parentis* has a central role to play as far as school conflict is concerned and to attain this unprecedented feet, the teacher must seek to understand,

know how to apply the relevant conflict management theories to the school situation and the rationale behind the various conflict management spectrums especially as it pertains to the school precinct and classroom learning environments.

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