
The decrease of violence in schools and educational environments through the program *We can choose*

The final results

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Abstract

In this paper are presented the final results of a project on preventing and reducing violence in school and other the education environments, phenomenon growing worldwide, and, default in Romania. The purpose of the research was to implement and to evaluate the impact of the program *We can choose*, successful program in reducing aggression in schools. To decrease violence among children we organized an experiment in two classes: an experimental group and a control group. In the experimental group were carried out activities that have determined the improving socio-emotional skills and the non-aggressive behaviour of the children. After implementation of the program, the aggressive tendencies of students decreased by 20%, which demonstrates the need of the intervention programs in schools and a new vision on what schools can do to provide comprehensive training to students to enable them to better adapt to the realities everyday life.

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1. Introduction

The requirements expressed by the society towards the educational system in general and teachers in particular,
are constantly changing. Thus in the USA., for example, initially believed „that public education should provide learning opportunities to benefit the students, now there are more and more expectations from schools to ensure the academic success of the students” (Van Acker, 2004, as cited in Gable, 2006). A secondary effect on pursuing and obtaining the school performance of as many students is the evident decrease of the tolerance to the behavioral problems in the classroom.

This problem is found in the current Romanian school reality that is exposed to the pressure of the integration the students with special educational diverse needs, given that the curricula, the standards of performance and the training of the teachers have not been changed, have not been adapted to the new requirements of school and to postmodern education.

According to the same author the factors thought to be responsible for the difficulty / the failure of the teachers to react and respond in an appropriate and effectively manner to the behavioral problems manifested in classroom (Gable et al., 2000) are: the inability to assess the student’s behavior and identify the major factors associated with behavioral issues; the difficulty to relate to diverse groups of students; the lack of skills in developing educational interventions focused on students in order to ensure the academic success of the students and to promote positive social interactions among them.

A study of the Institute of Educational Sciences and UNICEF (2006) revealed that the main causes of the aggressive behavior of teachers in schools include, in the opinion of the school leadership and of the school counselors, the challenges from students and insufficient training of teachers.

„This latter issue is reflected at the behavioral level in the lack of communication between teachers and their students (mentioned by 87% of advisors and 52% of executives), lack of classroom management skills (67% of advisors and 35% of executives) failure pedagogical training, low motivation of teachers to their profession (70% of counselors and 31.7% of directors) and a smaller percentage are among the causes and stress, fatigue, insufficient experience, lack of vocation lack of continuity in teaching” (Mark W. Fraser et al., 2010, pp 9).

The students opinions on the methods used by their teachers shows that the flexible academic expectations, the flexible behaviors, the interactions between students and teachers and humor are very attractive and pleasant. The opposite would be “academic expectations and the rigid behavior and disciplinary procedures” (Crowley, 1991).

2. Psychosocial programs of prevention and intervention in schools

The studies on emotional issues of behavior student's, the etiology and their interdependence with other factors (internal, external, psychological, social, environmental, etc.), of the correlation their with the antisocial behaviors or even the juvenile delinquency, the evaluation of programs to prevent and reduce the aggressive behaviors have intensified starting with 1950. Numerous studies highlight the effectiveness, adaptability, suitability of different therapeutic options trying to highlight their strengths and limitations in relation to the individual characteristics of the therapeutic relationship but also environments manifestation of emotional -behavioral disorders (Kostelnic, Soderman, Phipps Whiren, 1993).

Comprehensive programs, multimodal intervention are involving multiple distinct elements (for example: social skills, development programs for students and parenting skills training) or a mix of different interventions (Gresham, Sugai, Horner, 2001). In the case at hand, they may be programs for parents and teachers and school administrators, in addition to the programs offered to students. In this form of services programs are classified in universal and selected/indicated. Comprehensive universal programs include multiple treatment modalities, but the intervention is done universally apply to all students in the class or school. “Comprehensive programs selected include also multiple ways of intervention, but they are addressed only to students although of their emotional and behaviour problems or a risk factors for such problems” (I. Darjan and collaborators, 2009, p,209). The most effective programs have proven to be the universal solution to all of the students of a class or a school, and selected programs offered to students previously selected in an environment different from the classroom. Also, cognitive orientation techniques were the most frequent used both in programs and in the universal individual as contributing to their effectiveness for therapeutic intervention. Preferred by many researchers are the behavioural techniques for developing social skills and counselling.

In the treatment of emotional and behavioural disorders there have been used several methods of intervention (Dunlap, 1997; Kostelnic, Soderman, Phipps, Whiren): drug therapy, psychotherapeutic approach (from different
perspectives, psychoanalytic behaviourist, dynamic, cognitive, humanistic, etc.) psychotherapy or counselling individual or group for students, educational intervention. Thus, the programs and techniques used are such as, classroom management, providing positive support, develop self-esteem, develop social skills, parental education, addressing systemic functional analysis of behaviour.

This research highlights the need for continuous training of teachers in order to provide mediation and prevention of conflicts, and the need to generate intervention programs to prevent and reduce the level of aggression in schools. These types of programs include also the program “Making choices” developed by Mark W. Fraser and col., 2001/2004/2005. This program was presented in the study "Reduction of violence in schools and educational environments through the Making Choices Program" (M., and C. Constantinescu 2013)

The activities undertaken in this project are based on role-playing, experiment and exemplification, to children being given concrete life situations similar to those experienced by them in relation to their peers. During the exercises, the children are encouraged to express their opinions and their feelings, but are challenged to find alternatives to the behaviors they are already doing.

3. The experimental research approach

3.1. The research objectives

- Assessing the socio-emotional skills of pupils of second grades, that attended in the research
- The implementation of the program We can choose to pupils of the second grade involved in project;
- The identification of the opinion of teachers (of the teachers involved the in program) concerning student behaviour;
- The highlight of the impact produced of the implementation of the Program Making Choices on the level’s of socio-emotional abilities of students from the second grade.

3.2. Research hypotheses

1. The aggressive potential of the pupils from the experimental group will fall significantly because of the participation to the program Making Choices

2. There’s a significant difference between the level of the aggressiveness identified by the teacher and the level of aggression perceived by the pupils.

3.3. The experimental design and presentation of the intervention

The research plan was the type pretesting – intervention – post testing. The pretesting was carried out in September 2012 in students in grades II and it consisted in assessment socio-emotional skills through the questionnaire Carolina SLA and teachers applied the Grid from grades participating in the experiment.

The intervention consisted of the adaptation and implementation of the program We can choose to students from classes II (A and B) of School No.1, Pitesti included in the project. Implementation of the program was conducted over a period of 12 weeks' that were sustained preventive sessions/therapeutic, with a frequency of one hour per week, only with the experimental group. Among the topics developed include: Let's learn about emotions and feelings; grading feelings - fury; identifying social cues; feelings and actions etc. The project team had 18 meetings with students participating in the project and began work in September 2012 and ended in February 2013. The program Making Choices is a social development program designed to improve student behaviour and developing social skills interrelation. Research independent variable is represented by the intervention program we choose, and the dependent variables are the level of socio-emotional skills (potential aggressive children) and the type of discipline used.

The testing post was performed in February 2013 and consisted in retesting of socio-emotional skills structure, models of discipline based on perception and observation of the teachers from classes using the same questionnaires
as in the pretesting phase. In the last session, the project team emphasized the good works done by students at school and awarded to those who did the most good deeds. The activities in the experiment were carried out by a group of students and masters of Social Work, coordinated by a specialist from the University of Pitesti.

3.4. Instruments used in research

The aggressive behaviour of students was assessed with two instruments, a questionnaire applied to pupils and an observation grid applied to the class teacher. To assess the level of socio-emotional skills (aggressive potential) of pupils used test Carolina Children's Initiative - SLA (Skill level activity). This was taken in the program Making choices, designed by Mark Fraser 2001/2004, and adapted to the age of the pupils in classes II. The test aims to evaluate how students interpret and act when they are in common social situations. The questionnaire refers to six situations in which the children are doing an injustice to another child to the same age, and for every situation there is an image that shows details about action. For every frustrating situation, the child is interviewed on the following aspects: distinguish between intentional and unintentional behaviour, action cues, the type of goals made - aggressive or nonaggressive, the type of cognitions through which children find explanations on what is happening, emotions resulted after frustrating situation, behaviour immediately/long-term behaviour. The questionnaire has 42 items in total but of them is quoted only 36 (6 frustrating situations - 6 sizes). Rating questionnaire was as follows: 0- non-aggressive behaviour, 1- verbally aggressive behaviour, 2- physical aggression. After completing the questionnaire each student will have a score that represents the potential of aggressive (declared) in frustrating situations of life.

The grid applied of the teachers contains 14 items, 10 of which relate to printing aggression (verbal / nonverbal, manifested open / indirect, against other / against oneself, observing passive / active involvement), and the last four items express the qualities of the child (assertion, cooperation, self-control, empathy). This grid was taken by Franz & Ulrike Petermann, 2006, Therapy Program for aggressive children. To assess the child, teachers awarded a rating from 1-5 Likert scale, indicating the frequency with which it is manifest that behaviour at school as follows: 1 = not occur again; 2 = rarely occurs; 3 = sometimes occurs; 4 = frequently occurs; 5 = very frequently occurs; To find the score expressing aggressive behaviour occurred in each student, evaluated by teachers, gathered score of each item of the scale, the first item was made a direct quotation, and the last four were quoted indirectly.

3.5. Presenting the lots of participants

The experimental group consists of 14 students and the control group of 19 students. The groups were homogeneous in terms of gender. Children from families with average status, some families are socially disadvantaged, presents problems of violence, divorce, unemployment. In the experimental group were children from a placement center.

4. Research Results and Their Interpretation

Using two instruments, the questionnaire applied to pupils and observation grid applied of the teachers, was identified aggressive potential of students by designing them in social situations frustrating and how the teachers evaluate on students. The results obtained allow us to identify both the way students declare that interrelates with the other children but also how they behave at school. Analysis of the results obtained by applying the two instruments indicates that the two classes are not homogeneous in terms the of the aggression level of students identified by their statements and teacher evaluation. The weighted average of the experimental group in terms of student is 6, 10 and 3, 25 in the control group. It maintains the same idea from the perspective of the teacher, the weighted average is 5, 25 in the experimental group and the weighted average is 2,05 in the control group.

4.1. Analysis of the results before and after Intervention

The results obtained in the experimental group and control group before and after intervention are summarized
in Figure 1, the dates are presented from the perspective of the student. In Figure 1 we can see compared the distribution of the aggression level assessed of students at the beginning and after implementing the program. It can be seen that the final assessment (testing post) the distribution of results is much different from baseline (pretesting) in the experimental group. The dates obtained from the interim evaluation showed that are small positive changes in regarding the aggressiveness of children in the experimental group (M. & C. Constantinescu, 2013). At pretest in the area high and very high aggression were 35% (5 out of 14 students) of the experimental group the respondents, and at the end of project implementation has reached 14%. (2 out of 14 students), so, the aggressiveness of the children decreased by over 20%. Therefore, our hypothesis was confirmed and gave us the hope that implementation of these programs determine the socio-emotional skills development of students and implicitly, decreasing of the aggressive behaviors.

Regarding the control group, as can be seen also from Figure 1, there aren't differences between the results of the pretest and posttest and the distribution of potential aggressive is much different to the experimental group. Most children evaluate themselves as good and do not show aggressive behavior (80%).

![Fig.1. Distribution of children identified child aggression intensity, initial and final self-evaluation of the experimental group and the control group.](image)

**Comparative analysis of the aggression level from the perspective of students and teachers**

To see compared the distribution of the aggression level from the perspective of students and teachers, the results were converted into standard rules, so each interval corresponds to a gross value and indicates the level of aggressiveness of the students. In Figure 2 is observed the distribution of the aggressiveness level of the students' evaluated by student and teacher in the experimental group, so we can see if their dates are similar or very different. Although at first glance we see that the level of aggressiveness of students is close to the level of perception of teacher, especially in the high and very low aggressiveness area (the extremes), however the teacher distributes the students at all levels of aggressiveness. The distribution of students by teachers is explained by the fact that it evaluated a group of students, so he had a benchmark when compared to complete, while the student was reported only to him. It follows that the second hypothesis is partially confirmed.
Student achievement and teacher of the control group can be found in Figure 3. At the control group no significant differences between the level aggressiveness of students before and after the procedure and especially between the teacher and the students' perception regarding aggression. We believe it an atypical situation, the teacher appreciated by most students as non aggressive. In this class the majority of students were very good results to education and probably non aggressive the behaviour and school success are mutually influence.

The results from the questionnaire indicate a decrease in potential students aggressively, especially experimental group where intervention was performed, so the weighted average of the experimental group obtained after implementation of the program is 4.10. In teachers' opinions reduces the levels of aggression in both groups. Following implementation of the intervention in the experimental group students have learned to identify more
correctly the intentions of others, that they may make the difference between intentionally and unintentionally the behaviour and to hold that ambiguous situations threatening social cues that have not enough to draw conclusions and has changed the perception of the frustrating situations. An appropriate perception of social situations altogether during which children interact with them, facilitates the formulation of realistic goals and adopting specific behaviours for achieving the objectives. The other dimensions such as: the cognitions, emotions evaluated by the students had changed quite a least. Perhaps the full implementation of the program and for a period of time would increase the probability of fixation of the information presented and would be more visible changes in student behavior.

5. Conclusions

Analyzing the results obtained by the students and teachers on the level aggressiveness students' before and after implementation of intervention of the program we can draw some conclusions: intervention programs to reduce students' aggression are effective if applied long term. In this context, we have extended the application of the program for three months to get some progress. In the short term have low efficiency programs, but they impact the awareness of teachers and parents regarding the level aggressiveness of children in the family and school. Making intervention programs to be designed not only for children but also teachers and parents to teach how to relate to aggressive the students would be an advantage, since the behaviour change children would feel in all modes of expression and would impact over a long period of time.

We appreciate that the situation to the teaching students shall be constituted a school environment factor that influences the children's behaviour. The aggressive behaviour of students' sometimes negative influence teachers when assessing students' knowledge, any of our experimental group where the teacher, although experienced with students have problems to relation class, adopting a less flexible behaviour in interactions with students, with a poor image, disappointing child with possible undesirable effects on student-teacher interrelating and consequently the for educational context and instructive education. Therefore, it is necessary implementing intervention programs in order mediation to prevent and reduce aggression in the school environment. Perhaps the full implementation of the program and for a period of time would increase fixation probability information presented and would be more visible changes in student behaviour.

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