

Focus –group discussion on violence in school – ROMANIA

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Introduction

Information on the way the focus group was conducted and recorded, the context the interview took place (innercity, urban, suburban, rural), the type and number of participants (informants and moderator/researchers), the overall climate of the discussion.

The Romanian research team decided to hold two focus groups primarily to be able to make comparisons and secondly to avoid the "fear of failure" (which is likely to occur if it is known that there is only one focus group, which must be correct). Fortunately both focus groups were conducted in appropriate technical conditions and we are able to equally use information resulted from these activities.

The two focus groups were held in Bucharest, but schools were chosen from different educational environments.

The first focus group was held at the "Dinu Lipatti" Music High-School (CDL), located in the center of the capital. Students are selected through entrance examination and testing of their musical skills; most of them are already preparing for a future career as a professional musicians.

The second school (School No. 64) is located relatively in the outskirts of Bucharest; it is a so-called "ordinary school", where all children in the neighbourhood are enrolled, regardless of the school performances or their parents' social status.

The atmosphere during the discussions largely reflected the distinctive profile of the two schools.

A NGO representative was invited at one of the discussions (along with teachers, school counsellors, principals, parents). Other invited guests have declined or were absent without informing us about the reason, so the focus groups were held almost exclusively in the two schools. We would have wanted them more open, more

challenging, but unfortunately it was not possible. (One reason could be the period in which they were held, when it snowed quite heavily in Bucharest).

The discussion was moderated by a member of the research team (the same person in both occasions, so as not to induce other differences than those already existing), it was audio and video recorded, without any opposition from the participants.

The discussions were held in a somewhat improper location at "Dinu Lipatti" High-School, where the benches in the gym were the used as "discussion table". The conditions were superior at School No. 64, providing a comfortable location for the participants.

The general climate of discussion was relaxed for most participants. Only the "Dinu Lipatti" parents seemed to be more tensed, anxious, perhaps because they were not used to participate in such discussions. They did not seem to have particular problems with their children's aggressiveness or with any situation in which their children were victims. However, most of the parents invited at School No. 64 were confronted with issues of school violence. They seemed more relaxed, more interested, they talked more.

Instead, all teachers invited felt at ease, they were rarely contradicted and generally they supported their own opinions without any difficulty.

1. CATEGORIES OF ANALYSIS

1.1 Perceptions of violence at school

The extent to which violence is a matter of concern. The way different informants understand violence at school. Which are the terms used (there are specific words in the national language and possible translation in English). Which forms of violence they identify. Settings, occasions, places where violence takes place.

Violence in schools is a matter of interest for the participants in this focus group and communication seems particularly important in this context:

"Second grade pupils are violent; I inform the parents about these issues and no action is taken - these are matters of general interest; I can only stop the children from fighting, I explain things to them and we discuss; that's all I can do "(Teacher, Dinu Lipatti School).

School counselors initiate debates, discussion on school violence: *"We discuss this issue because it is frequent in our school; we deal mostly with verbal violence. ... I discuss with the pupils in class about the forms of violence, we try to find solutions; we analyse case studies and we provide personal development activities to the children "(School counselor, School No. 64).*

There are parents who feel the need to discuss with their children about the phenomenon of violence: *"I give him examples to explain what can happen if one is violent, violence begets violence, our family have never been violent ... The little one comes home and tells us almost every evening what happened at school. In most of the cases he doesn't consider that he (the son) was offended by a colleague. It doesn't matter to him, but from what he tells us we realize that in fact he was offended. I asked how he felt when he was offended? His answer was that he thought to leave the other child alone. "(Parent, School No. 64).*

For many students violence seems to be normal (especially at School No. 64):

- *"I have encountered cases where students considered normal to slap someone, because they are also used to this behaviour at home as a way to solve problems. It seems normal to offend at school. So slapping is regarded as something normal "(School counselor, School No. 64).*
- *"If they use bad words, they (the students) think it is normal, that they just defend themselves, that they have learned something good, insults; this is the example given at home, in the community" (Teacher, School No. 64) .*
- *"Offense is so usual that they don't not even notice it; they think it's normal" (Teacher, School No. 64).*
- *"My daughter is always verbally insulted. She shares with me some of her problems and I tell her she should ignore that child ... "(Parent, School No. 64).*

- "*They believe they defend themselves (regarding verbal aggression)*" (Teacher, School No. 64).

Even if violence has been recognized as a general phenomenon present in schools, a unanimous definition has been difficult to identify during the discussions with the people involved in school life. We could rather identify concrete forms and modes of expression thereof.

Verbal violence is the most common, but cases of physical violence were also reported .

Some participants in the discussion identified a special form of violence, physical violence (hair pulling), which some parents caused to some of the children at school. In other words, some parents feel the need to do justice to their own child by assaulting another child: "*I have worked in three different schools so far, and in all of them I have met parents who have abused other parents' children. It is about a mother who assaulted a girl, she pulled her hair. ... She did justice, so to call it, what can we expect from a child ?!*" (Teacher, School No. 64).

Practicing physical violence (beating) was noticed by a parent as well: "*My child fights with children in school. I was called twice at school. The Principal wanted to see me ...*" (Parent, School No. 64).

Most often violence is spontaneous: a reaction of anger, frustration. But cases of planned aggression were also reported; it was premeditated as a warning or seen as punishment for behaviour deemed unacceptable (see Afrodita's case, a Roma girl, described below). Violence against the animals was also reported.

Teachers' and parents' perception of school violence is different. While teachers agree that the focus should fall on the family role in a child's education, parents argue the opposite, namely that they have no problems with their children.

School representatives estimate that the public discourse exaggerates in pointing the finger at school to the detriment of the family as a source of pupils' violent behaviour: "*Family is a delicate subject. It is often avoided by media and by society; the general approach is that school only must deal with the child's education.*" (Principal, School No. 64).

The conclusion is that a child's education cannot be reduced only to what happens in school. Sometimes parents are tempted to teach their children to react violently in order to be respected, but it should not be attributed to school.

These arguments are otherwise invoked by another teacher who claims that education starts from the early childhood and the parents are the ones who should be a model for the child's education: *"Everything starts from early childhood, everything starts from somewhere, it is about a proper upbringing in the first years of life. As hard as we may try at school, we model them formally, it's not enough. What we do is for a short time, they behave in accordance with their model"* (Teacher, "Dinu Lipatti" National High-School of Arts).

Teachers seem to be struggling to be understood by students, but they come with their own language from home. Parents are the ones who most often transmit to their children a positive or a negative attitude, and the latter can have consequences regarding the motivational plan: *"Violence is the result of the parents' attitude, they are formed this way. Their reaction is motivated by the parents' (different) reactions. It is obvious that some children understand a particular situation just from the way one looks at them, they understand that it is wrong, the same happens to them at home. Everything is explained elegantly, beautifully ... There are others who don't do anything. There are some children one would yell at, we are aware it's not pedagogical, but what can we do with those children who aren't used to just explaining to them?! At some point one might think they have understood and the matter is properly settled... one day later or maybe two weeks later they do the same thing, and we start all over again. We explain again and tell them what it is good and what is wrong, we give examples, they nod. They admit they are wrong. ... They understand, they realize they were wrong, but they have an inner urge. They are used to other reaction."*(Teacher, "Dinu Lipatti" National High-School of Arts). Some children seem not to react to the teachers' explanations or advice, they are used to be beaten as punishment. They are insensitive to other reactions.

We consider significant for this matter a phrase used by a lot of stakeholders - "the first years of good family upbringing". It is a Romanian colloquial expression referring, among other things, to the so-called "good manners". When someone is said to have the first seven years of good family upbringing it means that person has received a proper education in childhood and this usually happens in the family. For this reason, as one can notice, teachers in particular referred to ideas such as: the child spends more time in the family environment; the child already has an education (good or bad). Instead, some parents believe that school is to be "blamed" for the

children's behaviour because it fails to provide proper motivation: *"I for one am astonished; the child is no trouble at home. He causes problems only at school. He has a colleague who also causes trouble. He doesn't like school, he doesn't like this school. He doesn't like his colleagues, he doesn't like anything at all ... he no longer cares about anything. He would like to stay at home, to withdraw from school."*(Parent, School No. 64). As can be noticed, this mother emphasizes that the child "doesn't like school", which is an element seemingly difficult to be managed by the teachers and the principal. Another matter worth mentioning is that the family represents a "whole": attitudes, values, parents' behaviour etc. Their system of values, as well as the family relationships are a model for children even from a very young age. For this reason, there are two main reasons regarding who should provide this "education" and which is its role: is it the family or is it the school?!

The places where violence occurs in schools have been identified during the discussions (school hall, in the classroom, in the school yard, etc.):

- *"We are on duty in the school hallways. We notice when a conflict breaks out, we try to settle things. Sometimes we are not around, there cannot be a teacher for every child. It should be a natural reaction. Their level of aggression is very high, they see it at home; if matters are discussed in the family, one should discuss with them"*(Class master, School No. 64).
- *"Last week something happened. Two children were fighting and mine didn't want to get involved; he wanted to separate them, but accidentally he hit another child with his elbow; the other child was behind him. He was considered guilty in the end. That's what he told me at home."*(Parent, "Dinu Lipatti" National High-School of Arts).
- *"The boys, the children go outside to buy food, water (in the school yard). The teachers grab their hands and take them to the Principal's office and in the classroom"*(Parent, School No. 64).
- *"Two boys threw a cat into water (there is a fountain in the school yard) and they blamed each other. One of them threw the cat and the other one encouraged him"*(Class master, School No. 64).

This segment cannot be concluded without considering one last factor that may contribute to the development of violent behaviour, namely the broader **social** element. People involved in school life support the idea that violence is a result of entourage: *"I am the seventh grade class master, children grew up and as they grow problems become more serious, environmental influence matters a lot. So the group of friends influences the seventh graders, more or less..."*(Class master, School No. 64).

1.2 Major variables of school violence

A. Gender – homophobia, National origin- xenophobia/racism, Social class – social inequality, Other prejudice

Our interlocutors' references to social prejudices and stereotypes were not very common or emphasized upon, despite the fact that the question regarding this issue was asked during both discussions organized; sometimes the question was repeated. Few of those present (teachers, parents) have seen such a relationship; others talked about significant facts from this point of view, but they do not realize its full significance.

- Perhaps not coincidentally, the only Roma participant in the focus (a mother) was also the only one who told us about **two episodes** of violence against both her children:
 - Her second grade son told that he was bullied in the bathroom; he was threatened and forced to say an obscene word.
 - About her elder daughter, a sixth grade pupil, she said that "*when classes ended, in the evening, some (seventh grade) girls stopped her at the school gate and beat her ...*". During the break she had gone into their classroom to look for a friend of hers and her friend's colleagues told her "*no, you aren't allowed here*", but she returned the next break too and they rejected her again.

It is interesting that the parent (like most other participants) has not linked these episodes of violence to a more general bias against the Roma.

An "autistic" child's grandmother tried to tell us about a similar attitude (this time against a disabled child) : "*Many of his colleagues do not accept him*"; she was not able to share more because she started to cry, thus proving perhaps the frustration she felt due to the hostility shown by her grandson's classmates .

Continuing the discussion on the "gap" favouring violent attitudes, a Principal says, "*this neighbourhood is also a bad model in this regard. Roma have a different temperament and they get a different education at home and usually many things happen in this area.* "

In other words, Roma (the minority) would be those who bring along a pattern of violent behaviour. And yet no one reported during the discussions any case of Roma students' violence against the majority.

Another female participant in the discussion on intolerance continues: "*Yes ... not accepting differences, but they do not realize they are different, they believe that everyone must behave like them and like the same things, listen to the same music; if they do not do this, they will be punished*" (school counselor). Finally, a third participant confirms it: "*... I have students who say, listening to a specific type of music that any other kind is a big mess, how can anyone listen to these stupid things, they are real nonsense... or regarding apparel / clothing: I had a student who said that we all wear (he wanted to say "shitty clothes", but he didn't) he is the only one nicely dressed and the rest of us don't know what designer clothes look like.*" (Teacher, School No. 64)

Referring to prejudices in school, a representative of a NGO tried to conclude the discussion (from the "Dinu Lipatti" National High-School of Arts):

"... It was told that we should form the students as society requires, but this is the problem ... We would just want everyone to be good students and get only good marks... I mean there are some patterns for these youngsters, but they will never fit in because they are different ... and so vivid. Violence comes from their excessive energy; when one sits so many hours at the same desk and one is supposed to keep learning, it is not very pleasant, energy must be released ... and they feel the pressure of society of being one way or another. Somehow they are socialized in one way or another by gender - boys must prove their masculinity and they can only do it against each other ... and this pressure comes from everywhere, from family, from the media etc. "

B. How do the informants understand the main characteristics of the perpetrator and the victim

The participants in the discussion did not make a clear distinction between victims and aggressors. Even one of the participating teachers told us about a test she had given to her young students; the results revealed that the vast majority of them considered themselves to have been at least once both victim of violence and a

source of violence on other colleagues. Or a student's mother believed that her own child, who was involved in several cases of violence as the aggressor, was rather the victim, because another student suggested to assault a colleague if he wanted to be accepted into the group or be allowed to play on the tablet.

The aggressor's portrait features mostly (or exclusively) psychological characteristics:

- Home caused frustration: ... at home .. the parents strictly control them and at school they *"release their emotion ... At home they obey the parents who provide them with everything they need ... but the school's discipline is imposed by regulations"* (Teacher, "Dinu Lipatti" National High-School of Arts), which they find difficult to cope with. Another similar view: *"Children strictly educated at home escape at school; their violent parents punish them frequently and this results into a state that is released at school"* (Principal, School No. 64). Their family relationships is problematic: children strictly controlled by parents, who do not communicate with them, are afraid to assume their own results (possible failures). Or frustration acquired in the school environment: unfulfilled desire for affirmation, unfulfilled desire to be accepted in the group (in the class).
- Introversion: the abuser (perpetrator) child is not necessarily permanently aggressive, extroverted, noisy. He/she can be very quiet, even silent, withdrawn; he/she bursts in reaction to being rejected by the group: *"he seemed withdrawn, quiet, a good child, but I found out that he was humiliated by his classmates ... he could not impose himself on the others. And the child who seemed to stand very quietly, actually suffered, deep down inside; he kept suffering and once he broke out and hit a colleague who mocked him, perhaps not more than others but at that moment he could not bear it any more, it was the straw that broke the camel's back ..."* (Teacher, "Dinu Lipatti" National High-School of Arts)
- "Lack of confidence, fear, group dependence: *"he would follow the group anywhere..."* (teacher, School No. 64)
- Social incompetence: Abusers (perpetrators) often have self-control difficulties. They are impulsive, they react to false rumors, *"a girl hears from another girl that another girl had called her names; she does not check the information and she confronts the girl who had allegedly called her names and assaults her"* (psychological counselor, School No.64)
- The violent children's relationship with the School is ambiguous: sometimes the violent children are in conflict with the school, they do not like the school environment, they are rejected by their peers ... The

violent behaviour acts as a signal for the others indicating they want a change, they do not feel comfortable. Sometimes children with good marks are among the violent ones: "*they come from another good school... they cannot adjust to the new group's requirements, or it claims more than they can offer*" (Teacher, "Dinu Lipatti" National High-School of Arts).

- Children with disabilities, Roma children and other categories have been among the victims (as the discussions revealed) - good students (envied by the others) or children who said something which disturbed the others (including in the virtual environment) or which were the victims of false rumors.

C. Which are the reasons causing violence?

Family is the he most frequently targeted reason, especially by teachers:

- Parents who are violent at home (or even at school, in front of their own children, towards them or their colleagues): "the degree of aggression is very high and it comes from the family" (School No. 64). One of the participants discusses "*the example of a child beaten by his parent in front of his classmates ... what an example that was... it destroyed his personality ..*" (Teacher, "Dinu Lipatti" National High-School of Arts)

We met a number of children who considered that slapping was normal as they were used at home too with this way of solving problems and then at school they believed that offending or slapping was normal (Teacher, School No. 64, 8.50)

There are parents who behave violently in public (at school) towards their own children or other children which they admonish, they offend or even hit them when it appears that they have harmed their child (they take justice into their hands).

- Extremely controlling parents frustrate the children, they keep them tensed and constantly afraid: "*parents make them obey by coercion .. by beating them.*" (Teacher, "Dinu Lipatti" National High-School of Arts); "*All these things (violent behaviour – m. n.) originate in the early childhood, around the ages of 3-4 -5 years, the first years of good family upbringing*" (Teacher, "Dinu Lipatti" National High-School of Arts); "the environment matters, so does education ... school is where they release emotions, it's a release, or they react to the discipline imposed by the school" (Teacher, "Dinu Lipatti" National High-School of Arts)

- Children are afraid to tell their parents about their marks. Parents are stressed due to the results, they think about high-school admission. They should accept that a grade is not always relevant. Children adopt defense strategies, "Afrodita (a student mentioned above –m. n.) does not tell her mother that she got a bad mark; she prepares the speech for her father, out of fear. And a teacher reports: "... *I once asked a child: Why do you behave this way? when he blamed another child for his deed (throwing a kitten into the pool): I was afraid, teacher, I wanted to escape punishment.*" (Teacher, School No. 64)

Some parents' strategy to limit the child's autonomy pushes him/her to exaggeratedly seek the friends' company.

- Cultivating an aggressive, defensive attitude: "*parents who teach their children to hit, to defend themselves or who believe that violence is a way to survive. We're still in the "Jungle Book" or we live according to Darwin's theory*" (Principal, School No. 64)

School

- Violent teachers: "*There are potentially violent adults working in education. It is not a secret that there is (in the school – m.n.)an old teacher who is now retired but he still teaches; he pulls children by their ears... I froze, I could not believe it... but he refused to admit he uses such a pedagogical model*" (Principal, School No. 64)
- The grading system, children hierarchy which makes them fight for status: "*..there is a fight among older students, when they come from other school; it is a competition among themselves for supremacy and to occupy their social place.They have expectancy from another school; the expectancy is not met and the student is amidst a conflict ... he/she cannot adjust to the requirements here or does not want to. Or he/she pretends more than he/she can offer ...*"(Teacher, School No. 64)

"*We should change the laws of our system somehow, so that the child will be accepted by family and feel good as he/she is, how he/she can be ... school performance on a basic level, accessible to his/her normal abilities, the family does not he have exaggerated expectations and the child has a normal school education*" (Principal, School No. 64)

"*To have happy children, not stressed children.*" (Teacher, School No. 64)

- Busy schedule, rigidity, lack of opportunities to relax: "*there are a lot of subjects, teachers must do everything in the curriculum, children do not have spare time anymore... they don't have time to relax ... it is normal to accumulate tension*". (parent, "Dinu Lipatti" National High-School of Arts) A lot to learn for the eighth grade final examination is what "*makes parents, students and teachers feel 'desperate' ... then we wonder why children are afraid, why parents are afraid, this is where all the problems in schools originate from*" (Principal, School No. 64)
- Limited communication possibilities between children and teachers

Teachers admit that "*... we do not have too much time to train them for society, to talk to them ... we have to stay within the curriculum ... and there are many children in a class ...*" (Professor "Dinu Lipatti" National High-School of Arts) and continues to apologize: "*no, it's not that school causes violence ... teachers are just pawns ... it's rather the Romanian education system*" (professor, "Dinu Lipatti" National High-School of Arts). Yet some acknowledge the rigidity of the system which creates tension: at school "*us and the children are all tormented ... especially after the first 2 or 3 years of school children become very serious, pale, mature ... because the system is so restrictive and everything must always be done by the book, around the clock, there is no flexibility ... why should we be like the scheduled departures and arrivals at the train station? People are not trains, we are not machines ... We are depersonalized*" (Principal, School No. 64)

The children's busy schedule also contributes to increasing tension: "*now the child returns home, now the child eats, now the child starts learning and does the homework ... the child turns into a machinery and sometimes there's a burst out, humans are not made to be automatic*" (psychologist)

The child can no longer relax and relieve tension: "*The child also needs to talk about his/her feelings ... and we get to that pressure*" (psychologist)

Society, models in society, group influence, classmates

- Scenes of violence in the social environment, violence on TV and in films, violent computer games: "*they see a lot of physical and verbal violence in the movies, and sometimes they try to do the same*" (Teacher, "Dinu Lipatti" National High-School of Arts); "*Media*

gives examples of non-values" (Teacher, "Dinu Lipatti" National High-School of Arts)

When talking to children about the legal consequences of violence they come with examples from real life: they saw in the bus someone who hit and cursed somebody else and *"nobody said anything to anyone ... the other people did not react, they didn't do anything, the police did not intervene."* (Teacher, School No. 64)

- Fear and tension in society: violence as means of releasing tensions: this fear seems to be nurtured in our society and aggressiveness appears .. (Teacher, School No. 64)
- Group relations: *"When a child feels marginalized, he/she wants to be accepted or to become a leader; if his leader is the leader of the class, he/she will do his/her best to imitate; if the leader uses force to keep his status, this is the behaviour the child gets to imitate ..."* (Teacher, School No. 64); *"Peer pressure is very high when we talk about preteens ... they follow the group unconditionally ... I met many children who were ordered by the group leaders to behave in a certain way under threat. If you do not beat your colleague, I won't not accept you in the group and all the pupils in the class will know you are a coward."* (teacher, School No. 64); *"Another child had a tablet and David wanted to watch. And the first child told him: If you go and throw away Dragoş' books or you tell him something anything or you curse him I'll let you watch; otherwise I won't. So David had to do it in order to be accepted. He did as he was told to."* (Parent, School No. 64)

1.3 Means for Combatting violence / Recommendations

- What would you recommend to support schools / school communities? How could they be helped?
- What do you like to say on the issue of school violence? What do you think should be improved in the daily school activity?

Focus group participants highlighted the complex issues of violence, considering the collaboration between school, family and community to be necessary :

- *We support the idea of teamwork, collaboration between classmasters, principals, parents, police .. (Principal, School No.64)*
- *It is important to collaborate with the media as well, to promote violent free shows, movies, cartoons, commercials (Teacher, "Dinu Lipatti" High-School)*

Teachers often feel there are no solutions, that education is limited when it is provided by teachers only, therefore it is necessary for the family to support school.

Sometimes teachers feel they lack means:

- *What would be the best way to prevent violence? If talking does not help, what other methods do we have? .. Teachers have boundaries, they are not as efficient as parents who are closer to the child through the education they give at home, in the family (Teacher, "Dinu Lipatti" High-School)*

At a certain point during the discussion they seemed to acknowledge the school responsibility to a certain degree; according to them, the education system as it is proves to be rigid, hierarchical, task-oriented and too little concerned with the student; it might contribute to creating tension which then is discharged into manifestations of violence:

- *The school system should be less restrictive, to give up patterns, we want classes to be adapted to the pace, needs or class issues, with lessons through play (Manager, School No. 64)*

In order to realize the seriousness of violence and the consequences of violent behaviour, parents and teachers support the idea of involving students in extracurricular activities, such as optional subjects, workshops on conflict management or mediation, or through participation in school counseling.

- *Collaboration with various foundations, companies or NGOs is important for school, it completes non-formal education (Parent, School No. 64)*
- *School should review regulations, to provide less stressful content, program or requirements - to have good communication between school, family, police, community (psychologist, "Dinu Lipatti" High-School)*

Participants in the focus groups suggested that the school should organize **violence preventive actions** based on counseling perpetrators, victims or observers through positive methods of discipline, mentally and emotionally maintaining the wellbeing, by promoting rules to stop any form of violence.

- *It's important to involve psychologists to work on a relief, on children's adjustment to school requirements and to work on valuing all students and on conflict management (Teacher, "Dinu Lipatti" High-School)*
- *The power of example is recommended at school, in family or society (Teacher, "Dinu Lipatti" High-School)*

Psychologists believe that stopping violence must begin at the first signs of conflict, and, although the school psychologist's activity is important at school, there are not enough experts for the high number of students.

- *Time allocated to counselling is not enough considering the number of students, so more psychologists are required. (Psychologist, "Dinu Lipatti" High-School)*

Teachers have found that their intervention methods are often ineffective and there is need for training:

- *Rules must be explained politely.. what about those children who do not know how to react to discussing? We need educational, pedagogical methods, (Teacher, "Dinu Lipatti" High-School)*

Using attractive methods and educational practices that make the child understand where he or she is wrong are just some of the methods necessary to reduce school violence, teachers say:

- *If for now it seems that the violent student was enlightened with kind words, a week later the child does the same thing, we start explaining all over again, students agree with the teacher and admit they are wrong .. it's hard to persuade students without strategies and methods (Teacher, "Dinu Lipatti" High-School)*

The idea is reinforced by the school counselor during the focus group:

- *Classes on prevention of violence are needed; through discussions students understand the forms of violence, they will know how to react to bullying, to talk about stereotypes, gender, to apply strict rules for those who continue to assault, harass, steal (Psychologist, "Dinu Lipatti" High-School)*

Parents suggest improving communication with children (including those with special needs) and support the maintenance of a healthy climate to encourage students to express themselves or to do something they like:

- *Promoting positive family attitude, family discussions on children's problems, the child learning not to fight and the parent to keep the child busy, restrictions of computer games, doing sports, participating in activities where*

their children's abilities and self-esteem can be improved, by swimming, language courses (parent, school No.64)

One of the matters discussed was that of running school programs concerning positive conflict management, using student mediators who help their peers to solve problems peacefully, extra-curricular activities and parent education (*Parents' School*)

- *Educating parents to act in line with the school, to create Parents' School, to learn to communicate with the parent, to reach their children's real needs .. To work with the school psychologist who can explain violence, how it occurs, the consequences; students need to speak, to be understood, to discuss with the school counselor, individually or in class (parent, "Dinu Lipatti" High-School)*
- *Peer counseling, students to be mediators and partners with teachers, to participate in promoting stop violence messages (NGO representative)*

One principal emphasized the need for teacher training to deal with conflicts:

- *We must consider training teachers by providing counseling tools; thus they will understand children psychology, they will discuss during class about friendship, tolerance, children's rights, how to behave, have an individual approach with warning or scolding in front of the class... explanations alone are not enough (principal, School No.64)*

Teachers argue that **the parents' idea according to which beating is an effective method of education** must be combatted; they suggest values to be taught at school, such as solidarity, tolerance, altruism, pacifism, respect for those who are different:

- *Although there are parents who make their children obey by beating them, we do not recommend it (Teacher, "Dinu Lipatti" High-School)*
- *To carry as many campaigns to stop violence and family to support school, to train parents, family education through cultural events, conferences, workshops in which students learn about respect, tolerance, generosity (teacher, School No.64).*

School principals participating in the focus group consider school to be part of the wider community and that the problems faced in the training of youngsters concern the entire society:

- *Educational investment programs in general should be for pupils, parents, teachers, to make children happy, not stressed and to enjoy attending classes (Principal, School No.64)*

Participants recommend the development of various anti-violence programs.

- *The school system should be less restrictive and stop using templates, we want classes to be adjusted to the pace, needs or issues of the class, with lessons through play (Principal, School No.64)*
- *Effective programs and projects are the long-term ones and those specialized in types of children; they aim at working with the SELF / EGO, acceptance of differences; they value children with different types of intelligence, anger management, self-control, mastery of fear, emotions knowledge / expression, to relate / cooperate with others (teacher, School No.64)*

Conclusions

The discussions provided an insight into how children's violence is perceived by the adults involved (teachers, school managers, parents, NGO members).

At the beginning of the discussion the participants rather believed there were no problems and, if any, they were due to the **education received at home or school models from external sources**; school would not have much to do so as to limit violence. Further discussions revealed deeper causes and favouring factors. Gradually it has been found that **the rigidity of the internal organization of the school environment and insufficient communication with students (and parents)** favour many of the manifestations of violence. Many bias affect perceptions of both teachers and parents.

Even if many of the participants in the discussions failed to notice the relationship between manifestations of violence and poor education regarding democratic citizenship and human rights, there were participants who mentioned **intolerance among the factors determining violence in schools**.

The issue of violence proved highly complex and with numerous causative factors. In this situation the entire community is challenged, especially the school, teachers, school managers and parents. Even if the solution is not unique, school has an important role in implementing preventive measures.

School violence is favoured by violent familial environment and violent communities but it also has causes specific school environment. Schools are more efficient in facing violence when community supports them, by developing integrated and comprehensive plans involving the community, the social services, specialists in **conflict management**.

Anti-violence campaigns should be based on the development of life skills, conflict management and the development of attitudes and personalized learning mechanisms, conscious and efficient, applicable to different contexts of life, not just within school.

Non-violent education should pursue to cultivate students' openness to other views, mutual trust, respect for others, acceptance of diversity, willingness to share knowledge and competences to the peers, self confidence, confidence in the ability to develop, possibility to achieve personal development. From this perspective, it was recognized during one of the discussions that the transformation of a "trouble student" (with violent behaviour, aggressive, non-cooperative) becomes only a matter of time, if the student is part of a project concerned with personal development and positive cooperation with his/her peers.