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Social-based learning and leadership in school: conflict management training for holistic, relational conflict resolution

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Navigating conflicts is crucial for promoting positive relationships between pupils, teachers, and parents. The objective of this paper is to present Social-Based Learning and Leadership (SBL), an innovative approach to group dynamics and conflict resolution within the school setting, aiming to foster meaningful relationships and personal and social growth. The methods of SBL focus on group evolution by navigating conflicts rooted in higher needs while balancing the interplay of separation and connection. It proactively embeds prosocial values and conduct into the school culture, with teachers prioritizing the wellbeing of others, fostering shared problem-solving, and positive feedback amid conflicts. Teachers acquire tools to transform the classroom into a "social laboratory" and construct meaningful partnerships with parents. Practical conflict management within the SBL framework involves dynamic group discussions, shifting from other blaming to accountability, and reflective group introspection. Experiential learning through crafted case studies and role-plays enhances students' conflict management skills by fostering perspective-taking and inclusiveness. We conducted a qualitative case study in an SBL training in a school from 2020 to 2023. These conflict management processes allow the school community to reimagine conflict as an invaluable educational opportunity, equipping pupils with essential soft skills for navigating the challenges of the 21st century.

KEYWORDS

social-based learning and leadership, training, education, listening, soft skills, conflict resolution

Introduction

Conflicts are an inherent part of schools and manifest in a variety of ways between various parties. Consider the following vignette. Four fifth-grade friends: Maria, Emma, Jake, and Liam have planned a party and have decided not to invite Maya. Maya's mother, Ms. Barak, is furious that her daughter is not invited and calls her homeroom teacher, Ms. Thompson. Ms. Thompson tries to help by talking to the children. They feel that Ms. Thompson is being judgmental and is taking sides.

They get angry and are even more reluctant to invite Maya. This incident makes them resent Maya for "snitching" on them (although Maya did not tell her mother to call the teacher). The issue is then brought up in the parents' WhatsApp group and results in a heated argument between Maya's mother and her friends and the parents of Maria, Emma, Jake, Liam, and other parents who side with them. Meanwhile, the children in the class ostracize Maya because they see her as the reason for the conflict. Maya's friends are embarrassed to be seen with her at school, which leads to further social rejection. In the wake of this heated conflict, several parents, including Maya's mother, contacted the school principal and vent about the incident. They are furious that the school let such a thing happen and escalate.

This incident had a lasting impact on the class dynamics, thus highlighting the challenges of addressing social issues in the classroom. Ms. Thompson, despite her efforts, could not bridge the divide, hence underscoring the complexities of navigating interpersonal conflicts among pupils. This example is one of many such school conflicts ranging from two 1st graders fighting over a game during recess to power struggles between teachers and parents about academic or social issues. Such cases portray the complex reality that schools face daily and their need for effective conflict management and resolution approaches across the educational ecosystem.

The tolerance for conflicts in schools is low and often leads to extreme reactions such as violence and mental breakdowns that are indicative of systemic dysfunction (Burde et al., 2017). The staff, teachers, and parents are also vulnerable to the disruptive impact of intergroup and intra-group conflicts, which pose a threat to the overall school environment (Ertürk, 2022). Conflict is perceived as an indicator of systemic (school) or personal (teacher or pupil) failure (Marengo et al., 2018), but school conflict management strategies often do not align with the challenges of the 21st century (Malik, 2018; Blank, 2020). The outcome is simply doing "more of the same," even when the "same" (i.e., conflict management) does not work well (Liddle, 2023).

These challenges have been further intensified in today's educational landscape, which faces an unprecedented social reality that drastically impacts school interpersonal relations. These challenges include high proportions of ADHD pupils (Zagzoog et al., 2020), extensive use of social media (Stern, 2017), and fewer social interactions (Stern, 2017), which often lead to decreased social skills such as less empathy (Gultom et al., 2022) and more ostracism (Eriks-Brophy and Whittingham, 2013). Addressing this new intricate web of conflicts necessitates a comprehensive and innovative approach to school conflict management that transitions from the mindset that conflict is a "problem" to a mindset where conflict is seen as an educational opportunity to learn valuable life lessons. Conflict management should be perceived as an ability that has educational value, namely, a mindset and proficiency that should be taught and practiced in schools to better prepare pupils for contemporary challenges rather than a tool that helps teachers avoid classroom chaos. Specifically, developing soft skills, particularly conflict management skills, should become part and parcel of socialization (Lamm, 1976).

The present work introduces a novel approach to conflict management based on the theory of Social-Based Leadership and Learning (hereafter: SBL; Vinokur et al., 2023). We first present an overview of the nature of intragroup and intragroup conflicts among teachers, parents, pupils, and staff that typify the school system. Our primary focus is on teachers since they interact with all the other groups and are considered to be drivers of educational change and reform. We then describe conflict management according to SBL, including the theoretical foundation for the approach, followed by its practical applications. Finally, we present a qualitative case study in a school that implements SBL-oriented conflict management.

SBL is an approach that seeks to shift the mindset of educators to evaluate the quality of an educational process according to the quality of the interpersonal connections among all the parties in the educational process (teachers, students, and parents). It is a holistic approach that seeks to construct positive relationships among the members of the educational community (Vinokur et al., 2023). When managed properly, implementing the SBL methodology should prevent the escalation of social conflicts. Still, it is worthwhile noting that conflict is an integral stage in the process of the formation of the group, thus conflicts are expected to arise and thus SBL also gives teachers the toolkit to face such challenges constructively.

Intragroup conflicts

Intragroup conflicts within educational institutions can manifest among all stakeholders, including teachers, parents, pupils, and staff, in different but interrelated ways. Teachers frequently encounter intragroup conflicts rooted in power dynamics (Ingersoll, 1996) and tenure (Handayani, 2016), which affect their motivation and reciprocal behavior (Kilag et al., 2024). The division created by tenure can erode organizational citizenship and helping behaviors and can be exacerbated by the teaching profession's duties outside the classroom, such as school trips, extracurricular interactions, and interactions with parents and students after school hours (Manesis et al., 2019).

Parents' communication issues, particularly within digital spaces like WhatsApp groups (Addi-Raccah and Yemini, 2018), can escalate into conflicts due to a lack of common goals and norms of conduct and a tendency to prioritize their child's interests over the good of the class, or to blame others for personal problems (Moyano Dávila et al., 2023). Only a few parents actively participate in official school councils and often express dissatisfaction at the passivity of others while criticizing the school staff "in the name of all parents" (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014).

Pupils struggle for attention (Isaksson et al., 2010), recognition (Beveridge, 2004), and social status, which can lead to instances where children may harm others to bolster their social standing (Rodkin et al., 2006). Such struggles can disrupt classroom social dynamics, split the class into small subgroups (Bray and Schommer-Aikins, 2015), and contribute to the deterioration of positive peer relationships (Blatchford et al., 2003).

Staff conflicts in schools stem from a lack of cohesion between staff members, ideological differences, and the

principal's management style (Robbins and Alvy, 2009). To foster a harmonious and effective team, school principals need to encourage open communication led by listening (Itzchakov, 2020; Kluger and Itzchakov, 2022), establish shared goals (Gittell et al., 2010), and promote a culture of collaboration (Tschannen-Moran, 2001) to ultimately mitigate the negative impact of competition and differing approaches, and contribute to more cohesive and successful educational leadership.

Intergroup conflicts

Teacher centrality in the case of conflicts significantly contributes to burnout and high turnover rates (Rave et al., 2022). Teachers find themselves at the nexus of multifaceted challenges ranging from interpersonal issues among pupils to broader systemic problems within the educational institution (Chatterton and Goddard, 2000). The dynamics between teachers and pupils reflect a general decline in respect for authority (Hammett, 2008), where pupils value immediate gratification or success in alternative venues over school achievement and long-term goals (Alam, 2022) and frequently test boundaries (De Cordova et al., 2019), or express frustration at what they consider the irrelevance of course content (Doherty, 2015) and demonstrate a sense of self-entitlement (Schlesier et al., 2019). Conversely, teachers struggle with managing discipline issues and encounter resistance and lack of cooperation from pupils, often due to an apparent deficit in their ability to handle contemporary classroom dynamics effectively (Becker, 2019). The teacher-parent dynamic is fraught with trust issues and conflicting perceptions of responsibility for children's difficulties (Bilgic and Gumuseli, 2012) that often culminate in parents challenging and interfering with school decisions (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014). The consistent complaints, lack of gratitude, and disagreements between the school and the parents eventually hurt the children, stress the teachers (Stoeber and Rennert, 2008) and the principal (Aravena and Madrid, 2020) and lead to burnout (Stoeber and Rennert, 2008).

Conflicts between teachers and staff are characterized by perceptions of poor feedback, resource allocation, staff engagement, responsibility distribution, and acknowledgment of teachers' efforts (Coe, 1998; Itzchakov and Kluger, 2018), reflecting a broader gap in communication and cohesion within the school's organizational structure (Itzchakov et al., 2022a; Weinstein et al., 2022). The principal's role is pivotal in shaping the organizational climate since their decisions impact all facets of the school environment (Lunenburg, 2010), including during crises such as the pandemic (Allen et al., 2020; Itzchakov and Grau, 2022).

The conflicts above reveal the intricate web of interpersonal and systemic challenges that educational stakeholders must navigate and highlight the need for improved conflict management skills to increase communication, mutual understanding, and collaboration to foster a healthier and more effective educational setting.

Conflict management based on social-based leadership and learning

How SBL perceives conflicts

The Social-Conflict-Based Learning (SBL) framework views conflict as an inherent aspect of group dynamics that emerges when individual needs collide with the group's collective goals or objectives. Conflicts are frequently perceived negatively, thus leading to attempts to avoid, overlook them, or search for a "quick fix." This superficial approach is often the byproduct of fear, anxiety, and intentions to disengage on the part of teachers or pupils. The crux lies in insufficient education on ways to navigate and participate in group processes, particularly in constructive conversations about conflicts. Rectifying this deficiency in conflict resolution skills is pivotal for cultivating a more robust and harmonious group dynamic.

Teachers often attempt to quell conflicts by resorting to superficial measures such as punishment (Marshall, 2012). These disciplinary measures stem from the misconception that class conflicts should be swiftly "taken care of" to avoid disturbing the lesson flow. This approach fails to contend with the nature of conflict and its educational potential for the whole class (and not only the parties in conflict) and overlooks the reality that conflicts are inherent to group dynamics and are likely to recur (Brown and Pehrson, 2019). Finally, recognizing the intrinsic nature of conflicts within the group and adopting proactive conflict management strategies are crucial to creating a more harmonious learning environment and better preparing the pupils for the future.

Conflict as a trigger for learning, development, and growth

The Social Based Learning (SBL) perspective on conflict views group evolution as progressing from specific conflicts to conflicts rooted in higher needs. It emphasizes the importance of building meaningful relationships through a delicate balance between separation and connection. Within this framework, conflicts are considered to occur on various levels. Within pupils, they primarily take the form of an internal conflict between the desire for relatedness- to belong to a social group, and the need for autonomy and self-expression- the fear of "losing oneself" upon entering the group (Ryan and Deci, 2020). For instance, on the 1st day of school, students inherently seek to be a part of the class (group) while harboring the fear of being unable to express themselves. This encapsulates a conflict. This tension can become a persistent theme influencing students' ongoing ability to strike a balance between social connections and maintaining their identity. As they develop this ability without canceling either one of them out, they begin to use their work in the group as a means for personal growth, since every occurrence in the group will trigger the development of a greater ability to achieve internal balance, learn about themselves and the group, and thus grow as independent individuals.

Conflicts at the group level can motivate the group to evolve to become more connected. According to SBL, conflicts represent a developmental phase in the process of the group's growth. Specifically, a conflict is a sign that the group is facing its next stage of development toward "thicker" and more meaningful connections among its members. Note that resolving a conflict in and of itself is not the goal, nor should it become the central focus. Rather, the main focus should be on the group's attempts to strive toward a more connected state and think and act as though it is already there. How would the group members treat each other if they were to truly care for each other? What would they think of one another? How would they react to a challenge? What would they do when faced with a conflict? How, and based on which principles, would they make a decision? Immersing themselves in such mindful exercises helps group members strive toward greater integration until eventually, from "faking it," they will "become it."

Adopting such a mindset turns every conflict encountered by the group members into a milestone on their mutual journey toward the group's more cohesive, integrated, and connected state, namely, toward their mutual social goal. In other words, sociologically, an ideal type of a social group is defined in SBL as a group of individuals bound by strong ties of mutual responsibility, care, and connection that can smother conflicts with love. Thus, conflictual situations serve to strengthen their connections and propel them toward greater social integration.

Conflict resolution—From theory to practice

To enable group formation to take place, teachers need to take a proactive approach to conflict resolution. To successfully utilize every conflict in the classroom or the teachers' room, teachers must establish an organizational framework such that inevitable conflicts will not destroy it. This proactive approach has five main features. Success in navigating a conflictual state is contingent upon social cohesion within the group. From day one of the program, SBL trainers practice enhancing social support and connectedness within the group to protect them from future conflicts. The second and no less important feature concerns the group's goal. At the beginning of every academic year, teachers and pupils need to agree on their mutual goal. A viable goal for pupils would be to do well academically while enjoying classwork and ensuring that no one is left behind. A viable teacher's goal would be to design social and educational activities that promote care, mutual guarantee, and comradeship. These goals should be mentioned in every lesson and reflected upon during the discussion of every conflict. This can be done by asking questions such as whether a given behavior, action, decision, etc., would bring the group closer to its goal. The main idea is that once teachers and students have a strong and compelling goal, they will feel mutual responsibility and partnership while attaining it and believe that they can overcome any challenge.

The third feature relates to the organizational culture and involves promoting the values of prosocial behavior. Teachers and pupils in the SBL framework learn to prioritize the wellbeing of others over ego-enhancing goals. This involves approaching difficulties as shared problems without assigning blame. Specifically, it entails actively listening to others, even when disagreeing, rather than arguing to prove someone wrong (Itzchakov and Kluger, 2019; Itzchakov et al., 2023a). The SBL organizational culture values those who contribute to the wellbeing and worth of others over individuals who solely pursue self-enhancing achievements. This embodies the principle of self-enhancement by enhancing others (Alicke and Sedikides, 2009).

The fourth feature involves incorporating positive feedback for efforts to promote prosocial behavior and enhance educational activities, a practice often lacking in the educational system. Daily routines can be developed to encourage accountable, positive behavior, making it a habitual and valuable tool, particularly during conflicts.

The fifth feature has to do with awareness of subjective perceptions of reality. This can prove crucial in conflict management since differing viewpoints can shape how individuals interpret the same situation. SBL Professional development processes strive to integrate an appreciation for the diversity of perspectives into its organizational culture. This awareness enables teachers and pupils to identify opposing views and treat them respectfully when conflicts arise. Recognizing the subjectivity of reality reduces defensiveness during conflicts because the parties become less threatened and judgmental when they understand the subtle nature of individual interpretations.

SBL conflict management strategies

Dealing with group conflicts

One of the main innovations of SBL conflict management is that it not only deals with the active parties in a conflict but instead involves the entire group in the mediation. For example, when Alex complains to the teacher that Jane insulted him, and Jane simultaneously complains that Alex started first, the teacher facilitates a class discussion about the incident. Importantly, the teacher keeps the parties anonymous to prevent psychological reactance and reduce perceptions of being judged by Alex and Jane or Alex and Jane from being judged by the rest of the class. The main idea is that when a conflict occurs in the class, it is everyone's conflict. Distancing themselves from a particular incident allows the pupils to use the conflict as a valuable test case for everyone to learn from.

Class discussions contribute to conflict management in several ways. As discussed in Vinokur et al. (2023), this type of discussion utilizes conflict as a learning opportunity about human interactions, their complexities, and the forces that drive human behavior. Because groups develop through disintegration and integration, the discussion can encourage group as well as personal growth and development. Although the conflict above occurred between two specific individuals (Alex and Jane), other pupils are likely to be involved next time. This requires group responsibility and allows for group learning. When a solution comes from a high-power source, such as the teacher, it is less likely to be accepted than when the solution comes from other pupils (Johnson and Johnson, 2011). Finally, when the pupils are involved in the decision, they become more accountable for its implementation, thus increasing the likelihood that when a conflict occurs between other pupils,

they will be able to handle it more constructively. Thus, group discussion is one antidote for future conflictual situations because the pupils have overcome a relevant conflict before.

Group discussion structure

Conflicts can also arise among teachers. Similar to the procedure in the classroom, teachers also need to engage in discussion. The first step is to choose a facilitator for the meeting. These facilitators must be neutral, not impose their views, allow the discussion to flow from one attendee to another, for example, by using a listening object (Itzchakov and Kluger, 2017a), and ensure that all participants have time to express themselves and that the discussion stays on track. The facilitator should also remind the group of the rules and purpose of the discussion, namely, to manage the conflict as a *mutual* challenge and a step toward the achievement of a mutual goal and not a way to prove someone wrong. In the first round of this type of discussion, teachers typically talk about the importance of the quality of their relationships in achieving their mutual goals, their interdependence, and the importance and uniqueness of each participant. Enhancing the importance of the mutual organizational goal and the specific importance of each attendee is highly effective in constructing a warm atmosphere and the conditions for a productive discussion (Itzchakov and Kluger, 2017b).

The second step is to move from blaming to accountability. Here, the participants individually present the challenge from the standpoint of their responsibility to tackle the challenge by focusing on their perspective and without blaming others. Prompts for the discussion include: "What can I do differently?" "What do I find challenging in this particular issue?" "Where would I like to improve?" and "What do I need from my colleagues to face this challenge better?" Thus, the discussion can shift quickly from discussing the external aspects of the conflict to relationships and forms of communication that can help resolve the conflict.

The discussion should then turn to providing practical, constructive suggestions, and advice. Since the discussion should also lead to practical measures, every participant should suggest a strategy to tackle the specific issue at hand and suggest how to correct the flaws that were revealed in the relationships between the teachers that led to the escalation of the conflict. Several rounds of discussion might be needed before coming to a mutual agreement that satisfies the group and the parties. The discussion then concludes with group introspection and gratitude. The teachers reflect on their internal states, share what they have gained from the experience, complement each other, and make the importance of their mutual educational endeavor and their goal as educators in this specific school explicit.

Thus, the SBL approach differs from most educational practices, where disagreement tends to escalate into blaming others and rarely reflects on positive experiences as learning experiences for the future (Itzchakov et al., 2023a). Not every discussion about a conflict will end with a clear, quick solution. Teachers may end a discussion by agreeing that they do not have sufficient maturity as a group to solve the specific conflict. The SBL approach to discussion is not a magic wand that can solve all conflicts but rather a way

to foster constructive communication among teachers that avoids being an echo-chamber. Teachers also need to realize that the educational process is sometimes more important than the result.

Case studies and role-plays

Conflict management must involve experiential learning to be productive. This is especially true for pupils. The case studies and role-plays described below are designed to enable students to experience conflictual situations when they are not directly involved or before they might encounter similar situations in their social life as a group. This enables them to learn about these situations from a non-defensive perspective and develop internal flexibility and inclusiveness that can help them when directly involved in a conflict. Learning and acquiring the skills to deal with challenging interpersonal situations cannot be conveyed through frontal lectures (Vinokur et al., 2023). To enhance students' ability to engage in perspective-taking, they are often asked to role-play someone from a different social, cultural, or demographic background (Hinz et al., 2022).

During the case studies and role plays, the teacher describes a typical age-appropriate conflict to the class (Doorn and Kroesen, 2013). The cases can be conveyed, for example, through news articles and videos, by the pupils acting out situations that are cast as happening in another school or cases where the pupils are asked to step in and serve as "professional consultants." After presenting the case, the pupils discuss each side's perspectives, reactions, emotions, and subjective reality. This includes cultural, socioeconomic, and individual differences between the parties that can lead to a different subjective reality of the conflict. The main goal of these exercises is to increase pupils' awareness of the human and social forces that come into play in a conflict, learn about what drives them as human beings, become more flexible and empathic, and eventually connect the discussion to their social life in the classroom by agreeing on best practices for future conflict management, such as red lines, desirable and undesirable behaviors during conflicts, norms, and constructive educational measures to help each other deal with conflicts in the future (Clarke and Peterson, 2015).

Relationship committee as conflict management structure

The role of the relationship committee is to address conflicts that span different groups within the school community. This can involve managing disputes between individuals from different grades (3rd vs. 6th grade) and across different roles (teacher-pupil) when resolving the conflict within the immediate context is not feasible. For instance, if a 3rd grader reports that a 6th grader took her lunch box, there may be no established conflict resolution structures since they are not in the same grade (and are not in the same classroom). The relationship committee is composed of members of the grades in question (in this example, 3rd and 6th grade), a pupil from a higher grade (e.g., a 7th grader), a teacher, a representative from the Parent-Teacher Association, and

a facilitator (a teacher who is on "relationship committee duty" that day).

The primary objective of this committee is to lead a learning-oriented conflict management activity on a broader scale within the whole school community. By dealing with conflicts through this comprehensive perspective, the school community develops agreed-upon norms and behavioral guidelines to effectively address similar issues in the future. The decision-making process begins with a presentation of each side's perspective. Then, the facilitator assesses the incident from the community's perspective by asking the members to describe how it impacts the school community holistically. These questions can include the impact on various stakeholders within the school, such as the teachers, pupils in other grades, and teacher-pupil relationships. Next, the members discuss the reason for the incident. For example, in a school in the Haifa region in Israel, pupils were caught by a teacher jumping over the school fence to play hooky. Although the teacher told them to stop, they ignored her. This incident was brought up in the relationship committee. The committee identified that the cause of this incident was a lack of meaningful connection between one of the pupils and the teacher. The pupil did not care or appreciate the teacher and thus ignored her request and encouraged his peers to do the same. As a result, the committee decided to strengthen the connection between these pupils and the teacher by spending 1 h a week for 1 month playing board games with the teacher. As a result of the newly formed connection with the teacher, one of the pupils confided a personal issue to her. This incident made the school community realize that the relationship between the pupils and the teachers had to be reinforced. The committee wrote guidelines for optimal pupil-teacher relationships. This example emphasizes the novelty of SBL-oriented conflict management since, in a typical school setting, these pupils would probably have been suspended, and the relationship between the pupil and the teacher would have probably declined further because he would have perceived her as the cause of his problems. It should be noted that conflict management does not eliminate discipline. For example, when there is an assault on a peer, either verbally or physically, the school takes deliberate punitive steps such as suspension, and only then does the relationship committee handle the case.

One frequent criticism of this approach is that few schools have the time to facilitate comprehensive conflict management. Nevertheless, SBL views such incidents as priceless opportunities to engage in wide-ranging educational skill-building that prepares pupils for the real-life challenges of the 21st century (Vinokur, 2018, 2024). Further, these conflict-management structures constitute the essence of contemporary education. When these steps are carried out correctly, they make a long-term impression on pupils that they can apply throughout their lives.

Qualitative case study

We conducted a study on an SBL intervention that was implemented in school through a professional development process over 3 years. During the first year, the intervention focused mainly on changing the teachers' mindset toward the role of the educator today—from transmitting knowledge to social architecture to facilitating meaningful social and emotional educational processes,

also focusing on conflict management. The 2nd year focused on giving the teachers the necessary toolkit to implement SBL theory into practice. The 3rd year focused on mentoring the teachers and thus passing the torch to the leading teachers, who were training to "own" the method and pass it on to the rest of the staff.

The case study involved 40 teachers and 4 management members. Two instructors, certified in SBL-group facilitation, delivered the training over 3 years. The instructors conducted training sessions from the beginning of the academic year in September until the end of June, totaling 15 sessions. Each session comprised three modules: meetings with the school's leadership on policy, norms, and change management; plenary sessions with the teachers; and individual and small group observations and mentoring for the teachers. The training spanned over 3 years and included about 100 annual hours (a total of 300 academic hours). In the 1st year, the instructors spent most of the training hours on work with the management and plenary sessions with the teachers. In the 2nd and 3rd years, they placed more emphasis on mentoring and small groups, which highlights the transition from theory to practice.

In the 1st year, the focus was on changing perceptions and mindsets regarding conflicts. The instructors worked with the leadership and teachers to develop a shared educational vocabulary, organizational policy, and norms. This included understanding the roots of conflicts, recognizing their inevitability, treating them as mutual challenges, and fostering a culture of responsibility rather than blame. In the 2nd year, the emphasis shifted to the practice of new norms, routines, and methods. This included protocols for meetings, role-plays, test cases, and constructive discussions on contentious topics, as well as anticipating and preventing conflicts. In the 3rd year, the instructors aimed to instill a sense of ownership among the staff to ensure a lasting impact on the training even after its formal completion. Specifically, seven to eight teachers were designated as "early adopters," taking on leadership roles to support other teachers, set examples, and provide feedback. Additionally, a leading team, including coordinators from all disciplines and led by the management and a social coordinator, was formed to integrate the method into the school's culture, involve the parents in the process, and create a common educational language.

Method

This study explored the theoretical and practical contribution of SBL training and professional development to school curricula, pedagogy, and organizational climate. Specifically, we examined how SBL pedagogies of conflict management can contribute to the betterment of social relationships among all parties involved in education. The study received an IRB from the Chief Scientists Office at the Ministry of Education of Israel (approval #12849).

It is important to distinguish between the SBL methodology (to which the entire theoretical chunk of the work is dedicated) and the methodology of the qualitative study that accompanies the theoretical contribution of SBL. The methods for SBL practice appear in detail in the "Conflict Management Strategies" section, while the methodology undertaken for the purpose of this study is explained in detail in this Methods section. In general, qualitative research methods, especially anticolonial, feminist, and culturally

sensitive branches, refrain from organizing data in dehumanizing forms such as tables and charts, replacing them with lived voices (Garcia et al., 2015; Ali and McCarty, 2020). We followed the recommended procedure for qualitative study in the analysis.

Data collection

To explore how the components of SBL training are enacted in a real-life setting, we collected data in 2023 from an elementary school in Northern Israel that has undergone SBL training. This school is part of the Jewish secular sector of Israel's semi-segregated public education system and has about 550 pupils and 40 teaching staff. The school is in the middle with regard to socioeconomic status. Its score is 5.68 out of 10, with 1 indicating the highest socioeconomic status and 10 indicating the lowest[1].

Eighteen in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with school staff consisting of the school principal and assistant principal, the educational consultant, novice and experienced teachers, the school's inclusion officer, and immigration absorption personnel, two involved parents, nine teachers, as well as the two professional SBL trainers who led the bi-weekly training sessions in the school. Nine participant observations of school activities were also carried out in and out of class, all of which were designed to characterize conflict management and resolution in the school climate, organizational structure, the development of skillsets among pupils, and teacher teaching methods.

Interviews

The research team developed an interview guide for the educational staff. It included a core set of questions and additional queries with slightly different foci to better capture the interviewees' roles in the system and experience with SBL training. For example, for the teachers, we emphasized questions that addressed managing conflicts in class, their professional self-perception, their approach to teaching practices at large, and their experiences within the framework of SBL training. The school principal and assistant principal were asked to provide a bird's-eye view of how re-conceptualizing conflicts affected the training process and their perspective on the ramifications of this component of the SBL training on the school climate and their pedagogical practices. Before each interview, the interviewees completed a consent form. All interviews were conducted between February and May 2023 using audio recording for initial data documentation. Each interview lasted 50 to 90 min, for a total of roughly 20 h of audio data. All participants were interviewed and observed in classes and meetings. Pseudonyms are used to comply with IRB guidelines.

Participant observations

In addition to interviewing key stakeholders on their impressions, perceptions, and experiences on the ground, we

also examined how SBL conflict management impacted the social climate at school as a whole: in the teachers' room, in the playground during recess, SBL training sessions, as well as teachers' actual performance and willingness to promote social-based learning in their classrooms. The following activities were observed:

1. Studying in roundtables (3rd-6th grades).
2. Teachers' room: teachers' discussions of social dilemmas and teaching methods.
3. SBL training for the entire school staff.
4. In class one-on-one SBL mentoring session.
5. Leadership group meeting.
6. "Social Parent-Teacher Conference:" one meeting between a teacher, pupil, and parents about the pupil's conduct at school.

We applied audio recordings and jotted down field notes to document these activities, depending on whether minors were present. Audio recordings were used to document staff meetings. Field notes were taken during the class observations to comply with IRB guidelines.

Data analysis

We transcribed all the interviews and observation data from May to July 2023, relying primarily on Word and Excel and immersing ourselves in the audio and written data. The major themes emerged from these readings. We inductively developed an emergent coding scheme comprised of 12 codes and used inter-rater reliability (IRR) tests between research team members to adjust and validate the codebook. Our initial codebook included codes that addressed multiple arenas where SBL manifests at school, from the visions, goals, and values of school leadership through the social skills developed in SBL training among teachers to the unique language and unorthodox use of physical spaces in the classroom and the relationships between the school, the community, and the national education system. For this case study, we focused mostly on data from two types of conflicts: intragroup conflicts (teachers, pupils, parents, and management) and intergroup conflicts (pupil-teacher/management-teacher/parent-management).

Results

The results section deals separately with intragroup conflicts (teachers, pupils, parents, and management) and intergroup conflicts (pupil-teacher/management-teacher/parent-management). We analyze how conflicts evolve from a problem to an asset through SBL's reconceptualization of the role of conflict and its management.

Intragroup conflicts

Even in Myra's absence, the principal's office is reflective of her interactions: the walls are covered with group photos and mementos from former pupils and teachers, conveying gratitude

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1 Tekenet, the portal of educational institutions in Israel, retrieved from: https://apps.education.gov.il/tekennet/.

and love. "What a crazy morning! So sorry I'm late," Myra said as she rushed in, "I had to be there for a teacher." Her hands-on managing style was evident in her commitment to "be there" for her staff daily. Her secretary constantly interrupted her with questions and answers, and her WhatsApp was always beeping. Just as we were about to start the interview, there was a knock on the window. "Myra, we love you!" two boys shouted. She came to the window, "I love you both, and I'm so proud of you. I'm in a meeting now. See you later!" Just the day before, these two 3rd graders had been fighting so hard during the break that Mira had to stop everything to help them address the conflict. At first, they were reluctant to share their needs and feelings, but as they role-played and communicated each other's stances, both calmed down and were able to return to class with everyone else. Today, they were already playing together by her window. "This is magic!" I said, but Myra was quick to disillusion me:

> It's not. Being a social school doesn't make your life easier. On the contrary, we have it rougher than regular schools because we don't sweep anything under the rug. We face it all with open hands and hearts. Being a social school means welcoming conflict, accepting that conflict is a part of life, and learning to manage it here and everywhere. Society's working assumption is that conflict is dangerous, unwanted, and unwelcome. But here, we learn that when handled well, conflict is not the end of the world but a gateway to achievement. Learning to manage conflict is our greatest success.

Talia, the assistant principal who entered the room as Myra spoke, added an astute comment:

> Our teachers are teaching these kids how to build meaningful relationships. One of the key factors in doing so is knowing how to manage conflict. They must grow up knowing how to do it better than their parents. Look at what's happening outside.

Indeed, the country's social and political crises, internal as well as external, have plagued Israel for generations, especially in recent years. This reality of external conflict gives the school's embracing approach to conflict a special force as a new social vision. The following sections provide examples of how conflict is managed, reconceptualized, and resolved across levels.

Teachers: different levels of motivation

David (32) has been teaching at the school since 2019. This year, he is the 4th grade class teacher and also takes part in the school's math teacher group. For him, the group dynamics among teachers is a central source of support. Working out conflict is the heart of the process:

> We work on the connections among teachers all the time, in [SBL] training and just among us, in the math or science teacher group we're in. We talk about everything and work on

our ability to facilitate conflicts. Some teachers "get" SBL more than others, but we have created an atmosphere of "us." We're a team that works together.

While David internalized SBL, not all teachers share the same appreciation of SBL theory and practice. Learning to mediate and process conflicts among teachers with various motivations and commitments to teaching is inherent to the SBL approach. This principle allows SBL experts to refine their practice, as in the following account by Levana, the 6th-grade teacher and social coordinator at school (a designated role in the Israeli educational system. This teacher is responsible for coordinating all social activities at the school, such as the homeroom teacher lesson, ceremonies, the student board of representatives, volunteering and involvement in the community, etc.):

> The challenging part is going through the change with professional teachers who only want to teach the subject matter. They usually prefer discipline and order and don't identify with the social approach like the homeroom teachers, and it's harder for them to teach when they move around. For example, in my class, there are no assigned seats. Kids can choose how and where they want to sit every day. Even over the same day, they can change seats from the sofa to the pouf, for example. They rarely sit at their desks when I teach. Wednesday is my day off; only subject matter teachers teach that day. I told the kids that they only had assigned seats on Wednesdays. A few weeks later, I felt something was a bit off or unresolved in my classes, too. Then, I talked it over with those teachers. Then things began to change, between us and with the class too.

This quote suggests that talking about the conflict not only helps those who are resistant to SBL to see its benefits but also enables teachers who are more experienced with the SBL methodology to develop these skills in their colleagues to work for the betterment of all despite their differences. Levana noted:

> When I started teaching here, I couldn't stand the other teachers. I remember sitting alone and crying, telling myself, that's it, I'm leaving. I'm probably not fit to be a teacher. Today, I love most of the other teachers. I trust them. I see their good sides, even when they don't know "how to" or "what for." This trust is critical because otherwise, I wouldn't last. Some days, you feel like tearing your hair out. If a teacher breaks up the seating arrangement, that can make pupils feel that she doesn't trust them, but I still have to trust her. I would, of course, talk to her about it, but I would encourage her, tell her how meaningful she is to the kids, try to make her closer to them, and see her progress. When critiquing, I always give positive feedback and try to see where I, and not others, can improve. Although I'm very critical, I've turned this critique inward. It's unnatural for me, but it's my job. I have to give a personal example just like they do.

The ability of experienced SBL teachers to communicate their goals to their peers helps initiate change in their colleagues, which is what happened to Levana herself. Ilan, the SBL instructor who guided the teachers

at the school, talked about how rare this change is among teachers:

> It's harder for teachers to change than any other profession. You learn to stand and talk, and it's hard to try to be different. Learning how to manage conflict—that's where change happens. Any conflict with another teacher, with pupils, with parents is an opportunity to grow as a person and professionally. Change becomes possible when we manage conflict well and talk it through.

While there are many reasons for resistance to change, Ilan saw constructive conflict management as a fruitful way to tackle this challenge since conflicts are endemic to all relationships in the work environment, including when the conflicts relate to the change itself. This approach resonates with Talia who has been teaching at the school for over 20 years. She spotted an important issue related to the influence of a teacher's connection to the SBL method on the students:

> We see conflict as an onion that has personal, professional, and theoretical layers. Let's say I agree with SBL, but a teacher disagrees ideologically; the kids sit separately in her class. What does the child experience when one teacher works in SBL, and the other doesn't?

SBL methodology helps to mitigate these challenges by changing the way educators perceive the process of educational change in school and the formation of a different approach to conflict as a whole, as Myra explained:

> When there's change, there's resistance. Resistance means change is happening. Not everyone is on the same page. That's the basis of our social existence. Since people don't develop at the same pace, conflict always happens. Our goal is not to solve conflict but to embrace it, give it time, and reflect to ourselves and our colleagues how it works.

Teacher conflicts often occur in the teachers' room, which provides a place for socialization between the teachers and for venting and disagreements. A negative or hostile social climate in the teachers' room has negative consequences on school dynamics, ranging from the inability to carry out the principal's programs to teacher turnover. In an interview with Dana, a veteran teacher at the school, she commented:

> I had a difficult situation with a fellow teacher who contradicted me in front of my pupils. This made me feel insulted, angry and betrayed. In similar situations before SBL training, I would have felt insulted for a long time and would not agree to work or interact with this teacher. However, the training changed the way we conduct teachers' meetings. In the new meeting structure, we share and disclose school-related issues that bother us and address them as mutual challenges instead of blaming one another. In one of these meetings, I disclosed this situation and shared my feelings; my colleague did the same. My colleague did not have bad intentions, and in fact, miscommunication led to her behavior. This meeting

structure not only enabled us to resolve our conflict and made me feel better but also clarified information-sharing within our team.

Pupils: fighting over limited resources

The centrality of conflict management in SBL theory and practice derives from an understanding of the impact of social dynamics in the classroom, as Nitzan, the school's SBL trainer, explained:

> When teachers go into a classroom, they enter a given social setting. Pupils don't want to learn. They're in social survival mode, each with their mental issues, their coping strategies, and different social and emotional states. Pupils are generally unresponsive to learning, and the teacher doesn't always have the knowledge, tools, or understanding to approach this situation other than to take disciplinary measures.

In Nitzan's description, teachers cannot fully address pupils' true need for support in navigating the social dynamics that dominate the classroom. Pupils fight for what they perceive as limited resources, such as attention and appreciation. In these circumstances, the biggest challenge is to change the educator's mindset from teacher-centered solutions, such as trying to give individual attention or trying to impose individual disciplinary measures, to solutions that involve the whole classroom, engage the pupils in forging their norms of behavior through various pedagogical strategies and helping students to integrate better so that *they* can give each other the attention and appreciation they are seeking.

Ilan, the SBL instructor who worked with the staff at the school, believes that these changes are possible but require persistence and perseverance:

> Creating a different environment with a different language and social code takes a long time. I've seen classes where pupils can't even talk to each other without the mediation of a teacher, classes that haven't experimented much with SBL, and that don't know how to work together.

Teaching students how to manage conflict has more than just educational value. It also has existential importance, as Myra explained:

> In every social arrangement, there is conflict. We teach not to dissociate, leave, or run away when conflict appears but to talk things through. The kids will need this skill later in life, in crises like marriage and divorce. That's why we do it. Why do I feel hatred toward the other? Because the other is opposing my opinion or suggestion. But I don't want to give up on the connection because of opposition. It's crucial to realize that opposition will always be there. Look at Israeli society today: lots of people hate one another. Why? It's hard to accept someone else's differences and opinions and not be inflexible. However, our goal is the connection, which eventually will

overcome all the fights and disagreements on the road, in the line at the supermarket, our relationships, and our family. Our goal is to create bridges above our innate divides. And this is done by practicing with them over and over again how to approach conflict.

The interviews revealed that the staff perceived pupils taught by SBL-trained teachers as more proficient in managing their relationships and their conflicts. Importantly, they indicated that the pupils viewed constructive conflict resolution as a key prerequisite to a positive social climate in the classroom. Levana described a case that demonstrates this attitude and behavior:

> One morning, I noticed that my pupils were very upset. A short discussion revealed that the source was an incident the previous afternoon at a public playground between a group of pupils in the class. I quickly realized that the pupils were not emotionally available for the new topic I had planned to teach that day. I took this incident as a learning opportunity for conflict management. In my training, I learned how to facilitate constructive mediation. I initiated small-group discussions according to SBL principles and helped the pupils decide on the norms and social contracts they wanted for such cases (i.e., after-school gatherings). Then, a plenum followed. The opportunity for pupils to express themselves in a psychologically safe atmosphere without fearing social judgment seemed to calm them down. Despite the challenging emotional circumstances, the pupils listened well and empathized with their peers. Moreover, the inclusion of other pupils in the class who were not part of the incident helped those involved in the incident to look at themselves from a third-party perspective and gain new insights into the situation. At the end of the discussion, I asked them the following questions: "What did I learn about (a) myself, (b) my peers, and (c) managing conflicts?"

Levana also noted that:

> This case was meaningful for me because I saw how the pupils' relationship to conflict management had changed over the course of the year by practicing SBL. It gave me pride that the pupils did not blame one another in front of me or ask me to decide who was right and wrong (i.e., to judge the situation). Instead, they expected a mutual process where they could explore the situation together.

Intergroup conflicts

Managing conflicts well means building trust and mutual responsibility in the whole educational community. However, the process of passing responsibility to the pupils, for example, may also include absorbing losses to achieve greater gains, as Myra explained:

> As a new principal, one of the first things I did was to change the physical environment and make it more cozy and inviting: we got colorful sofas and poufs, painted the walls, and new furniture. The kids immediately tried to destroy

everything we redecorated. We absorbed the destruction of equipment and furniture and rehabilitated the space repeatedly. We also followed every rehabilitation with a discussion about the feelings, norms, and behaviors we, staff and pupils alike, wanted to cultivate in our school, why, and the challenges we might face. This was a statement: this is our home, and we all care for it. We trust you with it. Gradually, slowly, the kids internalized the value of preserving the furniture and equipment and protecting the space just like at home. We saw that when children feel trusted and respected, they don't betray the trust given to them. Of course, mishaps happen constantly, but now, if a window breaks, for example, the kids are more shocked and enraged about it than I am. And they immediately encouraged me to organize a school discussion about it.

Approaching conflicts in terms of relationships and sharing the responsibility across the staff, teachers, and pupils, in addition to disciplinary actions, when necessary, bears fruit. Despite the physical damage to equipment, the continuous trust and conversations eventually brought about a form of togetherness with respect to the school facilities. Involving the group in the conflict created group responsibility, which empowered pupils for the next time. This incident exemplifies how involvement and constant reflection bring about compliance and how constructive reconstructing can provide a learning opportunity.

Teacher-pupil conflicts: mutual disrespect and frustration

As explained in theoretical sections, SBL introduces systems and structures of group discussion that involve constant group facilitation, case studies, role-playing, distancing from the conflict at hand to overcome defensiveness, discussing what leads to conflict as "experts in human interactions," talking about different typical age group conflicts with the class, creating a relationship committee, turning conflicts into subject matter, and even conducting mock trials in the classroom. The educational staff utilizes these various strategies.

Vicky, who has taught science at the school for over 20 years, talked about the changes she has experienced:

> Dealing with conflict is challenging and not easy at all, and yet there's a social and emotional reward for doing it. I finish work every day, much less exhausted than I used to be. I can't believe that I used to teach 45 min in front of the whiteboard! Working socially with the group makes everything much easier. I also get lots of support in the teachers' room.

Shiran, a teacher who recently joined the teaching staff after working in a different school that does not place so much emphasis on positive social interactions and conflict facilitation, discussed her perspective on the role of the staff in cultivating trust with teachers and pupils to help them change their awareness and behavior:

> What happened here is so different from my previous school, where everything was about control, and when things got out of hand, the staff panicked. This made me so anxious

and frustrated. After working here briefly, I understood that working in a social school is the opposite of controlling the pupils. It doesn't scare them to see kids running around here. They're not afraid of their freedom. There's a complete backup from the staff. The principal gives us a feeling of security by leading an educational process, involving pupils in decision-making, and shaping behavioral norms. And it feels so good.

Shiran also talked about the importance of listening to the students, relying on them, and gently guiding them:

We try to see eye to eye with the kids, listen to them, and try not to control the classroom but to guide it. Kids are naturally wise and curious. They don't need the teacher to teach them but to guide and direct them to solve their challenges together.

Talia, the assistant principal, described another key element of conflict management that makes up the school's unique pedagogy:

I worked as a teacher for many years before becoming assistant principal at this school. I almost left the profession because I felt it was impossible to go on this way. People used to think I was crazy for conversing with the kids, letting them make the decisions, and doing group work instead of frontal teaching. I found this school totally by chance. It was a catastrophe when I entered. The kids weren't allowed to get up to sharpen their pencils. When Myra, the principal, was hired and our SBL training started, I finally felt like I could start creating and constructing things as I saw them in my mind's eye. The entire system was like: go for it, fly, and blossom!

Thus, mutual trust and encouragement between the staff, the teachers, and the pupils are the keys to meaningful educational endeavors.

Parent-teacher conflicts

Many schools are characterized by the fraught relationship between parents and teachers, where there is mutual mistrust, a lack of mutual goals, and an unclear boundary between involvement and interference (Crozier, 1998). By contrast, says Levana, "Our strategy is fractal: what we do with the kids, we do with the parents." The school wants the parents to feel like partners, understand the educational work conducted with their children, and help the school by continuing in the same spirit at home.

For this purpose, the school launched "parent social conferences," a regular event that involves the parents in the school's social activities and their children's social achievements. For Levana, repairing the relationship with parents is extremely difficult but worthwhile:

The main challenge is convincing the parents that teachers want to hear what they have to say. Before our SBL training, the relationship between the school and the parents was hideous. The parent-teacher association took a super aggressive tone. Their aim was how to win over the staff and make them surrender to their demands. Changing the tone and

the mode of conversation was very simple but required day-to-day work. The key was restoring authority—you are in charge: you manage the classroom and the relationships within the classroom, including relationships with parents. This perception trickled down to the teachers—we don't want this enmity, defensiveness, and combative spirit at our school. So, what can we do to turn them into our partners? From working against parents, we moved toward working with them. This took a long time. One of the main stepping stones involved holding working meetings with parents about the goals we promote at school and thinking together with them about where they can help. Another was announcing Parents' Social Day: just like regular Parents' Day when parents meet the teacher to consult about their child's educational achievement at school, during the Parents' Social Day, we discuss the child's social attainments, set social goals and think together about ways to help their children achieve them during the year. This way, the parents learn to perceive themselves, their children, and their teachers as part of the school's social network.

Teacher-staff conflicts

One of the most common reasons for teacher burnout is the quality of their relationships with school staff and, in particular, the pressure and tension they feel daily (Slišković et al., 2019; Itzchakov et al., 2022b). Instead of teachers feeling invisible and pressured, and the staff constantly blamed for ignoring teachers' feelings and needs, a different relationship flourished in the school described here, based on reciprocal listening and the articulation of a joint cause Myra explains:

I tell the teachers: you are my team. You are my shield, just as I am your shield. Without you, I can't do anything. We will discuss all the programs and activities we are planning at school. Nothing will be "imposed from above." I want to be engaged and listen to your feedback. Just as SBL gives autonomy to the teacher to become the class's social architect, so we the teacher should act like social architects also among ourselves. SBL's social pedagogy forces teachers to change, which is especially hard for teachers who are accustomed to more traditional modes of teaching, such as whiteboard pedagogies. To facilitate this change, the school's leadership had to learn to trust and join hands to achieve a mutual cause and internalize SBL as the school's educational approach through leadership and broad-based agreement. Nevertheless, the pace of internalization was different from what the management wanted. Although we want to develop faster, we understand that we have to be patient—this is the key to success. I also try to provide professional help to every teacher who asks for it. I used the funds I got from the Ministry of Education to recruit SBL coaches into the classroom to help me mentor the teachers. Through coaching, the system has been better internalized.

Deciding to change how social relations in school are handled by transitioning from external regulation, punishment, control, and power relations to internal regulation, mutual respect, joint

responsibility, and shared goals takes a great deal of courage (Day, 2014). It also demands patience and a strong belief that the role of schools today is no longer solely to convey knowledge. Just as importantly, it is to develop soft skills and capabilities by becoming a social laboratory for life, where every conflict in the educational community becomes a valuable developmental opportunity.

General discussion

SBL-based conflict management offers a learning-oriented approach to conflict management in schools. We described the cornucopia of positive outcomes that can emerge. SBL-oriented conflict management benefits all the stakeholders within the school. It reduces violence and social exclusion, improves scholastic achievement, and prepares students for adulthood. This approach increases workplace wellbeing and reduces burnout and teacher turnover. The parents benefit from happier children and better relationships with the school staff by making them feel that their child is well and safe. Finally, for the staff, this approach helps build a culture of psychological safety and positive emotions (Barsade, 2002; Castro et al., 2016).

This study provides examples of how conflicts are addressed through an SBL lens, thus enabling the pupil to experience greater learning and growth in their relationships and overall positive feelings at school. The teachers engage in conflict management training, which emphasizes the importance of managing conflicts among themselves. The school's social atmosphere is enhanced by handling conflicts openly, involving teachers in decision-making, and fostering trust and teamwork among teachers. The findings underscore the importance of positive feedback, collaboration, and understanding diverse viewpoints in conflict management.

This study explored conflicts between teachers and pupils and emphasized the shift from teacher-centered solutions to whole-class engagement in conflict resolution. Such school environment encourages teachers to trust and guide pupils, hence fostering a cooperative atmosphere. Teacher-parent conflicts are addressed through a fractal strategy, where the school applies the same principles to parents and pupils. This was concretized in "parent social meetings" that involve parents in the social orientation of the school. Teacher-staff conflicts are mitigated by building mutual trust, emphasizing the leadership's role in supporting teachers and facilitating the internalization of the SBL approach. Overall, this study highlights the transformative impact of the SBL framework in managing conflicts by turning them from problems into assets that contribute to the school's social and educational growth.

We posit that SBL is a novel theory for conflict management that views conflict as a natural and even desirable state in a team's progress rather than an obstacle that the school needs to resolve. This approach sees the school as a unified system that requires an integration of the multiple actors within the school (pupils, teachers, parents, and staff) rather than a piecemeal challenge. Conflicts in school are natural, as are attempts to resolve unwanted and negative behaviors. The present paper contributes to the literature by presenting an innovative theory that attempts to handle and resolve conflicts from a relational and holistic point of view. The findings show that constructive and stable conflict resolution requires a change in the school's organizational culture

because for optimal conflict resolution to occur, the principal must become a social architect and work to create partnerships, meaningful relationships, and engagement among the teachers by focusing on what they need, instead of on what the principal wants to promote or force upon the school.

One major practical contribution of the present paper has to do with the emphasis on teacher training and the development of a "positive connections" mindset and the skills related to conflict management and depolarization by acknowledging that conflicts are a natural part of group dynamics and thus are opportunities for growth rather than disruption. Teachers undergo specific training in conflict resolution techniques, which includes learning how to facilitate open discussions, engage in depolarization strategies, and guide pupils through conflict management processes. The goal is not merely to address conflicts but to instill in teachers the skills needed to manage conflicts constructively, which can positively impact the overall school atmosphere. By providing teachers with the tools to navigate conflicts, the school ensures that they can serve as role models for the pupils by demonstrating the importance of open communication, listening, empathy, and collaboration (Itzchakov et al., 2023b).

The emphasis on depolarization during training creates a school culture that encourages understanding diverse perspectives and viewpoints. This strategy extends beyond the immediate conflicts by fostering an environment where teachers and pupils alike can engage in constructive conversations without succumbing to polarization. This aligns with the broader goal of the SBL framework, which is to promote social cohesion and positive relationships within the school community.

Limitations and future research

While the SBL framework shows promise in promoting positive conflict management and group dynamics, researchers and practitioners should be mindful of several limitations and carefully consider the specific context described here. Addressing the following limitations through further research and thoughtful implementation strategies will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the framework's potential impact and challenges.

Although this work provides valuable insights into implementing the SBL framework, the findings may have limitations in terms of generalizability. This study was based on a single school, so the applicability of these practices to other educational institutions may vary. Future research should explore the effectiveness of SBL in diverse educational settings to ascertain its broader impact. Conducting studies across multiple schools would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of the SBL framework. Comparing diverse educational settings can unveil variations in outcomes by shedding light on the contextual factors that influence the success of SBL.

In addition, this study primarily focused on the experiences of a school within a specific cultural context, which may limit the applicability of the findings to non-Western cultures. Cultural nuances can significantly influence the dynamics of conflict resolution and group processes (Markus and Kitayama, 2010). Future research should explore the cross-cultural applicability of

the SBL framework. Investigating how cultural differences impact conflict resolution dynamics and the effectiveness of SBL will provide insights into tailoring the approach for diverse cultural contexts. Relatedly, the SBL method is currently implemented not only in Israel but also globally. For example, in the last 2 years, the method was successfully implemented in a large school in Mexico City, which has different demographic characteristics, mainly among the teaching staff, which consists of a vast majority of Mexican non-Jewish and Mexican-born Jewish teachers.

Implementing the SBL framework also necessitates changing the school's organizational culture. This can pose a significant challenge as it requires a shift in mindset, values, and practices among all stakeholders, including teachers, pupils, parents, and staff (Schneider et al., 2013). Resistance to organizational change may impede the successful adoption of the SBL framework (Oreg, 2018). Understanding the long-term effects of organizational culture change is crucial. Longitudinal studies could thus provide insights into the sustainability of the SBL framework and the challenges associated with maintaining a transformed organizational culture.

Furthermore, future research should test the effectiveness of SBL in comparison to other educational approaches. Such a study, which will likely need to be quantitative will help to shed further light on the incremental value of the approach. The approach is described in detail in Vinokur et al. (2023). Therefore, we advise researchers who seek to replicate the present study to read it together with this paper to get a comprehensive description necessary for replication.

Finally, the success of the SBL framework relies on the commitment of all involved parties to the conflict resolution process. This commitment involves teachers, pupils, parents, and staff. Achieving a collective commitment to the principles of SBL requires ongoing effort, support, and reinforcement. Without sustained dedication, the effectiveness of the framework may diminish over time. Hence, future studies should explore how educators, pupils, parents, and school staff can effectively foster enduring commitment and support for conflict-positive practices.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Ethics statement

The studies involving humans were approved by the Israel Ministry of Education, Chief Scientist Officer, May 14th, 2023. The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study. Written informed consent was obtained from the individual(s) for the publication of any potentially identifiable images or data included in this article.

Author contributions

EV: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Supervision, Conceptualization. AY: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Investigation, Conceptualization. MM: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation. GI: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Resources, Project administration, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization. LB: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Formal analysis.

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