



## Human Rights and Democracy in Action

### Pilot Projects on the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education

#### Addressing Violence in Schools through Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education

##### Focus group *analysis*, HUNGARY

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*Budapest, February 2016*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Hungarian Focus Group interview took place on 18 January 2016, hosted by the **Hungarian Institute for Educational Research and Development (OFI)**, with nine informants and four members of the Hungarian research team. The meeting was facilitated by two researchers and two further members of the team attended as observers, one of whom was the host of the event.

The nine participants were selected on the basis of **professional background**; the information about the event was circulated through professional channels and the intention of the research team was to select the volunteers in a way that the group represents a wide cross-section of professionals who can approach the topic of school violence from various perspectives.

The **venue** for the discussion was on the premises of OFI, an office building in central Budapest, where the facilities and the technical support were ideal for a round-table discussion; the whole event was **video-recorded** and later the discussion was **transcribed** in Hungarian. This report is based on ideas voiced during the interview and the quotations included here were translated from the Hungarian transcript.

In line with the *Focus Group Guidelines*, during the discussion one of the facilitators moderated the event, the other acted as a note-taker so the informants could follow the main points of the discussion on flipcharts and could easily refer back to previously mentioned issues. The discussion lasted just over 2 hours in a very professional and constructive climate.



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In a short **introduction** by the Project Team leader, the ***Addressing Violence in Schools through Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education*** project was presented. She mentioned the **Council of Europe's Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human rights Education project**, which has resulted in the six teacher manuals ([Living Democracy](#)) to provide teachers with supplementary materials to be used in their classrooms. Some of these are available in Hungarian though the [OFI website](#). The Council of Europe has had further educational projects and this is not the first time that OFI has been involved in one. The aim of the focus group discussion was also explained.

Then the informants introduced themselves. Their **professional background** was as follows:

- A. a representative of the *Kék Vonal Child Crisis Foundation* – an organisation that operates a helpline for children and young people, organises activities and training programmes to serve the interest of children,
- B. a professional *mediator* based in a provincial town, who has experience in offering workshops in mediation as an alternative conflict management technique and sexuality education for schoolchildren,
- C. a *French and history teacher from a vocational secondary school* of economics, who also takes part in the *school's youth protection programme*, working closely with the school psychologist, and has experience in conflict management,
- D. a *classteacher* from a leading *secondary grammar school* where, at the moment, there is not much open aggression among students, but who has experience in managing aggressiveness from previous working contexts,
- E. an *English teacher from a secondary grammar school* where she has a very challenging class with a lot of students with disadvantaged backgrounds; she has been interested in cyber bullying for some time,
- F. a *teacher and dormitory supervisor* who had to face the practice of cruel forms of "*rite of passage*" among boys and tried to address the problem with some restorative measures,
- G. a teacher who has worked within a *civil society assisting socially and culturally disadvantaged children* at upper primary level, offering socialising and personality development programmes, now teaching English in a secondary school,
- H. a representative of the *Hungarian National Committee for UNICEF*, working within the area of children's rights and conducting research into, among other things, violence in a sports context,
- I. a teacher in a *small primary school with a mixed ethnic composition*, where a lot of verbal and physical aggression can be observed and where as a teacher she has experienced a lot of frustration in trying to address this issue.



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With this background, the group represented **stakeholders in all the three different categories** recommended in the guidelines:

- a) educational actors from schools,
- b) members of NGOs / civil societies and
- c) members of school communities affected by special problems.

The discussion progressed along the **14 core questions** agreed upon previously by the project team. These were:

- 1) What type of school / organisation do you work for? If you teach, what age groups do you work with? What other responsibilities do you have in your school (school management, head of department, psychologist, child protection service, etc.)?
- 2) In what role can you relate to the issue of school violence?
- 3) What do you mean by bullying, abuse or violence? What instances belong here?
- 4) How serious or worrying is this problem in your own environment?
- 5) What can be the reason behind aggressive / violent acts at school?
- 6) Are there any groups that are typical targets of aggressive / violent incidents (e.g. racist, homophobic reasons)? Is the profile of the aggressors and the victims similar in any way?
- 7) How do you get to know about the incidents? What does your school do in order to investigate them?
- 8) When an incident comes to light, what happens usually to the perpetrator and to the victim?
- 9) *What steps or measures and what sort of help does the victim or the perpetrator need?*
- 10) *What happens to the bystanders?*
- 11) Does your school have a transparent protocol for handling violent incidents? What can a teacher do? What should the teacher not do?
- 12) Do you know any good practice in the area of prevention or treatment of school violence?
- 13) What help would you need for prevention or treatment of school violence?
- 14) What was the most useful for you in this discussion?

*(Questions 9-10 were not given a special focus but they were implicit in other parts of the discussion.)*



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## 2. CATEGORIES OF ANALYSIS

### 2.1 Perceptions of violence at school

#### Questions 2-3

- In what role can you relate to the issue of school violence?
- What do you mean by bullying, abuse or violence? What instances belong here?

Informants agreed that there is **no clear-cut framework** within which aggression and violence can be understood. It depends on the context, the perpetrator and the victim what is understood as violence. *“For one person verbal abuse is the most painful, for another it is physical assault, while for yet another person being excluded from a social circle is more devastating than being beaten every other day”*(Informant A).

It was also mentioned that **children at play can be rough**(e.g. in sports) but it is not considered as violence as long as **all parties understand it as play**. It can be difficult for a teacher to appreciate the situation and there can be cases when a teacher decides to intervene *“and then everyone smiles at me and they say ‘it’s only a game’”*. Sometimes the victim may not want to admit in public that they have been hurt, as *“they will have to remain a member of the community so they are vulnerable”* (Informant D). A similar finding was concluded in a school survey about aggression on the internet, where it turned out that even the victims of aggressive acts tended to consider the incident a joke, even though they were very much hurt inside. As one of our informants has phrased it, it was shocking to see that *“they do not really recognise that they are abused; it hurts but they grow a hard crust around their hearts”* (Informant E).

There are **cultural differences** in defining what violence is or what unacceptable behaviour is so there can be **different interpretations** of questions and answers when discussing the issue. According to an international study, *“when children were asked about school violence in their countries, Hungarians reported that violence was not a real problem, while research carried out by Hungarians showed that once we dig deeper, the problem is huge”* (Moderator).

Another research has shown that it also depends on the **participants’ relative age** whether a violent act is considered as such. When the participants in the incident belong to the same age-group, an aggressive act is not considered as violence as much as when the perpetrator is an older child or is an adult. Also *“whatever is all right between siblings is often not acceptable between classmates”* (Informant D).



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The informants **defined school violence** in the wide range of “using bad language, shouting, verbal abuse [...], the next step can be physical; hitting, beating, being assaulted by a group, as far as being bullied, which is basically a series [of violent acts]”, also taking personal belongings from a peer, or excluding someone from the community. A special form of violence is the various forms of initiation rituals or “rite of passage” which includes humiliation or physical abuse. A recently spreading form of violence is “visualharassment” through sexual content or rape-scenes shown around on smart phones.

There was consensus in that there is a **myth about male strength** among boys, which is a desirable quality for what it represents. “A **degenerate form of this is violence and the constructive form of this is gallantry**” (Informant B). The sexuality education specialist explained that unfortunately there are not enough role models and examples around to help teenagers realize what it means to be a great and strong man without using strength in an aggressive way.

One of the basic issues about aggression is whether it “needs to be considered as **something horrible that needs to be terminated or it is natural**. In different **historical times people judged it very differently what was acceptable and what was not**” (Informant B). Children need norms and guidelines to learn what aggression and violence mean.

#### Question 4

- How serious or worrying is this problem in your own environment?

Aggression and violence was perceived as **serious or worrying** by the informants because

- these are incidents which interfere with the teaching process as children tend to give extreme emotional responses and it needs a long time to calm them down
- it shows that there is no time or space to resolve conflicts so these are brought into the classrooms
- being the target of violence is detrimental to the victim’s self worth and self esteem
- it reflects emotional poverty and a negative attitude to themselves, their own bodies, as something valueless
- it spreads as “once victims finally become accepted members of the community, they will practice the same cruel actions they suffered from and which they have learnt from the others” (Informant I).

## 2.2 Major variables of school violence

#### Question 5-6

- What can be the reason behind aggressive / violent acts at school?

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- Are there any groups that are typical targets of aggressive / violent incidents (e.g. racist, homophobic reasons)? Is the profile of the aggressors and the victims similar in any way?

A reason **why children may find it difficult** to have a better understanding of aggression and violence is that adults do not have a clear definition of these concepts either and so we are not always aware of the signals that mark whether something falls into the category of violence. As a result, we cannot give unambiguous responses to the children when we witness something that may be a case of violence. *“We expect them to talk about, agree upon or to protest against something that we ourselves may not have established as a norm. It’s awfully difficult”* (Informant B).

Today children are exposed to such **impacts from their environment** and also **from their parents** *“that it is surprising that they are only stressed as much as they are, because there is **no valve to let off steam**, tension is building up inside them, and it looks as if we adults close off these valves at times”* (Informant B). Bad, angry language can be a sign of the need to reduce tension. For some children this anger or frustration becomes so unbearable that they damage themselves, burn their bodies or slash their wrists.

A lot of children come from **broken homes**, *“7 out of 10 couples are seeking a divorce and there is no chance for a child to escape from the extremely strong, emotionally loaded, negative and detrimental pattern”* that living in such a family means (Informant B).

A further problem is that children do not learn techniques for **assertive and non-aggressive communication**. Talking about emotions is not part of the curriculum so children have difficulty in expressing themselves, especially in emotionally loaded situations.

**Expressing emotions assertively is a difficulty** for children and adults alike. Being sensitive is often **taken as a weakness** and, as such, it may provoke aggression. So being tough is a kind of defence mechanism. Emotions are rarely discussed in a calm and constructive way, education is rarely concerned with emotive content just facts.

On the physical side, *“in our present educational system **the students’ own bodies** are not viewed as something precious and they will not take care of something that is **not viewed as worthwhile**. This is also behind the current views on sexuality; it is not talked about [...] people know very little about it and they are clumsy in sexual matters and they **don’t treat their bodies as something valuable**.”* This is behind all aggressive sexual behaviour, as well (Informant B).

One type of **behaviour that triggers aggressiveness is the perceived weakness** of a potential victim. *“If someone asks for help or shows their feelings, they are considered to be weak and this has negative*



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connotations. We allow a lot of children to become victims by promoting [that they should ask their teachers or other adults for help]" which is then understood as weakness or betrayal on part of his peers, and it is punished (Informant I).

The **opposite** may also be true. Such an example was given by one informant who works in a secondary school and has a class where there is a student with a bipolar disorder. This student is a private student and is **very vulnerable** because of her condition. But **even the most aggressive student in the class seems to protect** her, and on a class trip the whole class was looking after her, probably because they knew how fragile she was. But this case cannot be generalised (Informant E).

One teacher noted that in her school some **racist voices** could be observed where the targeted groups are the **Jewish or the Roma people**. "*This however is rarely against a particular person as the school has a number of Roma students who integrated very well into the school community so they are not targets of violent acts*" (Informant C). **Homophobia** was also present at a theoretical level, but not against particular members of the school community. Another teacher, however, mentioned that in her school there is a growing level of violence among Roma students (Informant I).

Generally speaking, **children mirror the social context around them** and if they encounter behaviours in adult society that clearly do not conform to rules, they will **not follow rules themselves**. Some of them have not learnt to respect rules of games, they **cannot tolerate being a loser** so they rather cheat or do not face the challenge. The influence of the adult society can also be felt in projecting a negative image to children and teenagers, and they come up to the expectations of these **negative stereotypes**.

### 2.3 Means for Combating violence / Recommendations

#### Question 7, 8 & 11

- How do you get to know about the incidents? What does your school do in order to investigate them?
- Does your school have a transparent protocol for handling violent incidents? What can a teacher do? What should the teacher not do?

In most schools there is **no specific protocol** for handling violent incidents, the scenario usually is that the students involved are asked to sit down with a teacher and discuss the problem, the class teacher or the parents may also get involved. In one of the participants' school it is a policy that if there is a case, "*the headmaster asks all the parties involved to go and see [the school management], teachers, parents, students alike. This is a very good practice but incredibly time-consuming*" (Informant C).



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**Restorative discussion** is used with all the people concerned in the incident. Schools must initiate a **sanction** if the incident is serious enough, this is regulated by law. Above a certain level the **police** also needs to be involved but informants did not mention that this has ever been necessary. Students need to be clear about the legal consequences of violent actions. *“The basic principle is that everyone is entitled to fundamental freedoms and has basic human rights and these cannot be restricted. The right to study and to personal safety must not be violated”*(Informant H).

**Schools play a decisive role** in handling violence, especially **class teachers**, who in Hungarian schools call a meeting with all the teachers who teach a given class in every semester. At these meetings all the **students are appraised** against a set of criteria, looking for positive or perhaps negative changes in their conduct, study results and general behaviour, which might be indicators for need for special attention. In some cases the **parents are called in for a conference**. Schools often have a poor reputation for handling these issues but when parents are convinced that their child gets individual attention and they see that the school treats them as partners and do not try to behave like an authority, they open up and become cooperative (Informant D).

One teacher felt **frustrated about the indifference of parents** who do not turn up at parents' conferences and not even when they are personally asked to come to a consultation with a teacher. She also mentioned that **teachers are often so tired** and they have so many other duties that when their lessons are over they are just happy to leave and **do not have the energy to invest work into such responsibilities**(Informant I).

In another school **class teachers are selected** on the basis of their **monitoring abilities** and the **quality of relationship** with the students. A trusting relationship makes it possible to detect violence, often even in its latent form, and their presence also has a preventive function. *“The ongoing communication, tuning in to the students' feelings and being together with them often eliminates the conflict at its root [...] But it is no formal protocol”* (Informant D).

The **lack of official routes, communication channels and helping protocols** is unfortunate as there might be staff members at a school who get to know about an incident but feel left alone with the problem and, believing that consulting with other teachers may indicate that they are not competent enough, seek the advice of an outsider, a helpline worker or a specialist. A way out of this is to **set up working groups** within which people have specific roles, they collect information and train themselves in different areas, then they share their expertise and can collaborate openly, without the feeling of mistrust and incompetence. This collaboration also saves a lot of time and energy.

#### Questions 12-13

- Do you know any good practice in the area of prevention or treatment of school violence?

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- What help would you need for prevention or treatment of school violence?

According to some of our informants, as a first step, it is important for the children to know that even when they are playing *“they should **give a clear signal** verbally, or non-verbally, when the game goes beyond the point when it is not a game for them any more”* (Informant D). Children should signal and also learn to respect when another wants a **timeout** from the game. This way the thin margin between play, even rough play and violence can be made more clearly.

It also seems important that **trust is established** between children and those in charge of helping them. Helpline workers report that children turning to them *“get as far as recognising that they are abused but they do not take the next step of asking for help, because of a million reasons [...] like the lack of trust, the lack of hope that an adult can help, or the fear of becoming an outcast of their reference groups even more”* (Informant A).

There is also the **socio-psychological issue of reaching adulthood**. There used to be rites of passage through which children were welcome into a community as adults. They were given *“adult rights”* and they were fully responsible for their actions. Now children become adults legally, physically, emotionally at different points in their lives and they might claim certain rights, like protecting someone or taking revenge, without having the insight or the responsibility for what they do (Informant B). **Education** is crucial here.

Teachers and parents need **tools for recognising and managing situations** where their help or professional help is needed. **Verbal abuse** is one of the most difficult areas, as teachers are often not familiar enough with the teenage subculture to be able to estimate whether rude verbal expressions are signs of violence among teenagers or just the opposite, part of *“being cool”* or the expression of belonging together.

One informant reported on an **ongoing project** where practical tools for **differentiating between various types of behaviour** (e.g. between teasing and bullying) are worked out for everyday situations, based on well founded theoretical approaches. Barbara Coloroso’s book, *The Bully, the Bullied, and the Bystander* (2008, Harper Collins Publisher) was mentioned where the division is made according to *“whether the dignity of the other person is hurt, whether the action is finished when requested or whether the roles are interchangeable [between the participants]”* (Informant A).

On the physical side, it was suggested that young people **should be taught to respect their own and also their peers’ bodies** and consider their physical selves as something valuable. This would also add to self control (Informant B).



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Informant F summarised his ideas in the following 3 points:

- Children need emotional richness and we need to help them develop this.
- They need to be able to express their emotions
- They also need to develop self-control and self regulation so that they can distinguish between their emotional state and their verbal or physical actions.

It was suggested that schools and communities should have a very **straightforward code of conduct, which is** not just announced but **also agreed upon and internalised** by the students. A teacher recalled an incident when a class of 10-year-olds had a lot of fights while trying to establish the social context and the pecking order in the group. The teacher, as a desperate move to try and stop the fights, invited them to **draw up the rules of fair fighting**. She *“devoted a full lesson to this and the students worked in groups to establish how fighting could be fair and they started with something like ‘you are only allowed to defend yourself’, which is a completenonsense”* but they worked constructively and the code was made. It might have been a coincidence but once the code was finished and posted on the wall, fighting finished in a few weeks’ time (Informant D).

It is also important **how rules are communicated** but in schools it is usually the students’ duties that are emphasised. This top-down direction of communication is very harmful. If rules are approached from the perspective of **students’ rights**, it becomes clear that students are supported and *“their duties are marked out by the fact that the others also have the same rights; this is where duties start, that the rights of others are also to be observed”*. Children need to be **considered as partners** in all this (Informants B and H).

At the same time, it would be unrealistic to expect children to work out everything by themselves in connection with cause and effect, or actions and result. They need **hands-on guidelines** for behaviour. *“Disciplining does not need to be a dirty word, it does not necessarily mean **punishment**, but they need to realise that **actions have consequences**”*. To teach them constructive behaviour, there needs to be a **supporting control** at first from the schools, just like with anything when children are taught to become autonomous step by step (Informant B).

There is a difference between deliberate and pre-meditated acts and the ones which are committed in an **emotionally heated situation**. In the second case, when children lose their heads and cannot control themselves in the emotional situation, *“they are required to demonstrate **skills in being empathetic** and to recognise what their partners feel and what they themselves feel. The question is whether they can identify their own feelings and how much teachers can help them in that.”* This process should start at early childhood but schools should also play an important part, as it is not easy, even for an adult, to recognise, verbalise and reflect upon inner feelings (Informant B).



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A special technique used by one of the institutions was to **offer an alternative behaviour** when a child loses control. It is useless to ask an impulsive child to suppress their emotion as it will find an outlet somewhere else. Instead, they try to find another – if not a constructive then a less destructive – **activity to serve as an outlet for the temper**. This does not substitute talking through the event and helping the child process the emotion but it helps to fill the time until the child manages to calm down a little. Physical activities are usually helpful, or tearing up a piece of paper and throwing something into the bin (Informant G).

One of the informants pondered on the idea that, as aggression means a huge amount of energy raging in a person, perhaps this energy could be made use of in a creative and positive way, like getting on a bike and generating electricity using a dynamo. If such an activity became popular in the community, it could be a self-directive measure for expressing not just anger but also strength and children might compete with each other in doing something that is useful (Informant B).

Some other tools for schools to contribute to socialising the students in a positive way are the various **lessons that develop the students' study skills or social skills**. The topics in these lessons do not follow a strict curriculum so they can address topical issues in e.g. group dynamics and various emotive topics. The ultimate aim of the teachers is to establish a **dialogue and a trusting relationship** with the students, and signal that they do care about them.

There used to be a project for vocational schools called “**non-aggressive school programme, which supported the participating schools with professional surveys, activities and workshops and which involved teachers and helping professionals**” but this programme finished a few years ago.

One of our informants had experience with a **special pedagogical-methodological framework** specifically worked out **for children with disadvantaged backgrounds**, who are often verbally and physically very aggressive. This programme, however, only worked within a particular project and elements of it cannot be incorporated to a different scheme (Informant G).

It was strongly felt that **prevention** is the strongest tool for maintaining a non-violent school culture; “*if the framework which makes it possible to maintain a preventive atmosphere in a school is continuously monitored, developed and implemented, there is a real chance for combatting violence*”.

In the boys' dormitory teachers approached a professional in mental hygiene to work out some practical suggestions for managing aggression in students. These included weekly small group discussions on “*the big questions of life [to help the boys] express, verbalise, and learn about and become aware of emotions*” (Informant F). Another attempt to sensitise students to **what it feels to be on the vulnerable side** was to design and organise with them a new “*rite of passage*” for the



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newcomers, in which all the potentially humiliating, dangerous or aggressive components were taken out, and leaving some funny, challenging or innocent practical jokes, after discussing **what it would be like to be at the receiving end** of these (Informant F).

It is important that when taking out aggression of social relationships and offering an **alternative behaviour**, the challenge or the social standing of the behaviour **should be more attractive** than the original one, otherwise children will not appreciate the change. It can happen that they follow their original ideas in secret while seemingly giving in to their teacher's suggestion (Informant G).

A further idea can be taken from **experiential education**, offering **real challenges** to students, "*when they need to get out of their comfort zones but they can stay within the panic-zone, they learn through experience which provides the necessary challenge.*" This cannot be automatically used with all groups of students and the teacher needs to be very patient to engage them and teach them how to take part in such working structures and changing the traditional rules of the classroom.

A positive way of relating to unwanted behaviour is **to change the usual punishment-centred protocol to reparation/compensation focused** ones, where students themselves could come up with ways of compensating for what they had done and with this they could also think over the consequences of their actions.

There are **soft ways of handling tension** and the top 3 (for Informant E) were:

- Braveness to be fit to go into a conflict situation
- Humour to release tension
- Honesty as this is the basis of building relationships
- Small rituals in the lesson that give students familiarity and safety and also structure the time.

These could be extended with **out-of-school activities** which change the routine-like classroom relationships, class excursions, sports events, where students need to work as a team, rely on each other or when they engage in real discussions, spiritual exercises, which need understanding and verbalising feelings and emotions and also self-reflection. One informant mentioned a successful **debating activity**, which helped some students express themselves and air out aggression from their communication. **These skills can be learnt and developed.**

Doing **volunteer work** and being part of a **peer-help group** also has huge potentials, as it shows children that they can provide help for other people, which adds to the helper's self-esteem and re-structures certain values in them. "*In many cases such a community can work as therapeutic group as a member who has been marginalised gets opened up here*". These need strong teacher support and preparation so that these benefits can be observed (Informant E).



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With all the mentally and emotionally focused activities it is also important that children and teenagers **become aware of their bodies**, their bodily functions, the expressions of their sexuality – these are usually taboos or uncomfortable topics for teachers. Yet students are really interested in themselves, their own bodies. Short exercises, e.g. on how they breathe, can be important. Impulses can be very well managed with breathing techniques (Informant B).

Apart from institutional support, trainings and a communication network in the schools, **teachers themselves also need psychological support** in processing the events and the information they get about students. As one teacher phrased it, *“teachers need to learn not to take these problems home and lie awake at night thinking about what could be done about a particular child because this is just impossible”* (Informant E). Teachers should be able to put this baggage down at the school entrance and go home to recharge their batteries. Being too involved does not only affect their professional work badly but also their private lives. They need to learn to **switch off as a professional strategy** and not go into either of the two extremes of not caring about students and getting wrapped up in their problems. This is the only way to avoid burnout and maintain a professional attitude.

Another informant added that *“if a teacher is the instrument that measures if there is trouble or if it is the time for intervention, the question arises whose duty it is to maintain this instrument [to function well]”* (Informant D). Teachers **undergo so much stress** that they often to **do not have the chance to rest or look after their physical well-being**. With this they do not only miss the opportunity to be able look after their students’ physical and mental health but also communicate the opposite of what they would like to teach about values. Further to this, when children go home from school, they often meet similarly stressed and tired parents, who cannot provide much help with their problems.

### 3. CONCLUDING POINTS

From the above it can be concluded that the informants at the focus group interview had a an informed understanding of aggression and violence in the educational sphere and all of them had first hand experience in observing and trying to manage violent situations.

The outcomes of the Focus Group Interview can be summarized in the following points:

1) The **spectrum of violence** was understood in a wide sense, ranging from verbal and visual forms through physical acts. The seriousness of these incidents also shows a great variety, and it is difficult to make a clear difference between inappropriate behaviour, aggression, abuse and violence.





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The cultural and situational context, the relationship and the relative age of the participants in the incident, also play a role in **how violent acts are interpreted**.

2) Various **reasons** were identified behind school violence, like the overall social **environment**, school-related tension, family-related issues, responding to stereotypical images of what it means to be strong.

Students' **lack of awareness** of their own emotions, failing to recognise them and inexperience in handling them was also mentioned. They seem to have very limited options in expressing aggressive feelings and cannot reflect on their actions.

The **responsibility of schools' and teachers'**, especially that of class teachers', was emphasised with the note that the teachers would need help in recognizing and handling violent situations. They often have difficulties in communication, they don't have in professional background knowledge and often feel left alone solving a problem.

They face a lot of problems that were non-existent when they themselves were students so they are socialised differently, their mental frameworks and comfort zones are different from their students. As a result, their **private and professional reactions may be in conflict** and it is not always easy to stay in their professional roles. It is frustrating to feel that the **world changes** so fast that while they learn to follow or manage a certain situation, new issues crop up and they **cannot catch up with their students' reality**.

3) Informants at the discussion came up with a collection of **solutions that seemed to be working at schools** they were familiar with. They also had a variety of creative ideas for addressing the problem.

The most important starting point seemed to be the **open and trusting relationship** between teachers and students. Setting up rules together that students can refer to and teaching them to **communicate more effectively** in a non-aggressive way. Students' **personal skills** need to be developed; they need to learn to be more empathic, to accept responsibility and, generally speaking, they need to be socialised to a better functioning community.

**Prevention** was seen as a better solution than treating the situation after the violent act has happened. **Soft ways of handling tension** could be part of a school's everyday practice.

One of the immediate outcomes of the Focus Group Interview was the subsequent networking which could be experienced between the participants. Added to the ideas that were exchanged at the meeting, some more resources were shared and circulated via email and participants also agreed to



## Human Rights and Democracy in Action

### Pilot Projects on the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education

meet again in March to discuss further possible areas of action addressing school violence and to learn about the results of focus group interviews in the partner countries.