



Pestalozzi Programme

Basic assumption document:

“Education for the prevention of violence in schools”

“Too many schools in Europe continue to be confronted with very serious acts of violence. It is necessary to take action at different levels and involve all key players, in particular families, teachers and pupils.”¹

The training of teaching professionals in the modules series has proved to be a proactive and efficient way to put into effect the principles that are upheld by the Council of Europe. Teaching experts from member states are invited to join a workshop where they get involved in an intensive training on the topic. In the follow up they write their own training units, pilot them in their countries and give feedback on those of their peers. This procedure yields both, well-trained experts on the topic that have already started to work as agents for change in their countries and a comprehensive (tried and tested) teachers’ manual ready to be used by all member states.

“Humanism, non-violent behaviour, tolerance and mutual respect are common fundamental values upheld by the Council of Europe since its foundation six decades ago and the Organisation has made longstanding efforts to combat all kinds of violence, in particular against children.”²

In the year 2004 the CoE created the European Charter for Democratic Schools without violence. The programme "Building a Europe for and with children" is being implemented by

¹ Mr Gvozden Srećko FLEGO, Education against violence at school, Doc. 12513, 2011.
<http://assembly.coe.int/Documents/WorkingDocs/Doc11/EDOC12513.pdf>

² Ibid

the CoE further to the Third Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe (Warsaw 2005). The programme is a response to the organisation's mandate to guarantee an integrated approach to promoting children's rights and the decision to launch a three-year programme covering the social, legal, and educational and health dimensions relevant to protecting children from various forms of violence. The programme comprises two closely related strands: the promotion of children's rights and the protection of children from violence. One of the CoE's objectives is to help all decisions makers and players concerned to design and implement national strategies for the protection of children's rights and the prevention of violence against children. In the last decade most European governments have put school violence on their political agendas³.

What is violence?

It is difficult to have one definition of violence. This definition for example, brings some questions with it:

*"Violence is the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development, or deprivation."*⁴

- How do we consider different forms of violence such as physical, psychological, structural violence?
- Are we able to distinguish overt and covert forms of violence?
- Do all forms of violence have the same purpose and results?

In the context of education for the prevention of violence, it will be useful to consider all these questions. For example strategies to prevent acts of violence perpetrated for the gain of entertainment will be altogether quite different than strategies to prevent structural violence such as institutionalized discrimination.

The causes for violence

Violence is a global problem in contemporary society. We find many interrelated causes for violence, such as: experience, personal traits and dispositions of an individual, culture and environment, tradition, historical heritage, and many others. Violence has different forms and we recognize it as physical, psychological or structural violence and it can manifest itself as

³ Building a Europe for and with children; http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/children/Default_en.asp

⁴ <http://www.who.int/violenceprevention/approach/definition/en/index.html>

direct or indirect violence. One of the crucial questions that emerges is: ‘What makes an individual or a group resort to violence?’ In school as in society “*people have to live together, and while living together share resources*” (e.g., Hawley & Little, 2008⁵) In schools and classrooms, there are some resources which seem valuable to obtain. Such resources could be attention from others, space to work in peace, space to have fun during school hours, or friendships with others. When there are conflicts of interest, aggression and violence can appear. During their school years, children are still trying to find their place and role in society and their social skills are not fully developed, therefore violence and aggression can arise. In early adolescence, children can experience a gap between how adult they (physically) feel, and how much this is recognized by society (Moffitt, 1993⁶). One way of obtaining more ‘social maturity’ is through their peers, these children can start acting antisocially or showing signs of risky behavior to compensate for the lack of mature recognition society gives them. Children that have been frustrated for a long time can develop aggressive behavior due to psychological exhaustion and lack of support and understanding (Maleš i Stričević, 2005⁷). Obviously, there are many other causes for violence in schools. The following questions can help us develop a common ground towards prevention:

- Are there visible triggers of violence?
 - Institutional triggers such as domination/power relations, discrimination and inequality, injustice?
 - Psychological causes such as: helplessness, frustration, fear, anger?
 - Psychosocial phenomena such as: peer pressure, imitation, mob behavior...?
- Is violence a successful strategy? What is the aim and gain?

What are its consequences?

Acts of violence produce very significant effects on the persons involved and their immediate environment, often resulting in frustration, fear and feelings of insecurity. They are a

⁵ Hawley, P. H., Little, T. D., & Card, N. A. (2008). The myth of the alpha male: A new look at dominance-related beliefs and behaviors among adolescent males and females. *International Journal of Behavior Development*, 32, 76-88.

⁶ Moffitt, T. E. (1993). “Life-course-persistent” and “adolescence-limited” antisocial behavior: A developmental taxonomy. *Psychological Review*, 100, 674-701.

⁷ Maleš, D i Stričević, I (2005) Zlostavljanje među učenicima može se spriječiti; priručnik za učitelje i stručne suradnike; Udruženje djeca prva, Zagreb

⁸ Sentse, M., Scholte, R., Salmivalli, C., & Voeten, M. (2007). Person-group dissimilarity in involvement in bullying and its relation with social status. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 35, 1009-1019.

⁹ Allen, J. P., Porter, M. R., McFarland, F. C., Marsh, P., & McElhaney, K. B. (2005). The two faces of adolescents' success with peers: Adolescent popularity, social adaptation, and deviant behavior. *Child Development*, 76, 747-760.

worrying sign that, despite many efforts, the phenomena of violence at school and of violence in society in general have not been properly addressed. Besides this, a violent atmosphere can increase the chance that violence takes place. So, aggressive children are liked better in classrooms where there is more aggression (Sentse, Scholte, Salmivalli, & Voeten, 2007)⁸. Popular children, for example, are more prone to adapt to the classroom norms, both positive and negative norms (Allen, Porter, McFarland, Marsh, & McElhaney, 2005)⁹

How to promote change?

Violence is a problem recognised worldwide, finding its causes in situations happening on a global level as well as in specific societies. Family as a key element of society is expected to give children safety and love but too often fails in this task leaving children scared, confused and frustrated. Schools are public spaces where children spend a lot of their time, almost as much as with family members. School is a place where interactions take place, relationships develop and conflicts abound. For this reason school environments become a ‘hot spot’ for education for the prevention of violence. To this end, we suggest that school communities develop an approach to education for the prevention of violence that not only tackles violent acts when they occur but develops an approach based on the strengthening of ‘convivencia’⁸. In our work for the prevention of violence in schools, it is of vital importance to promote convivencia in both classrooms and in schools through **whole school approaches** that include all key players, pupils and their parents, teachers and administration; a program that aims at improving the climate of schools and classes through staff education, and enhanced personal and social education for pupils.⁹ If this problem is not treated adequately, the resulting social and financial costs will clearly exceed the costs of setting up more comprehensive programmes to deal with violence effectively, not to mention the unacceptable human suffering of those children who are and were exposed to violence.¹⁰

The focus of this training will be to provide the trainers with skills which can help all key players to promote convivencia.

⁸ From the Spanish word for ‘living together in harmony’, and here: 1) establishing and maintaining a learning environment where violence is not tolerated so that an ethos of convivencia is always present; 2) responding to violence when it occurs so that ethos of convivencia is protected.

⁹ Violence reduction in schools –How to make a difference

¹⁰ Mr Gvozden Srećko FLEGO, Education against violence at school, Doc. 12513, 2011.
<http://assembly.coe.int/Documents/WorkingDocs/Doc11/EDOC12513.pdf>

At School Level

At school level, convivencia can be increased by setting rules that send a clear message that violent behaviour is not acceptable.¹¹ The rules are agreed on by everybody and are valid for everybody within the school, pupils, teachers and administration alike. Rephrased in unequivocal language, the rules are displayed in highly frequented areas in the school house.¹² Schools can.:

- Create an environment that does not encourage violence
- Create a safe environment that does not tolerate violence
- Create a democratic mutually respectful, environment

At Teacher Level

If teachers want to help promote a climate of convivencia, they should all have a sound knowledge of all forms of violence (physical, verbal, psychological). To be able to prevent violence teachers can.

- reflect on their own practice
- keep a lookout for the structural violence implicit in the school environment
- use different forms of professional improvement (formal, non-formal or informal) to develop competences needed for violence prevention
- build and sustain trusting relationships with all their pupils
- empower students to challenge unfair behaviour of peers and teachers
- seek to keep the environment free from the factors that promote violent acts, such as inequality, humiliation and exclusion
- organize parent-teacher meetings to get the parents involved in the topic
- reduce competitive trends in classes by choosing forms of learning that foster team work, co-operation and tolerance, e.g. cooperative learning.¹³
- stay informed about the dangers of new technologies and the new forms of violence that they bring about, (e.g. cyber mobbing or e-bullying)

Spies , Christine, Wir können auch anders! Beltz Verlag 2011, Weinheim

¹² ibd

¹³ Mr Gvozden Srećko FLEGO, Education against violence at school, Doc. 12513, 2011.
<http://assembly.coe.int/Documents/WorkingDocs/Doc11/EDOC12513.pdf>

- get to know the strategies that work as early warning systems in the prevention of violence and implement these in class:
- share the responsibility with their pupils by encouraging student councils and implementing a system of peer mediators
- accept that not all incidents of violence can be prevented in the school context because risk-taking, the breaking of rules and making mistakes are important parts of every learning process.

At Student Level

Teachers are aware of the fact that solving conflicts in a non-violent way is first of all the result of a learning process, and know that pupils come equipped differently. Therefore they include the training of life skills in the curriculum and make e.g. “Constructive conflict resolution” the content of lessons. To prevent violence and sustain convivencia students can:

- reflect on their behaviour
- respect others
- help one another and learn about, through and for cooperation
- learn to recognize and stop violence
- take responsibility for the school and environment

The challenges foreseen

Problems in contemporary society reflect in our family life as well as in our schools. Economic crises, unemployment, media influence, wars and high levels of stress in everyday situations have led a number of people to accept violence as a way of getting things done. At the same time society has bigger expectations from schools and the education system. Therefore there are a number of obstacles in realizing these ambitious goals of violence prevention and ensuring convivencia

- learning environments that support competition and aggressive behaviour
- inadequate class and school size
- teacher burn-out due to the constant rising of standards and tasks put in front of the teachers in everyday situations.
- lack of institutional support,

- lack of time or funding,
- insufficient teacher training

How can we overcome these challenges?

We find causes for violent behaviour in many different spheres of life, from social structures which generates frustration and injustice, to personality traits and dispositions of the students, quality of family relations, quality of school environment, influence of the media, culture and many others. That is why violence is a problem that should be dealt with on different levels; on a community level, institutional level (school and family) and on a personal level (Maleš i Stričević, 2005¹⁴). When considering prevention of violence in schools prevention starts above all with the promotion of a climate of and the necessary attitudes and skills for convivencia. It also includes early recognition of violent acts, and intervention when such acts happen. School administrations must be held professionally responsible to implement all the strategies necessary to successfully educate for the prevention of violence¹⁵. Holistic approaches such as the promotion of living in convivencia and the involvement of parents and students as partners in violence prevention are crucial. With all parties actively involved in shaping the change, chances of successful creation of convivencia and thus the prevention of violence increase. Interested colleagues team up as convivencia experts who, with the assistance of the Pestalozzi experts, work out a concept for their school and train their colleagues. The training resources that will be the result of this module series shall be important support tools.

¹⁴ Maleš, D i Stričević, I (2005) Zlostavljanje među učenicima može se spriječiti; priručnik za učitelje i stručne suradnike; Udruženje djeca prva, Zagreb

¹⁵ Mr Gvozden Srećko FLEGO, Education against violence at school, Doc. 12513, 2011.
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