

Mediating Over Three Cups of Tea

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Years ago, at the school where I was teaching, we had a vice-principal who was a hardworking but short-tempered man. Despite his years of experience, his patience would sometimes wear thin, leading to harsh reactions.

That day, everything happened suddenly in the school hallway. A fourth-grade student—a lively and energetic boy—continued to misbehave despite repeated warnings. Frustrated by the lack of discipline, the vice-principal lost control and delivered a sharp slap across the boy's face. The blow was so forceful that the child fell to the ground, landing on his wrist against the cold, hard floor.

The boy, writhing in pain, tried to hide his injury by holding his hand behind his back. But at home, when his parents saw his swollen wrist and realized he couldn't move it, they immediately took him to a doctor.

The next morning, while I was standing in the hallway with some staff members, the entrance door suddenly swung open with a loud bang. The student walked in—this time with his arm in a cast. Behind him, his furious parents entered, their faces tense with anger. His father, a large man with fiery eyes, stormed in and shouted:

– Where is the vice-principal?!

Seeing his enraged expression, I immediately sensed that this situation could escalate into a serious physical confrontation. I knew this man well—we were from the same neighborhood—and I was aware that he was not a calm person. In that moment, I made a

split-second decision to prevent an unfortunate incident. I quickly turned to the vice-principal and whispered:

– Get out of here now; this isn't the time! Let me try to handle this.

The vice-principal gave me a worried look, but when he saw the determination on my face, he lowered his head and silently disappeared from sight.

The student's father was still scanning the hallway with anger. To de-escalate the situation, I quickly approached him and said in a calm tone:

– What happened? Why are you so upset?

Still shaking with anger, he replied in a trembling voice:

– Look, that vice-principal of yours hit my son so hard that his wrist broke! And now I've come to settle the score!

For a brief moment, I hesitated, wondering if I could manage this situation. But two things gave me confidence: first, I knew this man well since we lived in the same neighborhood. Second, we spoke the same native language—Azeri. I knew that if I spoke to him in his mother tongue, I might be able to calm him down.

So, in a softer tone, I said:

– Let's go to the library; we can talk more comfortably there.

He paused for a moment but then nodded. Along with his wife and son, we walked into the library. We had barely sat down when Masoumeh, the school's caretaker, brought us three cups of tea—cups that were about to change the course of our conversation.

The father, still angry, began recounting the incident. He spoke of his son's pain, the difficult night they had endured, the hospital visit, and his fury toward the vice-principal. I was genuinely upset by what had happened, so I completely acknowledged his feelings. I told him he had every right to be concerned about his child and that the vice-principal's behavior had been completely inappropriate. As we talked, the tension in the room gradually eased. By the time we finished our first cup of tea, the shouting had subsided.

After a few minutes, I said:

– Look, the vice-principal is an old man who has been working in schools for thirty years. What he did was wrong, no doubt about it. But maybe this time, we should forgive him.

The father sat in silence for a moment. Then, in a softer voice, he said:

– I will forgive him—only because of you. But on one condition: he must never punish another student like this again.

His words had barely left his mouth when, suddenly, his wife—who had remained silent until then—burst out angrily:

– Why should we forgive him?! He hit our child, broke his wrist—he must be held accountable!

The father, as if suddenly enraged by her protest, turned to her and shouted:

– Sit down and be quiet! When someone from my hometown and my own language asks me to forgive, you have no right to object!

The woman, stunned and fearful, fell silent. For a brief moment, the room was filled with silence. Just then, Masoumeh arrived with a second round of tea. This time, everyone drank in silence.

After finishing their tea, the father and his family left the school—without any physical confrontation.

Once they were gone, the vice-principal, still pale, approached me with a look of gratitude in his eyes. He said:

– I don't even know what to say.

I simply looked at him and said in a firm tone:

– Just one thing—never, ever, physically punish a student again.

He lowered his head and said nothing. But as long as I remained in that school, no student was ever subjected to corporal punishment by him again.

And I realized that sometimes, mediation means three cups of tea, a bit of patience, and knowing exactly when to speak in someone's native language.

Mediating Over Three Cups of Tea: An Experience in Crisis Management in an Educational Setting

Introduction

Educational environments, particularly at the elementary and secondary levels, are not merely places for knowledge transmission. They serve as spaces for students' social, moral, and cultural development. Within this context, the interactions between teachers, administrators, students, and parents often present challenges that require proper management. One of these challenges is addressing student disciplinary issues and the sometimes inappropriate reactions of school staff. The story narrated here illustrates a crisis in an educational setting that was successfully managed through mediation, cultural awareness, and effective communication. This account will be analyzed from three perspectives: psychological-pedagogical, cultural, and sociological.

1. Psychological and Pedagogical Analysis

In educational psychology, the use of punishment and reinforcement is a key area of study. Research has shown that corporal punishment not only fails to improve student behavior but also has negative consequences, such as decreased self-esteem, increased aggression, and a fear of the learning environment. In this case, the school vice-principal, by resorting to physical punishment, not only failed to correct the student's behavior but also caused physical and emotional harm. More importantly, the parents' reaction demonstrated how violence within the education system can lead to intense social backlash.

From a crisis management perspective, the intervention of a teacher who was able to de-escalate the situation using psychological and communicative skills represents a successful example of conflict resolution in educational settings. By creating a calm atmosphere in the library, using a shared language, and allowing the parents to express their emotions, the teacher established a safe space for dialogue and diffused the tension. This approach aligns with well-established conflict resolution strategies, which emphasize

active listening, emotional validation, and guiding discussions toward constructive solutions.

2. Cultural Analysis: The Role of Language and Social Bonds

In many cultures, language is more than just a means of communication; it is a tool for fostering trust and reducing tension. In this story, the use of the parents' native language (Azeri) played a crucial role in managing the crisis. Sociolinguistic studies indicate that speaking in one's mother tongue in high-stress situations can enhance feelings of closeness, empathy, and trust.

Additionally, this story highlights the importance of local cultural ties in resolving conflicts. The father, upon realizing that a fellow community member was asking him to forgive, found it easier to control his anger. This demonstrates how social connections and cultural capital within local communities can contribute to conflict resolution.

3. Sociological Analysis: Power Structures and Gender Roles

This account also reveals interesting aspects of power dynamics and gender roles. The student's father, as the primary decision-maker, stood firmly against the vice-principal. However, when a trusted intermediary encouraged him to forgive, he reconsidered his stance. Meanwhile, the mother, still outraged by the injury to her child, protested but was silenced by her husband. This reflects the patriarchal cultural structure in which major decisions are often made by men, while women's voices may be marginalized in moments of conflict.

From a sociology of education perspective, this story illustrates how power structures in schools and families are interconnected. The vice-principal, as an authority figure in the school, initially used his power to impose discipline through violence. However, under social pressure and mediation, he was compelled to change his approach.

Conclusion

This experience highlights several important lessons about conflict management in educational settings:

1. The importance of emotional control in educational environments: The vice-principal's inability to manage his anger led to a major crisis. This underscores the need for educators and school staff to receive training in emotional regulation and student behavior management.
2. The role of mediation and communication skills: Effective conflict resolution requires patience, wisdom, and strong interpersonal skills. In this case, the use of a shared language, the invitation to dialogue, and the creation of a calm environment transformed a potentially violent confrontation into a constructive discussion.
3. The need to replace punitive disciplinary methods with constructive alternatives: Violence in schools, whether from teachers or parents, can have lasting negative effects on students' personal development. Therefore, school culture must shift from corporal punishment to positive reinforcement and corrective disciplinary methods.
4. The impact of cultural and social ties on conflict resolution: In close-knit communities, language and social relationships can be powerful tools for reducing tension and resolving disputes. Understanding these factors and using them wisely can prevent many conflicts from escalating.

Ultimately, this story illustrates that a teacher's role goes beyond academic instruction. Educators can act as social facilitators, agents of change, and mediators in resolving school-related conflicts. Mediating over Three Cups of Tea is not just a personal experience; it is a lesson for all teachers and school administrators striving to create a more peaceful and humane learning environment.

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