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Issues

Reduction of violence in schools and educational environments through the Program *Making Choices*

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Abstract

In the study of violence's issue effectuated in a school from Pitești it was investigated (in a sociological investigation), applied to pupils aged 8–15 years, the existence or nonexistence of violence in school, the types of aggression to which pupils are forced, the frequency of aggressive acts, solutions of reducing the violence in schools. Study results revealed the existence of aggressive behavior among students in different forms and intensities.

Likewise there have been done a series of solutions for minimizing of violence in educational environment. In the program „Making Choices” in what concerns reducing violence among children were held some activities such as: “Let's learn about emotions and feelings”, “grading feelings - fury”.

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1. Introduction

Our study aims to describe the importance of implementing in the school space programs to prevent and reduce the violence of students. Implementation of such programs is necessary because the violence in educational environments is a growing phenomenon worldwide and especially in Romania where social changes have favored the emergence and spread of new models of aggressive acts.

A form of social violence is violence in school and conduct aimed at students' behaviors who aren't integrated in school environment from normative point of view, emotional, educational and relational and is manifested among their like antisocial behavior, inappropriate and detrimental to others. The issue of school violence

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requires a detailed study of the causes and situations conducive to the development of aggressive behavior and assume the role and how society, namely school, understand how to prevent and stop it. Causality analysis of violence in education is a complex process that highlights both what happens in the school space, including atmosphere in the classroom, teacher-student relationship, relationships between students, framework of developing the activities, the style and content of education and the what happens outside of school but with repercussions on children's behavior at school, concerning family living environment, communitary and social of the children.

It is known that the phenomenon of school violence has a long history but researchers concerns in this regard are recent „ for the past 20 years have witnessed a large amplitude "(Ester-Hedibel, M., 2003) and in Romania the school violence has been less studied, despite the importance and extent of this phenomenon. It is worth to be mentioned study by the Institute of Education Sciences and UNICEF (2006, p.8), which had among its objectives and evaluation dimensions of violence in schools, identifying causes of violence and develop a set of recommendations to improve the phenomenon ". The image that present the school violence in Romania, as shown in this study is that in 75,3% of the schools evaluated, the phenomenon of violence is currently and main categories of aggression factors in schools, are: individual factors, including here, biological factors, psychological, personality traits, social factors - family, including parents relationship - children, the type of family, economic conditions of family, size and family structure, education level of parents, school factors represented by the attitudes of staff, school climate, mutual influence, learning conditions, school programa.

The main causes of aggressive behavior of teachers in schools are, in the opinion of the directors and of school counselors, challenges from students and insufficient training of the teachers. This result occurs in behavioral plan trough the inability of teachers to communicate with students, and inability in the relation with them, pedagogical insufficient training, low motivation for their profession etc.

Therefore, the factors involved in the school violence are related of the students personality, family and school. The emotional lessons learned in childhood, home and school, shape emotional circuits, increasing or decreasing their emotional adaptability. A global trend of the current generation of children is to have a lot more emotional problems than in the past. „They are lonely and depressed, angry and unrestrained, more emotional and more inclined to be anxious, more impulsive and aggressive "as shown by the results of a survey on a large number of parents and teachers in various countries (Goleman, D., 1995). The solution depends on how we think is appropriate to prepare young people for life. Childhood and adolescence are optimal times to form these essential emotional habits that would leave marks for the whole existence. It is increasingly evident that the school should not let random emotional education of students, overburdening with the training school, the school is a crucial and defining experience, says the renowned psychiatrist doctor David Hamburg (1992), which heavily influence children and teens in their adulthood. Sense of self-worth of children depends substantially of their ability to perform at school. A child who fails at school will considered defeated and react as such, which is a bleak outlook for its entire life. "

These latter data justifies the need for continuous training of teachers, in order mediation and conflict prevention in the school space and the need to generate intervention programs to reduce the level of aggression in schools.

2. Proactive prevention and intervention programs in educational media

Emotional disorders, behavioral problems of students, etiology and their interdependence with other factors (internal, external, psychological, social, environmental, etc.) are coupled in many cases with antisocial behavior or even delinquency. Prevention and intervention programs are designed to reduce the unwanted behaviors in schools. From the illustrative programs of intervention, to prevent destructive behaviors, aggressive in school, include: Therapy program for the aggressive children developed by Franz and Ulrike Petermann (2006), which is aimed at children aged 6 to 12 years with aggressive and oppositional behaviors and aims learning the ways of

peaceful resolution of conflicts between children; program Development of Emotional Intelligence, founded by Ann Vernon (2006) on the theory of Rational Emotive Behavior for discount the aggressive facts of the students, and is considered the most effective strategies for emotional literacy both in children and in adults, the Program Making Choices (can choose) conducted by a team of specialists, led by Mark Fraser (2001/2004/2005), this was the main tool in our research practice.

Making Choices program presentation

The program that we choose "is among the successful programs to reduce bullying in schools, being tested in the U.S. by Fraser and coworkers (Fraser et al.'s, 2001-2004 - 2005). In Romania piloting this program took place in 2003 - 2004 by a group of students led by A. Lazar and coordinated by Maria Roth (ICC project Sapinta, Valassz okosan, 2003-2004, ed. Maria Roth) in Cluj. Another test program, „Making Choices "was done by Nicoleta Golea (2009) all in Cluj, and Timisoara by a team of specialists from the University of West led by Ana Muntean (2009).

The program aims to develop emotional and social skills, based on the model problem solving . Making Choices is social development program designed to improve behavior in the classroom and develop problem-solving skills of social interrelationare. This type of program is a step-by-step approach which aims to decrease the frequency of problem behaviors and social rejection, training and developing constructive ways, nonaggressive reactions of the children in social contexts. The activities included in this program promotes teamwork in the classroom, helping children to make new friends and learn to work together to solve problems they face. When emotional and social skills are coupled with moral and educational support provided by adults, they positively influence self-confidence and prosocial behavior of the child, understood as helping, protecting and supporting the others.

Children's ability to recognize and interpret their own emotions and those of others, and the ability to adequately manage the emotional situations defines emotional competence. These include three elements: experiencing and expressing emotions, understanding and recognition of emotions, emotional regulation. „ Emotion control skills refer to the ability of a child to moderate emotional arousal in a number of areas related "(Lemerise & Arsenoi, 2000).

Thus, an important skill to control emotions involves the ability to identify the exact mix of emotions felt in a social situation. Another skill is the ability to manage - to not ignore - their feelings so that they do not become overwhelming. Related to this, the third skill of emotional control, is the ability to express a range of emotions in a way socially acceptable . Social skills in turn refers to children's ability to form appropriate social relationships with other children and adults, so as to meet their own goals and needs, without violating the rights of others. These are of two types: interpersonal skills (networking and problem solving) and intrapersonal skills (analysis and introspection). „ Incompetence at this level leads to social isolation, social maladjustment is painful at any stage of life, but especially during childhood, when the child tries to be accepted into a group playing "(M. Constantinescu, 2004, pp. . 74).

These isolation of the problems indicate a new type of toxicity that appears and troubled the childhood experiences and is due to the profound disabilities to the level of socio-emotional skills. This unpleasant emotional feeling seems to be for all the children the price of their modern lives. Therefore are necessary development programs for socio-emotional competence. On the base of the formation of these two types of skills are cognitive skills and refers to children's ability to analyze life situations faced, interpreting properly the clues without resorting to irrational beliefs such as absolute requirements, the low reaction of tolerance to the frustration, the negativ global evaluation and the perception of the situation like beeing catastrophic.

An important principle of this program is that all children, even the little ones can learn the way wich information processing affects them behavior not only to use automatic processing, but they can learn about problem solving, about the posibility to choice . Children with good skills for problem solving are often more loved by their peers and are assessed by teachers as less aggressive compared to those who have poor skills. the intervention program Making choices focuses on learning skills to control emotions by children and in the

working groups with the method to can choose be included children with hyperactivity, impulsivity and attention deficit moderate to severe.

Although the program Making choices, look like other intervention programs, however its uniqueness lies in focusing on a number of selected skills to solve problems that have been shown empirically to be related to aggression and other indicators of social inadaptability to children. This program has great applicability due to early intervention and due the possible prevention and can be used by children in the primary cycle, also to gymnasium grades.

3. Experimental research approach

3.1. Research Objectives

1. Assessing how students perceive school violence, phenomenon that exists, the frequency and types of violence, places where aggressive acts are found (a map of school violence in the school area) and solutions to reduce violence.
2. Assessing the level of the socio-emotional skills of students on classes II, participants to the research.
3. Program implementation Making choices to students involved in the experiment.

3.2. Research hypotheses

1. The students are aware of school violence and especially its consequences, the proposal will involve and compliance solutions to reduce it.
2. From the application of the program Making choices the socio-emotional skills of students will increase and consequently will reduce their aggressive potential.

3.3. Research Methods

In the first stage of the research was conducted a survey based on a questionnaire, one of the techniques most commonly used in social and human sciences (S. Chelcea, 1998, page 175). To the survey was answered 106 students, aged between 8 and 15 years in school No. 1 Pitesti. The questionnaire was divided into six dimensions (besides factual data) presence of violence in school, frequency and types of aggression, aggressors involved, places where violence occurs and the solutions proposed by students to prevent and reduce violence. The students were surveyed in May-June 2012. The research results were statistically processed with SPSS.

For the second and third objective, we used the plan of research the type pretest - intervention - posttest. Pretest was conducted in late September 2012 and consisted of assessment structure socio-emotional skills through proof Carolina Children's Initiative - S.L.A., developed by Mark Fraser.

The questionnaire referred to many situations - two in our experiment because I adapted with the age of students in Grades II, in which children are done an injustice by another child of his age and for every situation in the questionnaire appears image that shows the details of the action. For every frustrating situation, the child is asked about following: differentiate between intentional and unintentional behavior, action clues, such as the objectives set (aggressive or non-aggressive) type cognitions through which children can find explanations about what is happening, emotions results after frustrating situation; behavior immediately and long-term behavior. Questionnaire listing is as follows: 0 – non aggressive behavior; 1 - verbal aggression, 2 - physical aggression. After its completion, each student will have a score that represents the potential of aggressive (declared) in a frustrating life. The study conducted in two classes II in school No. 1 in Pitesti: class II B was the experimental group and class II A the control group.

The intervention applied to the experimental group and consisted in adapting and implementing the Making Choices program, students participated in the experiment in October and November 2012. Program implementation was achieved through eight preventive and therapeutic sessions and two sessions with character

and assessor summative with the two classes II included in the experiment. They worked on a frequency of one hour per week only in the experimental group and the program ranged some activities such as: "Let's learn about emotions and feelings," "Grading feelings - fury", "Identification of social cues", etc. Independent variable of research represented by Making Choices intervention program and dependent variables are the level of socio-emotional skills of students. The activities were coordinated by specialists from University of Pitesti, social work students, teachers and pedagogical assistance office aimed at improving problem-solving skills and behavior of the social interaction. They conducted an interim evaluation after three meetings, because the students went on intersemestrial vacation. We will continue the experiment after resuming training.

4. Research results and their interpretation

From the questionnaire on violence in educational environments showed that 84.9% subjects answered positively related to the existence of violence in school. Regarding the frequency of aggressive acts 57.5% responded that happened to be assaulted at least once, several times 20.8%. It is noted that more than half of the students were assaulted. Frequency correlated with gender violence showed that boys, a significantly higher proportion than girls were victims of violence more often (Chi-square = 13.96, $p = 0.007$). To these we add mixed forms (physical and verbal) 15.1%, physical, verbal by exclusion 4.7%. Although statistical tests did not provide statistically significant overall result, it appears that boys are more physical aggressed (15 boys), while at the girls, the verbal aggression is bigger (31 girls).

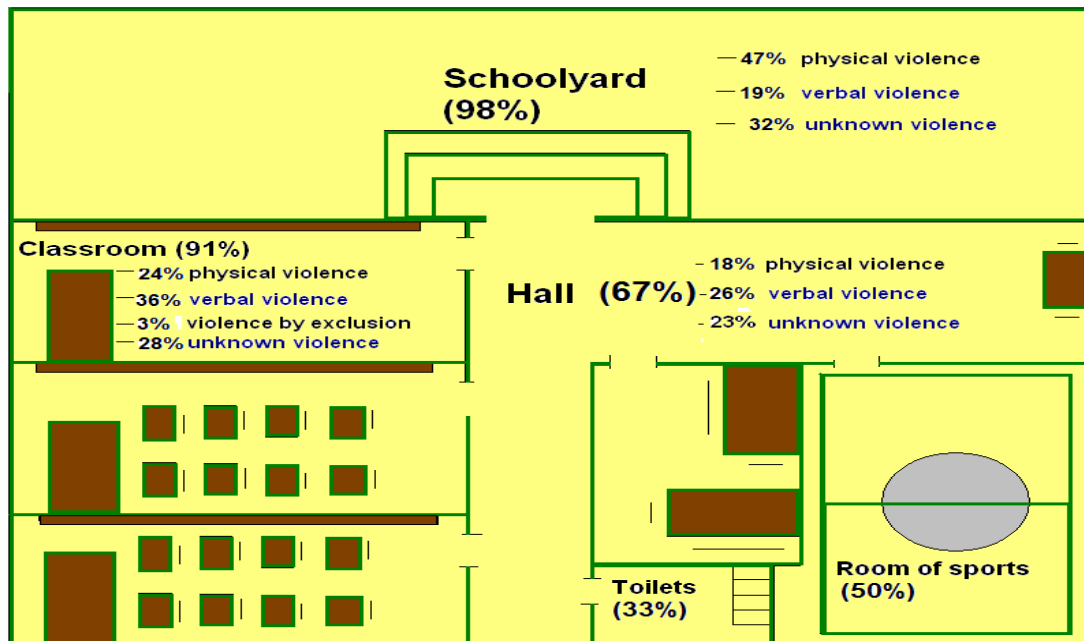


Fig. 1 Violence map in school

The solutions proposed by students to reduce violence in schools are educational activities, self-control (27, 4%), rules, regulations 20.8% Communication 17.9%, 15.1% intervention of teachers. Although statistical tests did not provide statistically significant results overall, boys tend to be seen as a greater extent to provide solutions based on the imposition of rules, regulations, while girls plead for communication and educational activities. The variety of solutions proposed by students for reduce acts of violence in school and desire to be involved in this process confirms the our hypothesis that if students are aware of the seriousness of bullying phenomenon will

follow school rules and will cause others to behave civilized to be involved in programs of intervention and prevention of aggressive acts in school.

Using questionnaire Carolina Children`s Initiative - SLA was identified aggressive potential of students by designing them in social situations frustrating. To see the level of the aggressivity of students as is seen by the student, rough results were converted into standard rules, thus each interval correspond to gross value indicating the level of aggressiveness of the students. By processing, the results to calculate the weighted average of aggressive level of each group included in the experiment, so the experimental group had a weighted average of 6.1, and the control group a weighted average of 3.4. Intensity distribution of child aggression identified by children, by the Carolina questionnaire to the first evaluation (pre-test phase both the experimental group and the control group) and interim evaluation of the experimental group can be seen in the figure below:

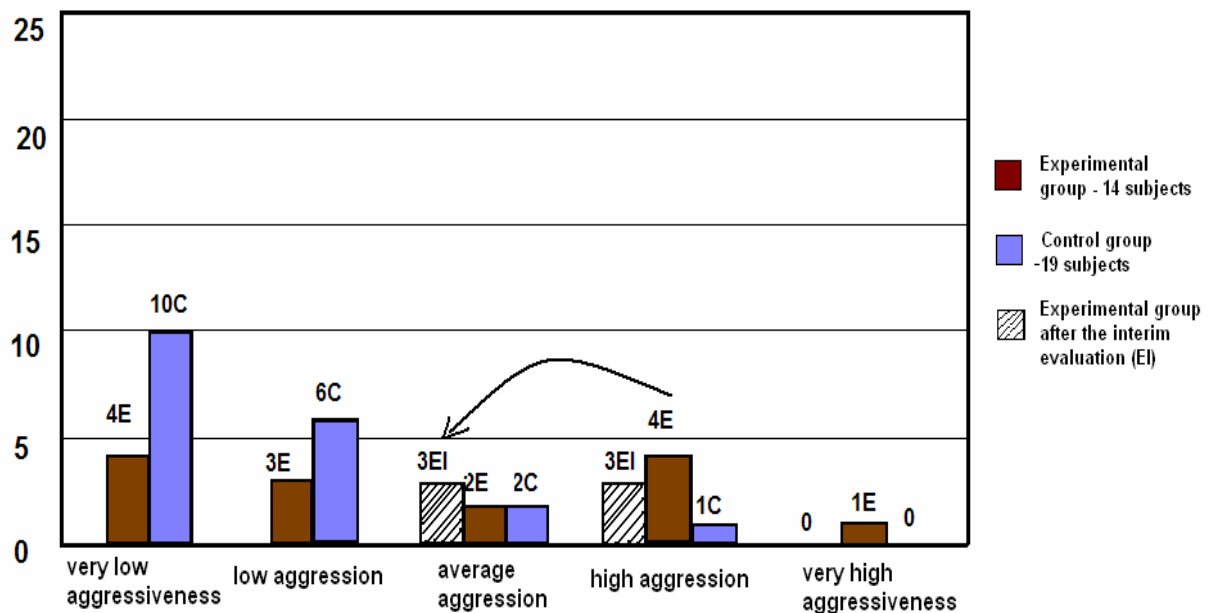


Fig. 2 Intensity distribution of child aggression identified by children, by the Carolina

In addition, processing data revealed that the weighted average level of aggressive potential in the experimental group differs by gender: boys and girls is 7.1%4.3% (on a scale from 0 to 15), 50% of boy`s manifest physical aggression and only 16% of These data correlate with the results of sociological survey among students.

After implementing the program, after three meetings, we achieved an interim evaluation of the level of socio-emotional skills of students. Distribution results can be seen in Figure 2 (shaded). We can see that although there are not significant differences between the aggressiveness of the students before and after partial intervention in the experimental group, a detailed analysis of the dimensions of SLA-applied questionnaire to assessed students, identify changes in some dimensions, although on the socio-emotional skills, level has not changed visible. Thus, to identify the intentions of others, making the difference between intentional and unintentional behavior and not identify ambiguous situations as threatening the social clues are not sufficient to draw conclusions. We hope that at the end of all activities to have positive results.

Conclusions

Pilot program, *Making Choices* is still ongoing, so the conclusions are based on the mid-term results. Data obtained after partial implementation of intervention programs shows that are mild positive changes of the level of aggression to subjects in the control group, if in the first stage the high and very high aggressiveness were 35% of subjects, after several applications the percentage drops to 28% which gives us hope that at the end of the program are expected larger changes.

Stressing again the pilot nature of this program, we believe that this experience was both informative and formative value for proper specialists who participated in this research and implementing actions of the program *Making choices*, but especially for students who were part of the experimental group, who responded with great openness and interest, involving actively, real and mostly enthusiastic in this kind of activity.

We appreciate that the enthusiasm of the children was due to the novelty, to the unusual character of inter-relationship child-specialist as opposed to unidirectional, authoritatively, practiced in Romanian schools, even at the level of primary education, with a focus on cognitive education to the detriment of the emotional education.

Effective intervention programs for reducing aggressive behavior in the short term have a low efficiency of impact rather the awareness of teachers and parents on the aggressiveness of children in the family and school. Therefore, we believe that these observations support the need for continued adaptation and adoption of such shares in Romanian education, our sociological research clearly demonstrates the existence of violence in schools, since, as the authors advocate this program from preschool ages, even to class 0-preparation.

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