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Chapter

Conflict and the Quality of Teachers' Work

Beata Pitula and Monika Morgala

Abstract

The text presents research on the conflicts revealed by teams of kindergarten teachers and their effects on the professional functioning of teachers and the quality of work of the preschool institution. Their results confirmed the prevalence of conflicts, their mainly hidden and emotional nature and negative consequences in the form of lowering the quality of the care, educational and didactic functions performed by the kindergarten teacher.

Keywords: conflict, teacher's work quality, teacher, conflict in kindergarten, conflict in teaching teams

1. Introduction

Education is one of the most important ingredients of human existence, and education *has long been recognized as an area of social life that largely determines the fate of individual people, various groups, nations and countries* [1]. Undertaking research and reflection embedded in the perspective of educational everyday life is important from the perspective of perceiving schools and kindergartens in the category of institutions that are *the basic tool of the State for the organization of universal education* [2] and understood in terms of a social institution, which is part of a more complex structure, it is characterized by a relatively constant *system of values, norms, statuses, role regulations, social groups and organizations (...)* related to the need to provide members of society with *basic intellectual and cognitive skills* [3]. The education of children and young people becomes a determinant of the development of every human being, and the teacher and the quality of his work will be of key importance here.

To implement the social functions imposed on education (socialization, social integration, establishing a social position, cultural innovation and other hidden functions) [4], the specificity of the school environment, and in particular the interpersonal conditions of social coexistence, including communication competences and conflict resolution styles, taking into account the roles played in this particular community [5–7] should be examined. The main processes of team interaction are therefore: communication, conflict and coherence [8]. Interpersonal communication in an environment diverse in terms of characters, attitudes, worldview and psychosocial competences is not easy, but it is the only method of effectively communicating information, emotions and own opinions in a team, including the teaching team.

Disruptions in the communication process cause misunderstandings and tensions, the consequences of which are conflicts within the teams. The effects of these conflicts may be destructive for an individual teacher, the teaching team and the entire institution, or on the contrary - positive, implying beneficial changes. *The key (...) is the belief that this conflict is a natural and inevitable part of life, and the realization that it is our reaction or responses to the conflicts that make the conflict situation constructive or destructive* [9]. However, no matter what happens to teachers in this work, both in a positive and negative sense, *if the work negatively affects the teacher's well-being, health and functioning, the negative consequences will secondarily translate into the quality of their work and the activities of the entire educational institution* [10].

Combining the scientific interest in the work of teachers and the factors determining their professional functioning and personal connections with the management of preschool education institutions, we made an attempt to diagnose the effects of conflicts on the effectiveness of the work of preschool teachers and the entire preschool institution.

2. The nature of the conflict

All activities in educational institutions are aimed at cooperation and cooperation in a team. Bearing in mind that the concepts of developing these competences are based on the norms and principles of social life, the need to create a safe atmosphere based on mutual trust and a sense of interdependence, then it becomes important to recognize conflicts, their sources, their course and the effects that they may entail [11].

The concept of "conflict" is a complex term, which is reflected in various attempts to define the concept. Most of them treat a conflict as *a clash resulting from different attitudes, priorities, methods of proceeding in the face of the actual object or situation* [12] or *a dispute between two or more members or groups resulting from the necessity to share limited resources or work or taking a different position, different goals, values or perceptions* [13].

On the other hand, with regard to interpersonal relations, the conflict may appear as a declared *fight between at least two mutually dependent parties who perceive the incompatibility of goals, the lack of mutual benefits and recognize that the other party creates obstacles in achieving the goal* [14].

In the context of human resource management, conflict is perceived both as an impulse contributing to increased creativity and the cause of many *unfavorable phenomena* [15].

On the basis of the quoted, selected by the authors, definitions of the phenomenon, one can notice the characteristics of conflict situations, such as the presence of at least two mutually dependent parties, and its disclosure takes place when one of the parties notices that its goals, tasks and values are in opposition to the attitudes and behavior of the opposing party. Moreover, it is noticeable that actions are taken to hinder or block the achievement of the goals and tasks of the opposing party. In the nature of conflicts, it is important that they can arise for non-objective reasons and are accompanied by strong emotions [16].

In the context of our research on conflicts and the quality of teacher's work, important are the functions assigned to conflicts - positive (functional, constructive) and negative (dysfunctional, destructive) functions and their etiology.

The positive function of conflicts is reflected in favorable changes, resulting in increased initiative and creativity in the work of teachers, or changes and modifications within the entire organizational structure.

Then, the negative function of conflict situations ultimately leads to a reduction in the effectiveness of the professional work of individual teachers, has a demotivating effect on undertaking innovative activities and, consequently, reduces the quality of work of the entire educational institution.

The etiology of conflicts is conditioned by various factors related to the nature of a man and the place where he performs his professional functions (Więcek-Janka, 2006, p. 116). Ross A. Webber expressed the view that the determinants of conflicts are three factors: incompatibility of goals, community of resources and interdependence of actions [17]. One of the best-known classifications of the sources of conflicts (and at the same time the typology of conflicts) is Christopher Moore's conflict wheel. He divided the sources (and types of conflicts) into the following conflict: data, relations, values, structural and interests. Of these five, the conflict of values is considered to be the most serious, as it arises as a result of world views, hierarchy of values, values of one's "self" (identity), as well as habits and conventions.

3. Professional functions of the teacher and the quality of his work

In pedagogy, there is a known (...) thesis that working conditions determine the quality of the effects of action S. Brzozowski [18].

In the education system, it is the teacher who plays a key role, because education is to a large extent what the state-led educational policy wants, but at the same time it is really the same as everyday teaching activity (Suchodolski, quoted in [19]). The teaching profession is assigned functions - covering specific, specific tasks. There are many classifications of teaching functions in the literature, but the best known is the division into the teaching, educational, caring, environmental, research and life orientation of young people [20].

The age of preschool children (2.5–6 years old) is associated with intensified activities related to the care and educational and didactic functions of teachers. They focus on tasks related to:

- creating a safe, friendly atmosphere for children, taking into account their developmental needs (caring function);
- planning and organizing educational activities, developing children's social competences and cooperation in the peer group and with adults (educational function);
- coordinating cognitive processes that develop the competences of preschoolers in terms of knowledge and practical skills, primarily preparing them to start learning at school.

All activities related to the implementation of tasks resulting from the performed professional functions are based on properly selected and adapted to the psychophysical abilities of children, educational interactions [21]. Hence, it is imperative that their implementation by teachers meets the highest standards defined by the provisions of the educational law and the code of teaching pragmatics. It is equally important to ensure appropriate conditions for their professional functioning.

Therefore, an important aspect of the implemented educational reforms is the general tendency to improve the quality of education. This quality relates to the work of the teacher and, consequently, to the quality/effectiveness of the work of the entire kindergarten. It seems obvious, because quality becomes an equal challenge, measure and requirement of contemporary pedagogical theory and practice [22].

Factors determining the quality of a teacher's work can be divided into:

- conditions of psychological nature - related to functional motivational mechanisms for the implementation of goals and tasks resulting from professional functions and general personality competences such as: ambition, creativity, openness or understanding the need for continuous development;
- pedagogical conditions, resulting from clearly defined goals and educational tasks as well as appropriate preparation for the profession;
- praxeological conditions related to efficient operation conditioning effective pedagogical activities as well as monitoring the quality of one's own work;
- conditions of social nature, relating to interpersonal relations in the institution, organizational climate, the social prestige of the teacher's profession and the social and professional roles it performs, as well as the appropriate material and organizational prosperity of the workplace [23].

As can be seen, the quality/efficiency of the teacher's work in the performance of the assigned professional functions is determined by many different factors that are referenced in specific and diverse interpersonal relations occurring in educational institutions. The planes of these relations include not only the teacher and the student, but also the teacher - parents /legal guardians, teacher - student's /child's assistant, teacher - specialists/therapists; teacher - headmaster; teacher - teacher/group of teachers or teacher - other staff of the institution. As a result, it can be assumed that interpersonal relationships and all related processes and phenomena constitute a special place in the work of teachers, and conflicts are one of them. Since the very beginning of teaching and educating children and youth, a discussion has been held on the teacher and his professional functioning.

Empirical investigations in the field of pedeutology relate to a large extent to such areas as: predispositions and competences, teacher's autonomy, professional satisfaction and well-being of educators, professional burnout and its implications for the professional functioning of teachers, stress in teachers' work and coping strategies.

Meanwhile, various external factors (including permanent reforms of the education system; increasing requirements and expectations on the part of state and local authorities, parents and students; excessive bureaucratization or insufficient financing of education) as well as internal (e.g. organizational culture of an educational institution; the level of psychosocial and professional competences of teachers; occurrence/intensification of salutogenic and stressogenic factors, etc.) (see [10, 24–26]) may be determinants of conflicts between members of teaching teams.

It should be emphasized at this point that although the topic of many works is the correlation between disharmony in personal and professional life, without any specific indication of teachers, the scheme of implication of conflicts for various areas of life is the same (see [27–31]).

The current literature on conflicts in educational institutions focuses mainly on conflict situations and ways of resolving them among students (see [31–36]).

However, the perception of educational institutions such as schools or kindergartens in the category of organization, allowed for the diagnosis of conflict and the ways of using it as a potential tool for managing the institution. This, in turn, shows the potential for conflict in the management and guidance of an educational institution with the use of human capital (teachers and other staff) and other assets (tangible and intangible).

In the literature, more and more space is devoted to the topics of leadership of principals and teachers, and conflict management in schools (see [37–41]). One important fact should be noted - how little attention in the literature is paid to conflicts and their implications on the work of kindergarten teachers. And yet, pre-school education, as clearly emphasized in the 1972 report on the state of education in the world under the patronage of UNESCO¹, is a key stage in the *effectiveness of the state's educational and cultural policy* [42].

4. Methodology of own research

4.1 Research objectives and research focus

The aim of the research was to diagnose the most common causes of conflicts in teaching teams and the relationship between them and the professional functioning of the teacher and the effectiveness of the kindergarten's work, while internal conflicts in the teaching teams of kindergartens were the subject of the research.²

In order to obtain reliable results, the research problems were formulated in the form of questions:

1. Whether and what kinds of internal conflicts occur in the teaching teams of kindergartens?
2. Are internal conflicts in teaching teams related to the professional functioning of preschool teachers and to what extent?
3. Do internal conflicts occurring in teaching teams affect the effectiveness of the school/preschool institutions and to what extent?

4.2 Methods and techniques used in the research

Taking into account the nature and complexity of the research topic, we decided to triangulate research techniques within a diagnostic survey and an individual case study. The use of the survey method made it possible to diagnose conflicts among teachers, while exploring the quality of their professional functions and the

¹ The project "Learn to be" was chaired by E. Faura and included 81 expert opinions of many eminent scientists, including I. Illich, J. Piaget, E. Reimer, W. Okoń and B. Suchodolski. The report was a critical assessment of the current state of world education and the prospects for its development (cf. [2], pp. 6–7).

² The presented analyzes are a selected part of the research on the problem of conflicts in teaching teams carried out as part of the doctoral dissertation of Monika Morgala MA, prepared under the scientific supervision of Beata Pitula PhD Associate Professor of Silesian University of Technology.

effectiveness of the entire preschool education institution. The individual case studies allowed to identify and understand deeper mechanisms of the emergence of conflicts in teaching teams, as well as their impact on the teacher's professional functioning, and the comparison with the results of the survey method showed regularities related to the mental state, self-esteem and effectiveness of professional activities.

The techniques that were used in our empirical investigations were questionnaires addressed to teachers, an interview with principals and selected teachers, a psychosocial competence test and observation.

The analysis of the obtained research material was carried out with the use of statistical methods. Measurements were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 25. It was used to analyze basic descriptive statistics, Pearson's and Spearman's r correlation analysis, Student's t -tests for independent samples, as well as Mann Whitney's U tests and one-way ANOVA. The classic threshold $\alpha = 0.05$ was adopted as the level of statistical significance.

5. Conflicts and the quality of teachers' work

5.1 Socio-demographic profile of the study group

The research was carried out in public and private pre-school education institutions (kindergartens, pre-school units in schools and other forms of pre-school education - kindergarten points) in the Rybnik commune, operating at least since September 1, 2020. The survey was conducted in the period from 09.2020 to 09.2022 with 305 kindergarten teachers and 37 principals as participants.

All respondents turned out to be women, so our analyzes did not take into account the gender determinant of the studied population. Feminization of the kindergarten teacher profession in terms of identifying and managing conflicts is crucial, as shown by global research. Women treat conflict situations more emotionally than men [43]. Moreover, they have greater abilities in interpreting non-verbal messages, and their reactions in conflict situations are more intense than in the case of men (i.e., in [44–48], cf. [49]), as in the case of commitment and striving to resolve a conflict situation.

In men, on the other hand, there is a noticeable tendency to present an attitude of withdrawal and denying the existence of a conflict (see [46, 50]). Bearing this in mind, in the case of respondents of both sexes, one should. Take into account a different approach to the problem of conflicts, as in the case of different styles of their resolution [51].

The professional structure of the survey respondents is presented in the **Table 1** below.

Based on the above chart, it can be concluded that in the case of teaching experience in the group of surveyed teachers, the largest percentage is 26.9% are educators with 11–15 years of experience, and the lowest are teachers with more than 26 years of experience (5.2%). and over 30 years of work in the profession (5.2%). It is interesting that in the group of teachers from non-public institutions there are no teachers with more than 25 years of experience. In the case of the group of principals, the largest group are people with work experience between 21 and 25 years (45.9%), of which as much as 88.2% of the total number of respondents in this period of service were principals from public kindergartens.

On the other hand, the data on the structure of the degrees of professional promotion obtained indicate that among teachers the most numerous group are chartered

	Teachers N = 305						Principals N = 37					
	P	%	NP	%	Total	%	P	%	NP	%	Total	%
Pedagogical work experience (in years)												
0–5	21	6,9	44	14,4	65	21,3	0	0	0	0	0	0
6–10	36	11,8	25	8,2	61	20,1	1	2,7	1	2,7	2	5,4
11–15	51	16,7	31	10,2	82	26,9	2	5,4	2	5,4	4	10,8
16–20	22	7,2	3	1,1	25	8,2	4	10,8	2	5,4	6	16,2
21–25	35	11,5	5	1,6	40	13,1	15	40,5	2	5,4	17	45,9
26–30	16	5,2	0	0	16	5,2	3	8,2	0	0	3	8,2
over 30 years	16	5,2	0	0	16	5,2	4	10,8	1	2,7	5	13,5
Total all	197	64,5	108	35,5	305	100	29	78,4	8	21,6	37	100
Professional promotion degree ¹												
no degree	0	0	27	8,9	27	8,9	0	0	3	8,1	3	8,1
trainee teacher	5	1,6	9	3,0	14	4,6	0	0	0	0	0	0
contract teacher	26	8,5	53	17,4	79	25,9	0	0	1	2,7	1	2,7
appointed teacher	51	16,7	14	4,6	65	21,3	0	0	4	10,8	4	10,8
chartered teacher	115	37,7	5	1,6	120	39,3	29	78,4	0	0	29	78,4
Total all	197	64,6	108	35,4	305	100	29	78,4	8	21,6	37	100

Source: own study based on the collected material. N - total number of the study group population; P - public kindergartens; NP - non-public kindergartens.

¹Teachers career degrees, obtained in accordance with the educational law, in force until August 31, 2022.

Table 1.
 The professional structure of the respondents in the research.

teachers (39.3%) and the least numerous are trainee teachers - 4.6%. In the case of principals, 77.1% are people who are chartered teachers, and thus constitute 100% of managers of public institutions.³ It can be assumed that the polarization of the professional experience of the headmaster of the kindergarten, resulting both from the seniority and the degree of a certified teacher, gives a greater guarantee of knowledge of the functioning of the kindergarten, the specificity of the work of kindergarten teachers as well as their needs and expectations. On the other hand, the change of perspective from teachers to principals allows for introducing innovative changes in the organizational structure of the institution, beneficial for the entire kindergarten community.

5.2 Analysis of the research material collected

The main goal of our exploration was to obtain information about the occurrence of conflicts, their causes, type and consequences for the quality of the teacher's work.

³ According to educational law regulations, principals managing non-public kindergartens and kindergarten points are not required to have any degree of professional advancement, although the headteachers of such educational institutions have the opportunity to take advantage of this path of professional development.

Therefore, our respondents were asked whether there were conflicts in their teaching teams in the analyzed period. Their presence was indicated by 236 of the surveyed teachers (76.87%) and 100% of the surveyed principals. The obtained results confirm the general thesis about the universality and inevitability of conflicts in the work environment. Confirmation of the occurrence of conflicts generated a question about their type. The results of the obtained responses are presented in **Table 2**.

Based on the above chart, it is visible that hidden conflicts, both in the opinion of teachers (27%) and principals (39%), appear most often, while open conflicts constitute only 12 and 8% of indications. Hiding one's attitudes and the inability to express them in the long run may consequently reduce the quality of the professional work of the teacher and the entire teaching team. It also entails potentially negative consequences in the area of interpersonal relations between all kindergarten employees [52].

The second type of conflict most frequently indicated by the respondents in the group of teachers (17%) and principals (27%) are those of an emotional nature. The essence of this type of dispute are emotions and attitudes towards other teachers or employees who play different roles. The autogeneity of emotional conflicts determines the difficulties or the inability to solve them. It is closely correlated with human factors, which causes difficulties in determining the real cause of the conflict, as they may result from fatigue, malaise, anger, jealousy, aversion, poor reading of other people's intentions or problems outside of work. The high percentage of responses shows that emotional conflicts put a heavy burden on teachers and teams. Additionally, in combination with hidden conflicts, they lead to the compilation of difficult situations with negative consequences for individuals, the teaching staff and the entire organization. Apart from emotional conflicts, in both groups of respondents material conflicts were indicated as situations occurring in their teaching teams (teachers - 16%, principals - 9%). This type of conflicts is related to specific issues, hence it is possible to use it constructively to introduce changes within the organization of teachers' work and the entire preschool education institution. The disorganized nature of all the conflict situations indicated by the respondents indicates the spontaneity of their emergence as a result of immediate resonance. Irrational conflicts (teachers - 5% and principals - 1% of responses) were the least frequently indicated in both groups of

Conflict types	Teachers' responses	Principals' responses
	%	%
hidden	27	39
public	12	8
emotional	17	27
factual	16	9
irracjonalne	5	1
rational	0	11
organized	0	0
disorganized	9	5
lack of conflicts	11	0

Source: own study based on the collected empirical material.

Table 2.
Types of conflicts occurring in the workplace according to the surveyed teachers.

teaching staff of kindergartens, which indicates that fictitious and false motives resulting from stereotypes, prejudices, envy and a tendency to suspect [53], constitute a small percentage of conflict situations.

The types of internal conflicts most often revealed by the respondents of the research, most often revealed in their preschool institutions, encourage them to obtain answers regarding the potential causes of their occurrence. Due to the coexistence of various conflicts and the multidimensional nature of their sources, the respondents had the opportunity to indicate more than one answer. The results of the opinions of the respondents are presented in **Table 3**.

The above data justify the statement that teachers see the greatest correlation between the disclosure of a conflict and bad interpersonal communication (11.5%), misinterpretation of the information provided (10.2%) and a complete lack of information (8.5%). In the opinion of the surveyed teachers, the overabundance of tasks and responsibilities (8.2%), the lack of teamwork skills (5.6%) and the lack of respect from other members of the teaching team (5.5%) are also conflicting factors. The least frequent sources of conflict were religious beliefs (0.1%) and non-compliance (or "bending") of the education law and regulations by the principal (0.8%).

In the group of preschool principals, the dominant etiological factors of conflicts were the misinterpretation of information (12.4%), the multitude of tasks and responsibilities (10.6%) and the inaccurate allocation of work tasks, responsibilities, powers and responsibilities among teachers (10.6%). Principals also identified as an impulse for conflict situations: poor interpersonal communication (8.3%), a low level of teachers' resistance to negative behavior of colleagues (8.3%), lack of mutual respect by members of the teaching team (7.3%) and teachers' inability to accept criticism (6.9%).

However, kindergarten principals do not see the sources of conflicts in their institutions in terms of different political or religious beliefs, an unfair reward system, insufficient infrastructure or bullying by teachers (0%). Contrary to teachers, they also do not see potential causes of conflicts in actions resulting from their own behavior, such as: favoring selected teachers, non-compliance or "bending" regulations or (0%) or bullying their subordinate teachers.

Worrying is that the respondents stated the existence of mobbing, both on the part of the principal (1%) and in the group of teachers (2.3%). This means that in the years covered by the empirical analysis, such a phenomenon must have occurred, and the principals did not notice it or do not want to admit.

The literature on the subject contains only a few studies devoted to conflicts in kindergarten, while many of them deal with potential sources of conflict in the organization. Recognizing that a preschool institution is a specific organization, we assumed that the comparison of our results with the empirical results of other researchers is legitimate and allows us to conclude that communication disruptions/disturbances are the most common cause of misunderstandings and conflict situations. Below in this classification the following are listed: favoritism, nepotism, disruptions in the organization of work, inadequate remuneration or stressful situations, including mobbing (see [30, 49, 54–63] and others).

The research has already confirmed that pre-school education establishments are institutions involved in various conflicts within teaching teams. Therefore, the question arose whether their appearance and duration in a certain period of time conditions, and if so, how is the implementation of the didactic, educational and caring function by the teacher.

In order to obtain reliable knowledge on this subject, the respondents were asked about the possible consequences of the conflict on the functions and tasks performed

Potential sources of conflicts in kindergarten	Teachers' responses		Principal's responses	
	Indications in the group N = 1700	%	Indications in the group N = 218	%
poor interpersonal communication	195	11,5	18	8,3
misinterpretation of information	173	10,2	27	12,4
lack of information	145	8,5	14	6,4
stereotypical thinking	95	5,6	14	6,4
differences in political beliefs	26	1,5	0	0
differences in religious beliefs	2	0,1	0	0
overabundance of work tasks and responsibilities	140	8,2	23	10,6
lack of sense of security	25	1,5	7	3,2
no sense of respect from other members of the teaching team	93	5,5	16	7,3
changes and ambiguities in the education law	34	2,0	9	4,1
improper allocation of work tasks, responsibilities, powers and responsibilities among teachers	79	4,6	23	10,6
inaccurate selection of members for task teams	59	3,5	6	2,8
unfair reward system	69	4,1	0	0
improper allocation of material goods	21	1,2	2	0,9
infrastructure deficiencies	33	1,9	0	0
favoring selected teachers by the management	75	4,4	0	0
mistrust between teachers	40	2,4	12	5,5
lack of trust in the principal	39	2,3	2	0,9
substantial non-compliance with the education law by teachers	26	1,5	2	0,9
substantial non-compliance with the education law by the principal	13	0,8	0	0
low level of resistance to negative behavior of colleagues	55	3,2	18	8,3
inappropriate behavior of the principal towards teachers (rudeness, harshness, verbal aggression, anger, etc.)	22	1,3	0	0
principal bullying teachers	17	1,0	0	0
bullying by other teachers	39	2,3	0	0
teachers' inability to accept criticism	96	5,6	15	6,9
principal' inability to accept criticism	29	1,7	0	0
lack of teamwork skills	60	3,5	10	4,6

Source: own study based on the collected empirical material.

Table 3.
Sources of conflicts in a preschool education facility.

by them. The distribution of responses is illustrated for positive consequences in **Table 4** and negative consequences in **Table 5**.

Consequences	Indications in the group of teachers N = 305										Indications in the group of principals N = 37					
	scale of occurrence										scale of occurrence					
	Never	%	Seldom	%	Sometimes	%	Often	%	Always	%	Seldom	%	Sometimes	%	Often	%
has a positive effect on the didactic function performed by the teacher	61	21,6	98	34,8	44	15,6	53	15,2	36	12,8	14	37,8	17	45,9	6	16,3
positively influences the upbringing function performed by the teacher	61	20	104	34,1	36	11,8	55	18	49	16,1	13	35,2	18	48,6	6	16,2
positively influences the teacher's caring function	61	20	93	30,5	47	15,4	55	18	49	16,1	13	35,2	18	48,6	6	16,2

Source: own study based on the collected empirical material.

Table 4.
Positive effects of conflicts for the teacher's professional functions.

Consequences	Indications in the group of teachers N = 305										Indications in the group of principals N = 37					
	scale of occurrence										scale of occurrence					
	Never	%	Seldom	%	Sometimes	%	Often	%	Always	%	Seldom	%	Sometimes	%	Often	%
has a negative effect on the didactic function performed by the teacher	71	23,3	87	28,5	65	21,3	69	22,6	13	4,3	16	43,2	15	40,5	6	16,2
negatively influences the upbringing function performed by the teacher	64	21,0	66	21,6	87	28,5	68	22,3	20	6,6	24	64,9	11	29,7	2	5,4
negatively influences the teacher's caring function	58	19,0	56	18,4	103	33,8	61	20,0	27	8,9	24	64,9	11	29,7	2	5,4

Source: own study based on the collected empirical material.

Table 5.
Negative effects of conflicts for the teacher's professional functions.

The information gathered in **Table 4** leads to the conclusion that, in the opinion of 1/3 of the teachers, internal conflicts occurring in the teaching teams they create rarely have a positive impact on their didactic (34.8%), educational (34.10%) and caring (30.5%). Especially interesting is that in this group of respondents, about 20% of respondents answered that conflicts never had a positive impact on the performance of professional functions, although there were also voices pointing to the favorable impact of conflicts on their activities (didactic function - 12.8%; educational function - 16.1% and the caring function - 16.1%). The principals of pre-school institutions, however, have a slightly different opinion, because sometimes internal conflicts generate positive effects within the functions performed by teachers: didactic (45.9%), upbringing (48.6%) and care (48.6%). Nevertheless, about 35.5% of the surveyed principals rarely notice the positive effects of conflicts for the performance of professional functions, and only 16% that they often see the positive effects of conflicts for the performed tasks of kindergarten teachers. It seems that the positive effects of conflict, conditioning the professional functioning of teachers, should be associated with usually favorable arrangements ending a misunderstanding/dispute in the team. Certain organizational changes or clarifications between the parties to the conflicts are conducive to increasing teachers' motivation and commitment to the work they do. Based on the listed effects of conflict (**Table 4**), we can conclude that teachers rarely perceive its positive impact, contrary to principals. Perhaps this difference results from a different perspective on the perception of the problem.

When analyzing the distribution of indications of the scale of the occurrence of negative consequences of conflicts in relation to the individual professional functions of teachers (**Table 5**), principals rarely (43.2; 64.9; 64.9%) or sometimes (40.5; 29.7; 29.7%) see a negative impact on the direct work teachers perform with children. Teachers' responses indicate that they rarely see a negative impact on their teaching function (28.5%), but 21.3% of them claim that the conflict clearly has a negative impact on their teaching work with a child. In the case of the educational function, 28.5% of teachers indicated that sometimes conflicts have a negative impact on the implementation of the tasks assigned to them; as in the case of caring interactions, where as many as 33.8% indicated the negative effects of conflict in this area of work. We emphasize that while in the group of principals the extreme items of the scale (never and always) were not included in their ratings, in the group of teachers, for each of the discussed functions, there were such indications. The analysis of the distribution of the assessment of the impact of conflicts on the professional functions performed, resulting from the presence or absence of conflicts in the team, was also interesting. For this purpose, a comparative analysis of the respondents' assessments regarding the occurrence of conflicts (in the group of teachers) and their number (in the group of principals) was used, which differentiates the assessment of the impact of conflicts on the teacher's professional functions. In the group of female teachers, the analysis covered answers where the variable was the presence of internal conflict or its absence and the noticeable effects (negative and positive) on the professional functions performed by teachers.⁴ The results of the Student's parametric *t* test are presented in **Table 6**.

The analysis proved that the surveyed teachers did not differ in the assessment of the positive impact of conflict on the performance of the didactic ($p = 0.657$),

⁴ due to the unequal groups, for the analysis, Student's *t*-tests were performed for independent samples, while at the same time Mann-Whitney U tests were carried out to confirm the results.

	Occurrence of conflicts (<i>n</i> = 236)		Lack of conflicts (<i>n</i> = 69)		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI		<i>d</i> Cohen's
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>	
Conflict has a positive impact									
Didactic function	2,75	1,21	2,86	1,85	-0,45	0,657	-0,57	0,36	0,08
Upbringing function	2,73	1,22	2,86	1,85	-0,52	0,607	-0,59	0,35	0,09
Caring function	2,78	1,21	2,86	1,85	-0,32	0,750	-0,54	0,39	0,05
Conflict has a negative impact									
Didactic function	2,82	1,12	1,68	1,01	7,58	<0,001	0,84	1,43	1,04
Upbringing function	2,89	1,07	2,13	1,47	3,98	<0,001	0,38	1,14	0,65
Caring function	2,96	1,09	2,30	1,45	3,49	0,001	0,28	1,03	0,56

Source: own study based on the collected empirical material. *n* - number of people in the subgroup; *M* - average (medium); *Me* - median; *SD* - standard deviation; Standardized value of the Mann-Whitney test; *t* - Student's *t* test statistics; *p* - statistical significance, where the significance threshold is <0.05; 95% CI - confidence interval; *UL* - upper bound of the confidence interval; *LL* - lower bound of the confidence interval; effect strength - a value specifying the amplitude of differences between averages (Cohen's *d*).

Table 6.

Assessment of conflict consequences for the performance of teachers' professional functions and the occurrence of a conflict.

upbringing ($p = 0.607$) and caring ($p = 0.750$) functions by the teacher. Significant differences were noted for the assessment of the negative impact of conflict on the performance of these functions ($p < 0.001$ for the didactic and upbringing function and $p = 0.001$ for the caring function). In the case of the didactic function, this effect is strong ($d = 1.04$), and for the remaining functions - upbringing and caring - the effects are moderate ($d = 0.65$ and $d = 0.56$). The obtained results therefore suggest that teachers with conflicts in teams experienced a more negative impact on their teaching ($d = 1.04$), upbringing ($d = 0.65$) and caring ($d = 0.56$) functions. Than teachers, who did not declare the occurrence of conflicts (the strength of the effect was: 0.08, 0.09 and 0.05).

In the course of further research, it was checked how the characteristics of an internal conflict in the group of principals is related to the assessment of the impact of this conflict on the performance of professional functions by a teacher⁵ Table 7 shows the results of the tests performed.

The differences between teaching teams with a large number of conflicts and teams with a small number of internal conflicts were analyzed in terms of the impact of these situations on the teacher's professional functions.⁶ The results of these tests turned out to be statistically insignificant. Therefore, it can be assumed that the number of conflicts revealed in teaching teams differentiates the assessment of the effects of conflicts on the didactic, upbringing and caring function performed by the teacher. At a later stage of the research, it became important to check the correlation between the diversity of conflicts and the strength of their course. These analyzes

⁵ U Mann Whitney tests and Spearman's rho correlation analyzes were performed.

⁶ U Mann Whitney tests were conducted.

	1-5 (n = 30)		There were so many of them that I cannot define (n = 7)				
	average rank	Me	average rank	Me	U	p	η^2
Positively influences performed functions							
Didactic function	18,85	3,00	19,64	3,00	100,50	0,849	<0,01
Upbringing function	18,93	3,00	19,29	3,00	103,00	0,932	<0,01
Caring function	18,93	3,00	19,29	3,00	103,00	0,932	<0,01
Negatively influences functions performed by teachers:							
Didactic function	18,68	3,00	20,36	3,00	95,50	0,689	<0,01
Upbringing function	17,97	2,00	23,43	3,00	74,00	0,151	0,06
Caring function	17,97	2,00	23,43	3,00	74,00	0,151	0,06

Source: own research. n - number of people in the subgroup; M - average (medium); SD - standard deviation; p - significance at the level < 0.05; η^2 - value determining the strength of the effect.

Table 7.
 Differences in the assessment of the impact of internal conflicts on the performance of a teacher's function depending on the number of conflicts.

			Diversity of conflicts	Strength of conflicts
Positively influences performed functions	Didactic function	<i>rho</i> Spearmana	0,64	-0,37
		relevance	<0,001	0,023
	Upbringing function	<i>rho</i> Spearmana	0,63	-0,29
		relevance	<0,001	0,076
	Caring function	<i>rho</i> Spearmana	0,63	-0,29
		relevance	<0,001	0,076
Negatively influences functions performed	Didactic function	<i>rho</i> Spearmana	-0,13	-0,11
		relevance	0,460	0,523
	Upbringing function	<i>rho</i> Spearmana	-0,17	0,03
		relevance	0,328	0,852
	Caring function	<i>rho</i> Spearmana	-0,17	0,03
		relevance	0,328	0,852

Source: own research.

Table 8.
 The impact of conflict on the teacher's functions in the opinion of principals.

were complemented by the assessment of the impact of internal conflict on the teacher's teaching, upbringing and care functions.⁷ The results obtained are illustrated in **Table 8**.

The summary presented in **Table 8** gives the basis for the conclusion that in the group of principals, the diversity of conflicts is positively and strongly related to the

⁷ Analyzes of Spearman's rho correlation were performed.

assessment of a positive impact on the functions performed by the teacher - didactic, upbringing and caring ($p < 0.001$). It follows that the more diverse conflicts are experienced in the teaching team, the more often principals notice their positive impact on the performance of professional functions by teachers. Additionally, the strength of the course of the conflict is negative and moderate (Spearman's rho = -0.37) and the significance is above the threshold and equals $p = 0.023$) with a positive impact of the conflict on the teacher's performance of the didactic function. Along with the stronger course of the conflict, its positive impact on the teacher's performance of the didactic function decreases, which was clearly indicated by the surveyed principals. On the other hand, for the educational and care function, the results were significant at the level of the statistical trend. These relations are negative and weak (Spearman's rho = -0.29), with the significance above the assumed threshold and amounts to $p = 0.076$ for both functions). Therefore, it can be cautiously assumed that the more turbulent the course of the conflict, the less frequently the principals notice the positive impact of conflicts on the performance of the upbringing and caring function by the teacher. There were no statistically significant correlations between the diversity of conflicts and the strength of their course with the assessment of the negative impact of the conflict on teachers' professional functions ($p = 0.460$ for the didactic function, $p = 0.328$ for the upbringing function and $p = 0.328$ for the caring function).

The positive result for the professional functions performed by teachers can be explained using the interactive theory of conflict, assuming that the occurrence of conflicts, understood in terms of universality and inevitability, does not always have to have negative consequences.

The empirical research was supplemented by a comparison of information obtained as a result of participant observation carried out during the implementation of the core curriculum by teachers and data obtained during individual interviews with teachers, which indicated participation in a conflict that took place in their teaching teams.

Observations of the care-upbringing-didactic activities conducted within the core curriculum allowed for an examination of the quality of the professional functions performed in a situation where a team of teachers assigned to one kindergarten group works under the pressure of visible tension between them. This study confirmed not only the existence of a conflict between teachers but also its destructive impact on the course of classes (showing dislike openly in public, disturbed communication, lack of cooperation or lack of respect towards the other teacher).

Interviews conducted as part of individual case studies presented a picture of personal experiences and consequences that became the result of participating in a conflict. Individual conversations with teachers allowed for a closer look at the mechanisms of the course of conflict situations on three different levels of interpersonal relations, where the conflict involved the following entities: teacher - teacher, teacher - group of teachers and teacher - teaching assistant.

The conclusion resulting from the conducted individual interviews may be the statement expressed by all respondents that the involvement of kindergarten teachers in the conflict diverts their attention from the common goals and tasks. Over time it is responsible for the noticeable deterioration of the quality of their professional work, and in the long term also the quality/efficiency of the work of the entire pre-school institution. In the opinion of the surveyed teachers, it is these short- and long-term consequences of conflicts that require systematic improvement and replenishment of communication competences that help in coping with stress, emotional tension,

establishing and maintaining relationships with other people, resolving conflicts, building and maintaining the team spirit (in Ref. [64]).

6. Discussion and conclusions

Conflict situations are a reality in every organization, including school and kindergarten. The need to identify and diagnose them is an important area of empirical interest, mainly due to their implications for the functioning of an individual teacher and the entire institution. Even if the problem of conflicts in an educational institution is downplayed or "hidden" by both teachers and principals, they affect the quality of teaching and the effectiveness of the teacher's work [61].

Our research oscillated around the verification of hypotheses assuming the existence of various conflicts (of different etiology and type) within teaching teams, as well as the identification of the correlation between conflicts and factors determining the professional functioning of teachers (i.e., the didactic, upbringing and caring function), i.e., the quality of work teacher's. The results of our research confirmed the common occurrence of various internal conflicts of various etiology. The results of empirical investigations have also confirmed the dependence between the occurrence of internal conflicts and factors conditioning the professional functioning of kindergarten teachers. The analysis of the collected empirical material leads to the conclusion that there is a statistically significant correlation between the conflict in the teaching team and the quality of the implementation of the didactic, upbringing and caring functions performed by the teacher who participates in it. The demonstrated dependence in relation to the quality of the teacher's professional tasks may result in reduced level of motivation to work, may also be burdened with a higher risk of errors, raise real concerns about the quality of his work and the functioning of the entire institution. The research confirmed that they are fully justified, as the consequences of the conflict lower the quality of work of an individual teacher, the team in which he operates and the entire preschool institution. They are consistent with the research results, according to which the quality of teachers' work is largely determined by the atmosphere in the workplace and interpersonal relations (see [65, 66]). Teachers who experience conflict, have negative feelings such as disappointment, insensitivity, stress, sadness, anxiety, etc., may not like their profession, have low morale and motivation, form groups with like-minded people, and have weaker results, which finds confirmation in the surveys conducted by other researchers (see [31, 62, 67]). Teamwork is extremely effective for the entire preschool community, becoming a tool conducive to open discussion from the level of various perspectives and integrating them into real solutions [68]. This is due to the fact that *contacts between two or more people will sooner or later come to a point where some differences in their desires, values, views and habits will appear. What is good for one person becomes unacceptable for the other* [69].

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