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## **The importance of using assertive communication in the educational environment**

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**Abstract.** The present article is a study about the teachers' assertive communication, the power of managing perturbation in the classroom with respect to students' feelings and rights. Also, the study shows that teachers that know how and when to say NO are more successful in the classroom, by managing verbal and nonverbal communication. Also, by considering students' rights and their own, teachers can use cantered-learning methods that are suitable for their object of study and their pupils.

**Keywords.** assertive communication, class management

### **Introduction**

As a tool through which the human being acquires its uniqueness, language represents a challenge of reflection for specialists from numerous and heterogeneous scientific fields. Jitaru (Jitaru, 2015, p. 7) defines communication as "a fundamental way of psychosocial interaction, a continuous exchange of messages between interlocutors, meant to build a lasting interpersonal relationship, allowing the affirmation of individuality and the achievement of personal and group goals". Therefore, to communicate effectively and expressively with others and with oneself, involves convincing, being able to develop the thinking, affectivity, and personality of others, to inform intelligibly and to correctly understand the meaning of the message, to perceive and become aware of the reactions, attitudes and behavioral changes of the receptors or the audience. One of the territories of interest for the field of psychopedagogy is assertiveness.

The word "assertive" comes from the English language and enjoys a wide use in moments of expression of attitude and evaluation of a person's behavior. Valued as a trait on which depends, to a considerable extent, a person's ability to achieve their goals, "to assert" means to affirm, to say.



For M. Roco (in Ianioglo, 2017, p. 133) to manifest yourself assertively, that is, *to assert yourself, to defend your rights, to claim* implies to:

- you assert yourself without fear and in a constructive way;
- defend your rights without restricting those of others;
- aspire to your own truth, to your own ideas, to your own tastes;
- You take back control of your personal environment.

Assertive communication is in Popescu and Sârbu's vision (Popescu & Sârbu, 2017, p. 102) a form of communication through which the person expresses his own opinions and emotions without attacking those of the interlocutor, being a way of opening the communication for the subjects that are potentially conflictual. H.Cornelius and S.Faire (in Anghel & Jitaru, 2021, p. 112) consider assertiveness as that option of the individual in communication that helps him to sustain his position without blaming or without treating the other person as an opponent, and Ianioglo (Ianioglo, 2017, p. 134) analyzes assertiveness as a complex social skill anchored in a social context, where the acquisition of assertive abilities can essentially but incompletely contribute to the remediation of interpersonal relationships and characterized by the manifestation of both proper and expressive responsible behavior.

Assertive behavior expresses respect for oneself and others, promotes self-disclosure, self-control and positive appreciation of self-worth, representing the most effective way to solve interpersonal problems (Pipaş & Jaradat, 2010, p. 650).

Hemavathy and Devi (Hemavathy & Devi, 2016) describe, in opposition to assertiveness, non-assertiveness manifested as denial of one's own feelings, needs and ideas, ignoring one's own rights or allowing others to violate your rights. Non-assertive people feel lower and let others make decisions for themselves. People who are not assertive usually behave in this way to avoid conflicts, however, they usually end up being angry at others and themselves.

Pedagogically, assertiveness is an attitudinal tool necessary for an existential and relational homeostasis. Because 'we are hurting in a world where people have to earn trust and communication, (...) twenty-first-century schools must help students develop their autonomy, their identity and the ability to communicate with others' (Schleicher, in Bârsan, 2021, p.42 ).

Bârsan (Bârsan, 2017, p. 9) proposes pedagogical assertiveness as a socio-professional competence of self-actualization and self-affirmation in pedagogical communication, which appears as a result of the formation of a set of attitudes, capacities and learned knowledge, having as long-term effects: improving social relations, developing self-confidence, strengthening the competence to make responsible decisions, developing conflict management capacities and the functionality of professional skills.

Some people are born with this ability to be assertive, but other people need to adapt along the way, so Bârsan (Bârsan, 2017, p.4) emphasizes the importance of the current paradigm of assertive communication and of training for this purpose assertiveness of students in the field of educational sciences. The mission of pedagogical higher education to train teachers capable of acting autonomously, freely and responsibly in the professional environment, untrusted conduct may decrease the cause of professional failure. The research of the specificity of the formation of the pedagogical assertiveness of the teaching staff for assertive communication is imposed by the exigencies of the contemporary society at the axiological level: vigilance, keenness of the mind, sociability, mastery and diplomacy in communication, the emotional self-regulation, the realistic approach, the resistance to stress and at the praxiological level through the need of efficient



strategies for the formation of pedagogical assertiveness during the professional training of the teachers.

Also, Bârsan, (Bârsan, 2017, p.5) talks about the fact that the problem of studying assertive communication includes the manifestation in education (on the part of teachers and students) of different forms of aggressiveness:

- a) hyperexcitability;
- b) impulsiveness;
- c) propulsiveness, expressed by manifestations of the unconscious that require an imperative satisfaction of the desire for fulfillment;

d) violence, reflected in conscious or unconscious aggression, having therefore feeling of guilt, shame, deterioration of personal relationships, counter aggressivity on the part of those around, alienation, misunderstanding and lack of sympathy on the part of others, lack of long-term success, ignoring or humiliating the opinions of others, sarcasm, control or domination of discussions, acceptance only of one's own opinions, high-voiced speech, aggressive gestures.

Assertive training has proven to be effective in increasing the assertive behavior of students who are victims of bullying. Research conducted by Mousa (in Faradita & Farozin, 2019, p. 41) shows that using assertive training can improve assertive behavior skills and reduce anxiety of social interaction. It also appears that assertive training has also proven to be effective in increasing students' self-esteem and academic performance.

One thing that works when we have a confrontation with someone is to try to emphasize their disturbing behavior (for example, to say: "Why do you raise your voice to me?"); the question will be confusing at this time and will make him lose the thread of thought and think about his actions. Some people simply do not realize when they become aggressive in conversation and this is a great way to take control in a tense situation (Pipaş & Jaradat, 2010, p. 653).

In a study conducted by Anghel and Jitaru (Anghel & Jitaru, 2021) on the topic of communication between teachers and students, dimensions of assertive communication that students consider necessary are captured:

➤ The teacher, as an adult and a professional, is responsible for building a secure emotional environment in the classroom, is a facilitator of positive emotions and learning: *From the teacher's part there must be more dedication in facilitating communication. If the dam exists on the part of the student, for example, it is not a fluency of communication, then it is the teacher who must remedy the situation... the teacher must be a facilitator.*

➤ Awareness of the relationship between learning, empathy and assertiveness: *In case of passivity, children will no longer give their interest in the subject, in the case of aggressiveness... students will learn with fear and forget in the second.* In the absence of empathy and assertiveness, there can be no constructive relationship between the teacher-student and there are bottlenecks at the level of learning: *It can be a springboard for the student if the teacher is willing to listen and understand when something bothers you, and so you become more ambitious, you develop ...; The teacher is responsible for the quality and efficiency of communication. For this it is important that he also listens to the opinion of the students, to be empathetic.*

➤ Identifying the blockages that intervene in assertive communication expressed in teachers' behaviors that arouse students' frustrations (led to revolt):



- 1) indisposition to listen to students: *To accept our opinion as well. It's not just what they're advocating that's also right.*
- 2) attitude of superiority: (...) *not to make you feel like you're the worst man on earth and he's the smartest because he's the teacher.*
- 3) anchoring in traditional methods in working with students: *they should understand that certain methods no longer work with us.*

Table 1. Consequences of passive, assertive and aggressive behaviors (Popescu & Sirbu, 2017, p. 9)

<b>Passive behavior</b>	<b>Assertive behavior</b>	<b>Aggressive behavior</b>
The problem is avoided	The issue is discussed	The problem is being attacked
His rights are ignored	His rights are upheld	His rights are upheld without regard to the rights of others
Let others choose for themselves	They choose their own activity	They choose their work and that of others
It is incredulous in itself	Trusts him	He is hostile, he blames, he accuses
I perceive the rights of others as more important than their own	Recognizes his rights and those of others	His rights are more important than those of others

In conclusion, assertiveness is a complex social skill anchored in a social context, where the acquisition of specific skills can essentially but incompletely contribute to the remediation of interpersonal relationships and characterize by the manifestation of both a corresponding responsible behavior and an expressive one. Those who have appropriated assertiveness can reduce and remove interpersonal conflicts in their lives. Thus, assertiveness, being the ability to influence others, related to behavior, proposes to make the individual able to express his personality, continuing to be accepted socially without fear of arousing hostility in the environment and promotes an effective way of solving difficult colic, interpersonal problems, conflict situations, involve in defending personal rights and expressing thoughts, feelings and beliefs directly, honestly and appropriately, without violating the rights of other persons.

Communication in general and educational communication are therefore linked to the phenomenon of social influence and persuasion (Jitaru, 2015, p. 7). Persuasion, as an effective communication strategy, aims to convince the receiver (students, the group) to change, freely, their attitudes and behaviors. The teacher is the one who exerts influence through democratic behaviors that allow him to build a relationship based on mutual respect, self-revelation and valorization, a context that facilitates the growth and harmonious development of the autonomous and creative personality.



## **1. Methods of research**

### **1.1. Objectives and hypotheses of the research**

The objective of the research is:

- Identifying the statistical relationships existing between the ability of teachers to freely express their feelings and assertive behaviours: the proper use of "No", the reaction to disturbing behaviours of students.

The hypothesis of the research is:

- It is presumed that there is a correlation between the ability of teachers to freely express their feelings and assertive behaviours: proper use of "No", reaction to disruptive behaviours of students.

### **1.2. Batch of participants**

The batch of subjects consists of 32 subjects aged 20-63 years, 100% female, 81.2% come from urban areas and 18.8% from rural areas.

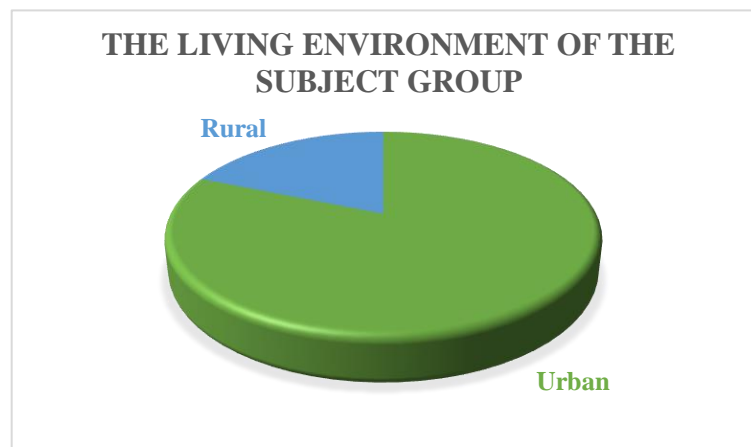


Figure SEQ Figure \\* ARABIC 1. Graphic representation of the origin of the subjects

### **1.3. Instruments**

The tool used is a questionnaire consisting of 12 closed questions, 2 mixed questions and 2 open questions. The questions aim to capture the ability of teachers to freely express their feelings, the practice of assertive behaviors such as the proper use of "No" and the reaction to disruptive behaviors of students.

### **1.4. Experimental design of research**

The research presence began in March 2022. The questionnaire was created on March 26, and responses will be received on the same day. We entered the data in the SPSS 20 program in April and processed and interpreted the data between 30.04.2022-05.05.2022.



### 1.5. Ethical requirements

This interview is confidential. Teachers are asked to answer honestly and read each question carefully. The subjects' experiences are important for this research. Respondents answered each question by ticking in the box next to each description corresponding to the situation or free answer, where appropriate.

### 1.6. Presentation of the obtained results

To the question "Do you trust your own forces?" the research participants responded in a percentage of 3.1% with the "Sometimes" version. 37.5% of the interviewed persons answered with the "Often" version and 59.4% replied with the "Very often" version that they trust their own forces. (Figure 2)

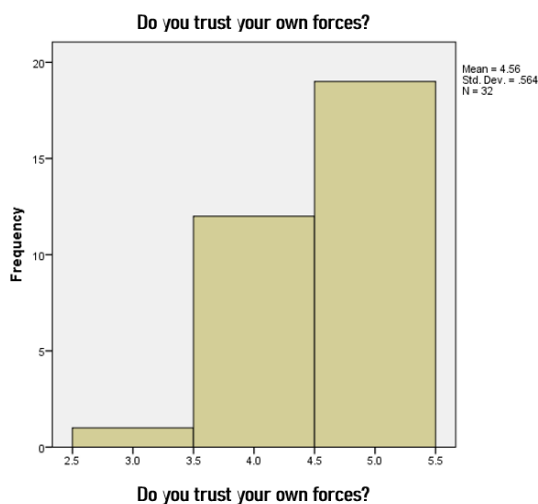


Figure 2. Graphical representation of the answers to the question "Do you trust your own forces?"

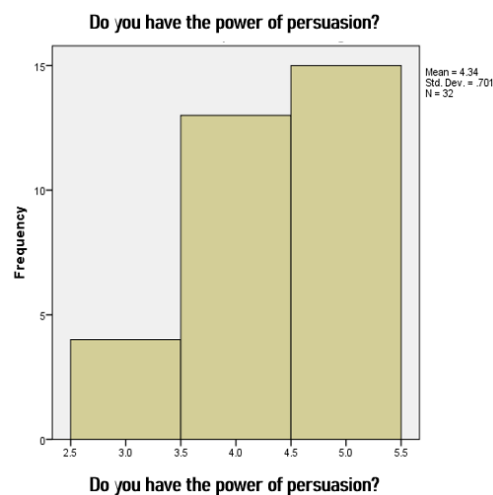


Figure 3. Graphical representation of the answers to the question "Do you have the power of persuasion?"

The perception of trust in each person's own forces comes from the self-image, through the way in which everyone accepts and appreciates himself will contribute to self-respect and self-confidence, and if the weaknesses without permanent criticism are accepted, then the basis of tolerance towards oneself and implicitly towards others will be formed, thus being able to live emotionally comfortable and confident in their own forces.

To the question "Do you have the power of persuasion?" the research participants answered in a percentage of 12.5% with the "Sometimes" variant. 40.6% of the interviewed persons answered with the "Often" version and 46.9% answered with the "Very often" version that they have the power of persuasion. (Figure 3)

85% success depends on the ability to communicate ideas and the power of persuasion to convince others to cooperate. First, each person must be aware of the power they hold and must develop confidence that they are convincing. To succeed in being convincing, you need several practices such as empathy, warmth of mind, attention paid to those around you, authoritarian and convincing voice, trust, and credibility both verbally and nonverbally.



To the question "Do you take responsibility when this is the case?" the research participants answered in a percentage of 3.1% with the "Sometimes" version. 31.3% of the respondents answered with the "Often" version and 65.6% answered with the "Very often" version that they take responsibility when appropriate. (Figure 4)

Taking responsibility when appropriate requires meeting certain requirements imposed when necessary. A responsible person worries all the time about the consequences of his decisions and has a rational approach to his behaviour. The issue of responsibility occupies a fairly important position in personality psychology and affects the profound aspect of the formation and development of any individual. Responsibility plays an important role in becoming a disciplined person, cultivating firmness and the right qualities of character.

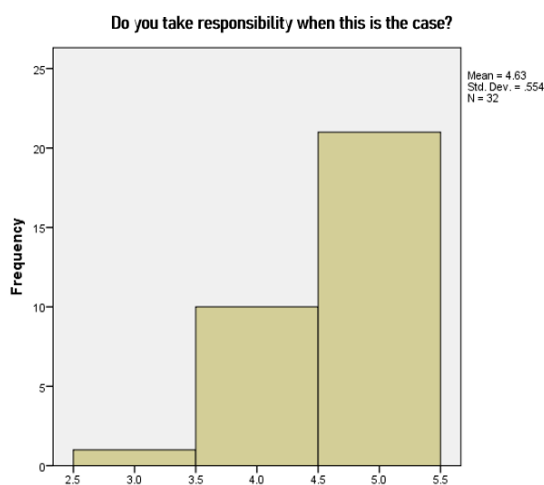


Figure 4. Graphical representation of the answers to the question "Do you take responsibility when appropriate?"

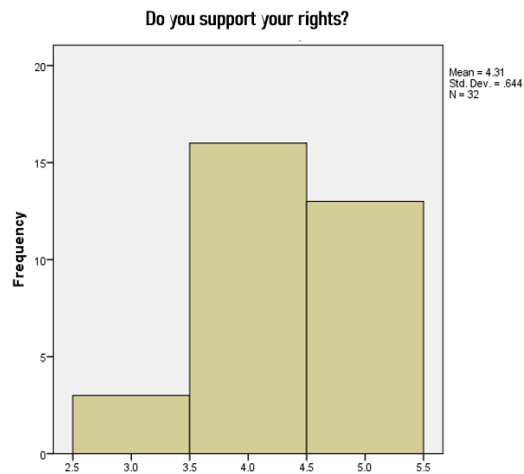


Figure 5. Graphical representation of the answers to the question "Do you support your rights?"

To the question "Do you support your rights?" the research participants answered in a percentage of 9.4% with the "Sometimes" version. 50% of the interviewed persons answered with the "Often" version and 40.6% answered with the "Very often" version that they support their rights. (Figure 5)

Everyone has rights guaranteed by the Romanian Constitution. Moreover, human rights are also guaranteed globally, and a prominent representative is the U.N. itself. One quote should follow our lives constantly and that is: *All people are born free and equal in dignity and rights.* Human rights are those rights without which a human being could not live in dignity. We can call them minimum standards by which a person can shape his own life. These rights also define how we humans could live together peacefully while protecting the freedom of everyone. Rights should lead to peace, security, development, harmony, respect and more.

To the question "Do you support the rights of your students?" respondents responded in a percentage of 28.1% with the "Often" version and 71.9% responded with the "Very often" version. (Figure 6)

Students' rights are guaranteed primarily by law and every teacher should ensure that they are respected exactly. Every student has the right to education in the education system, and this



education must be done in a fair way, without prejudices and stereotypes. The teacher must ensure that the teaching act (teaching-learning-evaluation) is always correct and objective and that each student has the right to consist of the evaluation of the written works. There are many rights of the students, I believe that every teacher must make them known to the students, as well as their duties.

To the question "Are you able to say *No* if the situation requires it?" the research participants answered in a percentage of 21.9% with the "Sometimes" version. 40.6% of the

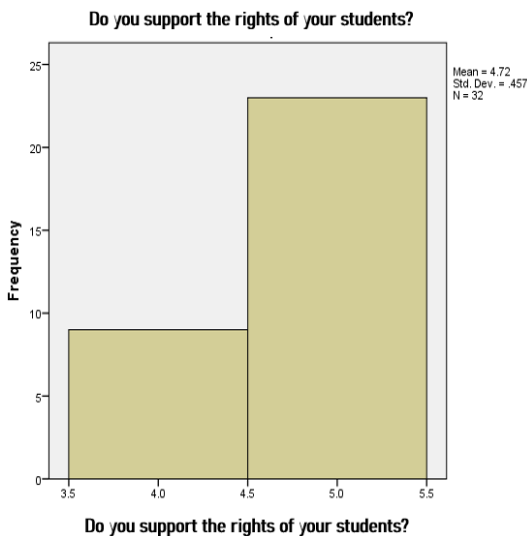


Figure 6. Graphical representation of the answers to the question "Do you support the rights of your students?"

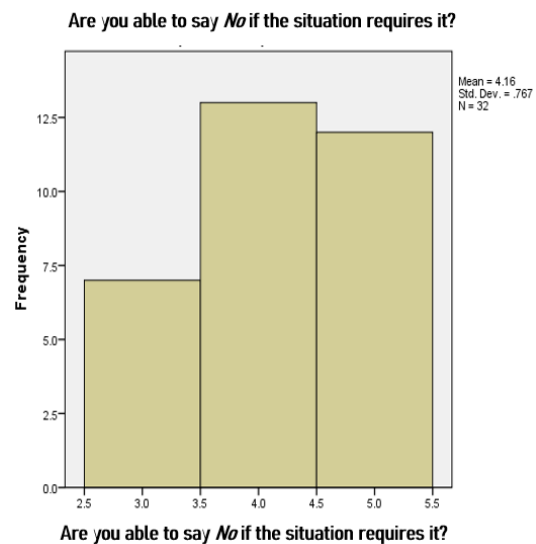


Figure 7. Graphical representation of the answers to the question "Are you able to say 'No' if the situation requires it?"

interviewed persons answered with the "Often"

version and 37.5% answered with the "Very often" version that they have the courage to say "No" if the situation requires it. (Figure 7)

A common problem is that of affirmative or negative answers. To say "Yes" or to say "No"? Although respondents responded that they are able to say "No" most of the time refusal occurs quite rarely in everyday life. It is not a question of being aggressive, but simply there are situations in which the No is imperative. Uttered in an assertive way along with a motivation does less harm than an unwanted "Yes".

To the question "When you express your opinion, are you careful not to hurt the feelings of those around you?" the research participants answered in a percentage of 12.5% with the "Sometimes" version, 34.4% of the interviewed persons answered with the "Often" version and 53.1% answered with the "Very often" version that they take care not to hurt the feelings of those around them. (Figure 8).

Expressing your opinion with care not to hurt the surrounding feelings requires some empathy. Basically, we transpose ourselves into the thoughts and feelings of the other, we get into that person's skin and we try to feel what they would feel and that. We can translate through a Romanian proverb "What you do not like another does not do".



When expressing your opinion take care not to hurt the feelings of those around you?

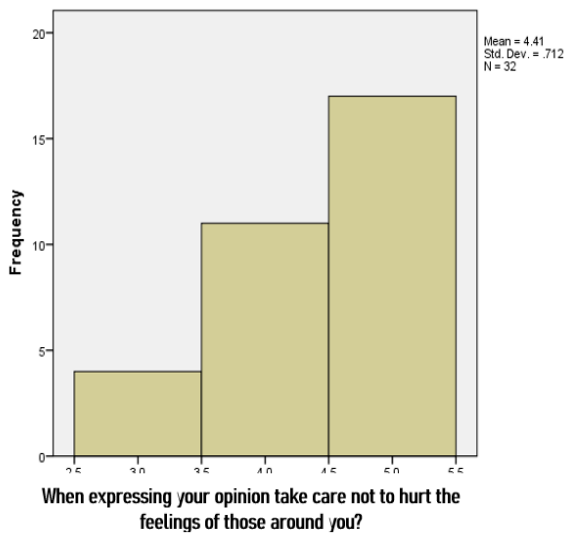


Figure 8. Graphical representation of the answers to the question "When expressing your opinion take care not to hurt the feelings of those around you?"

Do you freely express your thoughts and feelings?

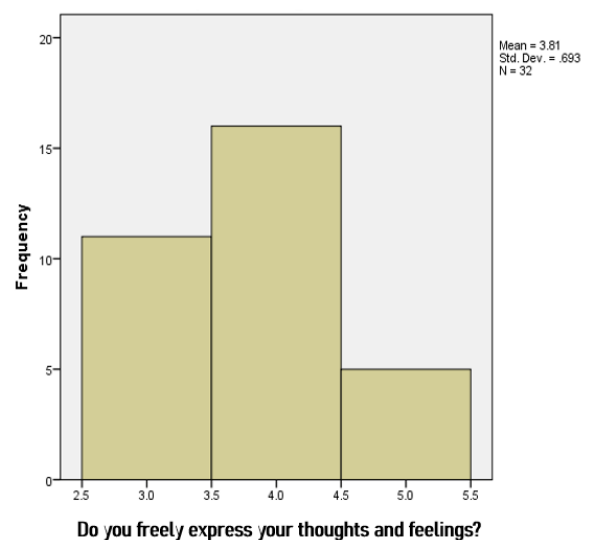


Figure 1. Graphical representation of the answers to the question "Do you freely express your thoughts and feelings?"

Every person should be aware that we live together with our fellow human beings and we should show care for them especially because nothing remains unspoiled and the Universe is always working to establish a balance.

To the question "Do you freely express your thoughts and feelings?" the research participants responded in a percentage of 34.4% with the "Sometimes" version, 50% of the interviewed persons responded with the "Often" version and 15.6% responded with the "Very often" version that they freely expressed their thoughts and feelings. (Figure 9)

The free expression of thoughts and feelings brings power and freedom. Some people cannot express themselves freely because they feel shame. Their inner voice tells them "What will they think of me if I say this thing?". This is how frustration, lying, falsehood, etc. come into play. Every person should be assumed, to express themselves freely, it is a therapy for the mind and soul. It is important that there is nothing left inside that grinds because in the future it can even lead to mental or other illnesses. In order to be able to freely express our thoughts and feelings, it would first be necessary to accept the thoughts and feelings of others, to learn to love and accept unconditionally, to understand that everyone has the right to express themselves freely and to feel differently.

To the question "When communicating do you use verbal language accompanied by nonverbal language?" the research participants responded in percentage of 9.4 with the "Sometimes" version, 46.9% of the interviewed persons responded with the "Often" version and 43.8% replied with the "Very often" version that they use the verbal language accompanied by the nonverbal one in communication. (Figure 10)



In the process of communication, the largest share belongs to nonverbal communication, followed by the para verbal one and finally, verbal communication represents the least of what we communicate, specialists say that somewhere at 7% is situated. People communicate much more than just the words they utter. They are expressed through gestures, facial expressions, body posture, eye contact and all these aspects are related to nonverbal communication. The silence that is often used in many situations and that helps us to convey a message or certain states and emotions should not be overlooked either.

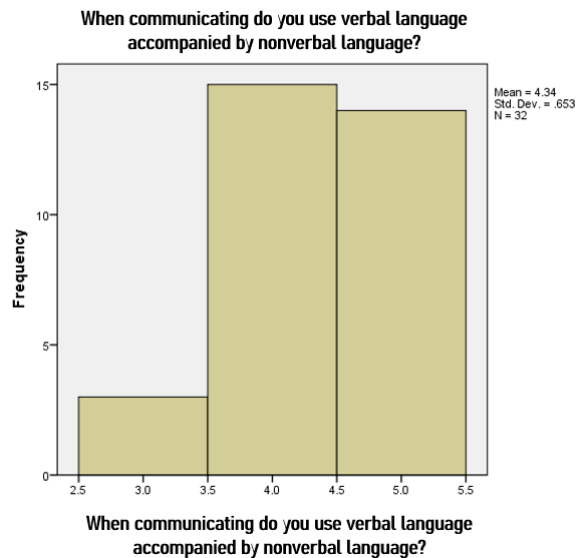


Figure 10. Graphical representation of the answers to the question "When communicating do you use verbal language accompanied by nonverbal language?"

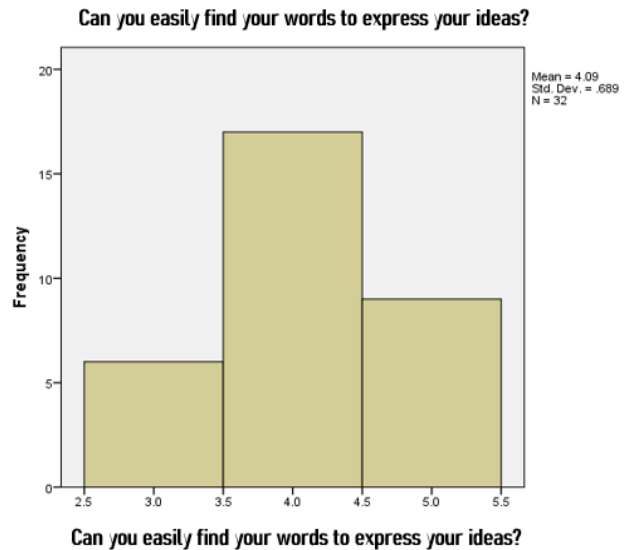


Figure 11. Graphical representation of the answers to the question "Can you easily find your words to express your ideas?"

To the question "Can you easily find your words to express your ideas?" the research participants responded in percentage of 18.8% with the "Sometimes" version, 53.1% of the interviewed persons responded with the "Often" version and 28.1% answered with the "Very often" version that they trust their own forces. (Figure 11)

A very important part of a person's image is competent speech, coherent and correct speech. The first thing we notice in those around us and attracts us is the beauty of speech accompanied by diction and voice. When we manage to express our ideas we attract the attention of those around us, and our opinion is listened to. In order to be able to find the right words, it is necessary, of course, to have confidence in ourselves, in our personal competencies. Many people tend to prepare a speech in advance to express ideas, others practice spontaneity. Regardless of how a speech is prepared, we must bear in mind that stuttering is not welcome and that emotion must be added to speech, perhaps even a little humor to relax a tense atmosphere.

To the question "Are you influenced by your peers on how to manage the class of students?" the research participants responded in a percentage of 15.6% with the "Very rare" version, 34.4% of the interviewed persons responded with the "Rare" version and 46.9% replied with the



"Sometimes" version that they are influenced by their colleagues on the way to manage the class. Only 3.1% responded with the "Often" variant. (Figure 12)

The influence is directly proportional to the style of a teacher. So, if a teacher practices an authoritarian style, he cannot be influenced because he wants to be in constant control and always makes decisions without consulting others. As far as the democratic style is concerned, an influence can be exerted, but not very much because the teacher is interested in other practices, but the decision will be made after analyzing it in detail. Conversely, if a teacher practices *the laissez-fair style*, the other colleagues can have a great influence on him because he is not involved in making decisions, nor is he very interested in carrying out the activities.

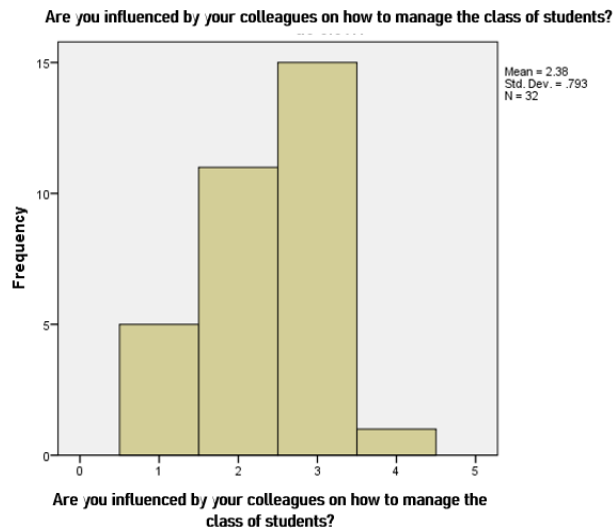


Figure 12. Graphical representation of the answers to the question "Are you influenced by your colleagues on how to manage the class of students?"

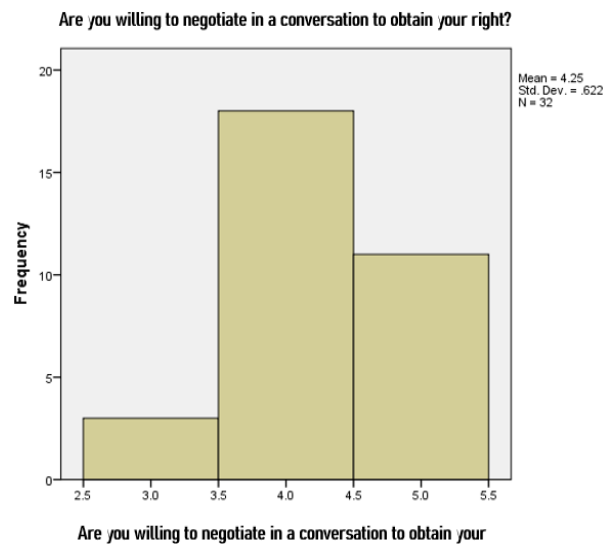


Figure 13. Graphical representation of the answers to the question "Are you willing to negotiate in a conversation in order to obtain your right? "

To the question "Are you willing to negotiate in a conversation to get your right?" the research participants responded in a percentage of 9.4% with the "Sometimes" version, 56.3% of the interviewed persons responded with the "Often" version and 34.4% replied with the "Very often" version that they are willing to negotiate for their right. (Figure 13)

Negotiation is about the assertive side. This skill is necessary for everyone to be able to communicate their needs, their desires, their expectations, of course, their rights. A negotiation in which temperance is lost is a lost negotiation. The aim of a negotiation is to bring two different interests closer together and to materialize. Of course, everyone must consider their personal limits and set thresholds. It is important for everyone to know some negotiation techniques because, all their lives, adults negotiate either in families, or between friends, or at work or in various environments.

Research hypothesis: It is presumed that there is a correlation between the ability of teachers to freely express their feelings and assertive behaviors: proper use of "No", reaction to disturbing behaviors of students.



We have statistically verified the assumptions, starting with the normality of the distribution of the collected data. Analyzing the Pearson coefficient, we obtained non-normal distributions and used nonparametric statistical tests. The results are shown in Table 2 below:

Table 2. Correlation between teachers who freely express their feelings and have the courage to say "No"

		Do you freely express your thoughts and feelings?	Are you able to say 'No' if the situation demands it?
Do you freely express your thoughts and feelings?	Pearson Correlation	1	.543**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001
	N	32	32
Are you able to say 'No' if the situation demands it?	Pearson Correlation	.543**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
	N	32	32

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation is significant, at a materiality threshold, the correlation coefficient is , which confirms the hypothesis of the research. We can explain the results by the fact that when a person has the ability to say  $p = .001, \rho = .543$  "No" he can certainly freely express his thoughts and feelings, without hurting the people around him, but expressed in an assertive way. There is also evidence that shows in the study offered by Berdahl and Martorana (Berdahl & Martorana, 2006) and applied to a sample of 61 groups, consisting of 3 people each, that people with great power to bring counterarguments in discussions, so also to use the word "No" which is so controversial at times, expressed even more emotions and positive thoughts as opposed to those with less power to support their point of view who also felt anger. This research gives us an insight into the fact that people with greater inner strength are more likely to express their opinions openly and without affecting the feelings of those around them.

The quantitative analysis of the data collected from the questionnaire that aims to highlight the teachers' perception of assertive communication shows us that 21.9% of respondents have the courage to say "No" sometimes, 40.6% often and 37.5% very often. With a slightly different percentage, to the question "Be careful not to hurt the feelings of those around you?", 12.5% sometimes answered, 34.4% often and 53.1% answered that very often they take care of the feelings of those around them.

To the open questions, each teacher gave his interest in providing the most complete answers. For example, to the question "A student is hyperagitate he gets up from the bench, disturbs the classmates and the hour with remarks outside the discussion. How do you proceed?", some of the most interesting, professional and pertinent resoundings are in my vision the following: "I request a meeting with the parents, I collect information from the other teachers, I identify the causes through specific techniques. Set clear rules in class.", "Ok... I understand your desire to be in the spotlight, but now we are in class and we have to respect our colleagues and the teacher. I make



you responsible in the future to monitor the work of those who will want to be in the center of attention with pertinent remarks." There were, however, slight answers in the aggressive area like "I walk next to him and look him in the eye I ask him to stop because it bothers me."

To the second question, "During a debate a student showed verbal aggression towards another student, trying to impose his point of view. How do you proceed?" we have identified several answers and good practices such as: "I mediate the situation, drawing his attention to the fact that it is important to respect the opinion of the other even if we do not agree, convincing through pros and cons.", "I remind him of the rules established at the beginning of the class, even if we feel angry, dissatisfied, we must respect the m the opinion of the other, so that we can find the most varied, original and unique solutions in our debate!" and yet it was also a slightly aggressive response such as "I adopt the same method, trying to impose my point of view myself and then I ask him how he feels."

### **Conclusions**

This study aimed to identify the statistical relationships existing between the ability of teachers to freely express their feelings and assertive behaviours: the proper use of "No", the reaction to disruptive behaviours of students. We have shown that there is a significant correlation, but much can still be said on this subject, even though the objective has been achieved. At the same time, studies support the hypothesis presented above.

Since the research has been limited, with 32 subjects being a small number in this sample, different situations may arise in which some results are not relevant. Another limitation in research could be that teachers provide the desirable answers. Most of the time most of them answered questions with the "Very often" or "Often" variant, which implies that teachers practice assertive and desirable behaviours.

Following the answers of the respondents, we deduce that most of the teachers have an assertive behaviour in class and know how to defuse a conflictual situation in which students are breaking the rules. But there are always some teachers that respond aggressively to the perturbation in the classroom.

These days, more and more aggressive incidents happen in the classroom, which are often produced by disruptive elements who don't have the necessary motivation for education or the object of study. Teachers must manage this perturbation by not adding to the aggressiveness but by assertive communication. Maintaining the order in class is important for both the teacher, that needs to educate and, maybe more importantly, for the other students who want and have the right to a proper education.

### **References**

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