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SCHOOL AS A SPACE FOR HUMAN CONNECTION

Václav Šimek,
PaedDr. PhDr. PhD., D. Ed., DBA
Higher School of Social Sciences and Security, Poland
orcid.org/0000-0002-0158-6432
simek@wsnsb.cz

Summary. This article examines the phenomenon of school violence through a comprehensive analysis that moves beyond traditional individual-focused approaches to consider group dynamics and relational factors within educational environments. The research was prompted by recent tragic incidents of school violence in Europe, particularly a deadly attack in Slovakia in January 2025, which highlighted systemic failures in violence prevention and the inadequacy of current educational approaches that, as one teacher observed, teach children "about the world, but so little about themselves."

The article draws on pedagogical and developmental psychology, positive psychology, and dialogical practice, with particular emphasis on the theoretical frameworks of Rocío Chaveste Gutiérrez and Loek Schoenmakers. The study challenges the conventional aggressor-victim dichotomy by introducing the concept of the "silent majority" – the 60–80% of students who neither perpetrate nor experience violence directly but whose passive observation maintains and perpetuates violent dynamics through implicit consent.

The research methodology employed a comprehensive literature review and analysis of international case studies, including successful violence prevention programs from Uganda, Pakistan, and the United States. The investigation revealed that effective violence prevention requires systemic intervention at the group level rather than isolated individual treatments.

Key findings demonstrated that school violence emerges from unmet developmental needs, particularly the fundamental human need for belonging and acceptance. The study identified that current educational systems prioritize knowledge transmission over socio-emotional development, creating environments where students may resort to violence as a means of achieving social inclusion. The silent majority's inaction was found to be interpreted by aggressors as validation, thereby reinforcing destructive behavioral patterns.

The research concluded that sustainable violence prevention requires transforming school climate through collective rather than individual interventions. Practical recommendations include implementing daily relational contact rituals, morning circles, strength-based approaches, dialogical language practices, and comprehensive teacher training in relational competencies. The study emphasized that schools must function as spaces for authentic human connection, where socio-emotional learning is integrated into regular educational practice.

The findings contribute to understanding school violence as a systemic issue requiring community-based solutions that engage all stakeholders in creating safe, supportive learning environments that address students' fundamental need for belonging and recognition.

Keywords: school as a social space, school relationships, school climate, social-emotional learning, violence prevention, mental health support, inclusive education, interpersonal communication, pedagogical intervention.

1. Introduction

In recent years, increasingly disturbing cases of violence within school environments have emerged across Europe, some of which have ended in tragedy. One of the most shocking incidents that deeply affected the public was the death of a teacher at the hands of a student in a secondary school in Slovakia. This tragic event occurred on January 17, 2025, at a secondary school in Spišská Stará Ves, where an 18-year-old student killed Mária Semančíková, a 51-year-old deputy headteacher and teacher, as well as 18-year-old student Alena. A third victim, another 18-year-old student named Barbora, was injured and hospitalized.

This incident has once again brought to the forefront not only concerns about school safety, but also questions about the deeper causes of such acts. The event exposed serious failures in prevention efforts, including the neglect of warning signs by the police. One week prior to the attack, teachers submitted a 22 page report to the authorities, documenting the suspect's alarming behavior in detail. However, the local police dismissed the threat as mere bullying and failed to take appropriate action. A statement by one of the murdered teacher's colleagues, widely quoted in the media, became a symbolic reflection of the broader issue:

"We teach children about the world, but so little about themselves."

This statement should not be interpreted merely as an emotional response, but as a profoundly accurate observation of a systematic shortfall in the educational system's formative function. While curricular goals are increasingly well-defined, the socio-emotional development of children and their basic human needs remain marginal within both educational policy and practice.

Among both scholars and educators, there is a growing consensus that violent student behavior cannot be explained solely through individual factors such as personality traits, family background, or mental health. The emergence and persistence of school violence must be understood within a broader psychosocial and group context.

The aim of this article is to offer a perspective that moves beyond the traditional aggressor victim dichotomy and instead presents an approach to school violence that considers group climate, the role of the silent majority, and, most importantly, the unmet needs of children within the current educational system (Miller, 2022). The article draws on insights from pedagogical and developmental psychology, positive psychology, and dialogical practice (Tussey, 2021; Jimerson et al., 2011). It is particularly inspired by the theoretical frameworks of Rocío Chaveste Gutiérrez (2016) and Loek Schoenmakers (2014), whose work in school prevention and group dynamics offers an innovative and humanistic perspective on the issue of violence in schools (Sampson et al., 2024; Durlak et al., 2025).

2. Education vs. Developmental Needs of Students

The current educational system largely prioritizes the transmission of knowledge, verifiable skills, and outcomes measurable through standardized methods. However, this approach often neglects the essential developmental needs of children and adolescents, which are critical for healthy growth and psychosocial stability from the perspective of developmental psychology.

According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, one of the fundamental human motivations is the need for acceptance, belonging, and secure relational grounding. For many children, school is the first environment where they engage with a broader social group beyond their family. In this context, the school serves not only an educational function but also acts as a primary setting for socialization, identity formation, and self-reflection.

Despite this, socio-emotional and relational skills remain marginalized within educational practice. Although some cross-curricular themes, such as personal and social education, are formally embedded within curricula, their practical implementation is often superficial, methodologically underdeveloped, and lacking systemic support. The emphasis tends to be placed on performance, correctness, and knowledge-based outcomes rather than on emotional experience, interpersonal relationships, or self-awareness.

Research in school psychology repeatedly demonstrates that schools which implement programs aimed at developing socio-emotional competencies, such as empathy, emotional regulation, and conflict resolution, achieve not only improved academic performance but also lower incidences of aggressive behavior, bullying, and psychosomatic symptoms (Durlak et al., 2025).

A lack of space for emotional experience and self-reflection may lead some students to internal frustration, feelings of alienation, inadequacy, and eventually to maladaptive behavioral patterns. A school that perceives the child merely as an object of evaluation, rather than as a unique individual, unwittingly contributes to their marginalization.

From a developmental psychological perspective, the school-age period and adolescence are pivotal for the formation of identity (Erikson, 1968). If, during this stage, a child is not offered a safe space for self-exploration and relational anchoring, they are more likely to seek validation through alternative and often dysfunctional strategies. These may include excessive conformity, social withdrawal, or, conversely, aggressive self-assertion. In light of this, it becomes necessary to reformulate our educational priorities**.** *Are we teaching children too much about the world and too little about themselves? And if so, what is the cost?* As Banaszak et al. (2023) emphasize, socio-emotional competencies support students' functioning in school and contribute to their long-term personal and professional success. These competencies can and should be cultivated directly within the school environment.

Schaffer and Bender (2024) highlight the importance of effective planning and implementation of programs that support social-emotional learning in schools. Their work offers a practical guide for educators and mental health professionals on selecting, introducing, and evaluating universal social-emotional programs using principles from implementation science.

The current educational system must reflect the insights of developmental psychology and pedagogy, integrating the development of socio-emotional skills into regular teaching practice. Only in this way can we create a learning environment that genuinely supports the holistic development of the child and prepares them for the challenges of the future.

3. Critique of the Aggressor–Victim Concept and the Role of the Silent Majority

School bullying is often perceived and addressed within a dichotomous framework: on one side the aggressor, on the other the victim. This concept is reflected in many preventive and intervention strategies that aim to work separately with the *"perpetrator"* and the *"target"*. However, in practice, this binary categorization has proven to be insufficient and frequently ineffective (Kolář, 2011).

The experienced Mexican lecturer and psychologist Rocío Chaveste Gutiérrez, who has long focused on the dynamics of violence in school groups, offers a significant conceptual expansion. According to her approach, it is impossible to understand and change the dynamics of violence without considering a third, and often the most influential, group the silent majority. This group includes neither victims nor active aggressors, yet through their behavior, or rather their passivity, they maintain the cycle of violence (Janošová et al., 2016).

Based on her research and experience, Gutiérrez divides the classroom group into four categories:

15% of students are *"trendsetters"* who determine what is acceptable, what is **"in",** and who often shape the group's social norms.

45% are *"regular members"* who are accepted by the group, do not attract particular attention, but co-create norms by adapting to them.

20% are *"ambiguous"* students who have weaker social standing, often belong to small, closed groups, and tend to conform out of fear of exclusion.

20% are *"at risk",* including both victims and aggressors, whom Gutiérrez sees as products of power imbalances and relational tension.

This model demonstrates that violence is not merely the result of an individual *"disorder"* but arises from within group dynamics, where the need for belonging and the fear of exclusion form a crucial psychological framework. The aggressor is not only an instigator but often a product of a collective, unspoken agreement. Someone must occupy the role of the *"other"* in order for the rest to feel they belong *"inside"* (Říčan and Janošová, 2010).

Gutiérrez argues that the main motivation for youth violence is not destruction, but a desire for inclusion. If a student lacks natural social skills, they may resort to asserting dominance. By attacking a chosen target, often someone who deviates from the norm, they gain respect expressed through fear, and thereby gain social status. Violence becomes a means of fulfilling a basic psychological need: *the need to belong.*

This dynamic is frequently overlooked in ordinary school settings. Interventions tend to focus on the individual, investigating the aggressor's family background or profiling the victim. Meanwhile, classroom climate, group culture, and the informal rules of the collective remain unaddressed.

However, unless the silent majority – the 60 to 80 percent of students who do not participate directly but observe – are engaged, no lasting change can occur. It is this majority that determines what attitudes toward violence are considered normative within the group (Bendl, 2003).

To work effectively with the silent majority, it is essential to implement strategies that activate this group and strengthen their capacity to intervene against violence. Education about group dynamics helps students understand how their behavior influences the entire group. The development of empathy through role play and simulations allows students to experience different perspectives in conflict situations. Assertiveness training teaches students how to oppose violence without resorting to aggression (Martínek, 2015).

Promoting positive role models helps identify and empower students who have a constructive influence on the group. Establishing safe reporting channels ensures anonymous ways for students to report

problematic behavior. Group projects encourage collaboration across different subgroups within the class. Regular class meetings provide dedicated time to discuss classroom relationships and address conflicts.

The implementation of these strategies requires a systematic approach and the engagement of the entire school community. It is crucial for schools to create environments in which students feel safe and are motivated to take an active stand against violence. This can significantly reduce the prevalence of bullying and improve the overall school climate.

4. The Culture of Silence and Indifference as a Breeding Ground for Violence

The silence of the majority is rarely perceived as part of the problem, despite its fundamental role in maintaining and perpetuating violence in school settings. Indifference is not merely the absence of action; it is a silent consent that the aggressor interprets as validation of their behavior.

Research conducted in Canada and Chile (Gutiérrez, 2016) has provided valuable insights into this dynamic. During a regular school day, children were given an extended recess period and left without supervision. The observation revealed the following:

– 1 to 2 children initiated aggressive behavior toward others
– 2 to 3 children joined in or mimicked the behavior
– approximately one fifth of the children attempted to intervene, usually only once or twice
– nearly 60 percent of the children did nothing at all.

The inaction of the majority was most commonly explained by the belief that *"it's not my problem."* Furthermore, many educational and cultural settings reinforce a norm that aligns with the Latin American saying: *"When you are quieter, you are prettier."* This belief fosters the internalization of a passive attitude, suggesting it is better to remain silent, not to stand out, not to draw attention.

The result of such a mindset is a culture of silence that unconsciously supports a culture of violence. An aggressor who is not met with disapproval perceives silence as agreement, and this perception grants them power. The silent majority thereby reinforces the role of the aggressor and co-creates an atmosphere of fear and dominance.

Psychologically, this situation can be explained as a form of conformity, known as the bystander effect – *"the more people are present, the less likely it is that any one person will intervene, as the sense of responsibility becomes diffused."* (Latané and Darley, 1970). In the school context, this is further intensified by the fear of becoming the next target – a child who intervenes may be cast into the role of the new victim.

It is therefore evident that addressing violence cannot rely solely on working with individuals, but must encompass the group as a whole and its shared values. The realization that an aggressor lacks support within the group, that their behavior is not aligned with the group's informal norms, can radically shift the classroom dynamic.

Transforming the school climate thus begins with engaging the attitudes of the silent majority. If the group can be encouraged to express disapproval, and if children are supported in finding the courage to take a stand against violence – *whether through words or through clear nonverbal signals* – the prevalence and severity of such behavior can be significantly reduced.

5. Changing the classroom climate instead of focusing only on individuals

Most current approaches to addressing school violence focus on identifying individuals such as *victims* and *aggressors* and working with them separately from the rest of the group. School counselors, psychologists, or teachers typically create individualized intervention plans, examining family background, personality traits, parenting styles, or academic performance. While such measures may be effective in the short term, they do not change the core social dynamics of the classroom or the cultural setting of the school in the long run.

Research and field experience from various countries show that effective and sustainable prevention of violence requires intervention at the group level rather than focusing solely on individuals. The group as a whole has its own rules, norms, implicit expectations, and behavioral patterns. If these structures remain unchanged, one aggressor will simply be replaced by another, just as one victim will be replaced by the next.

According to Rocío Chaveste Gutiérrez, it is essential to change the relational architecture of the classroom. This can be achieved through consistent and sensitive development of safe relational structures in which all group members are seen, recognized, and valued. Such change is only possible if the culture of the entire class is transformed, not merely the behavior of a *few problematic individuals.*

One example of a practical approach is the method of daily relational contact. Each day, the teacher greets every student with a personal gesture chosen by the student, such as a high-five, a hug, a gesture, a short dance move, or a silent nod. This simple ritual strengthens the sense of safety, visibility, and belonging, sending the child the message: *I am welcome here, someone notices me, I matter.*

Another proven technique is the use of *morning circles,* short community meetings in which the class shares small updates such as who is absent, who has a birthday, what someone is looking forward to today, or what good thing happened yesterday. These brief daily rituals support group cohesion, increase empathy, and enable the teacher to detect early signs of distress or changes in behavior.

Instead of relying on punitive measures and *isolating aggressors*, it is possible to work preventively on the classroom climate as a whole. In a well-structured environment where every member is seen and respected, violence loses its function. If it is no longer rewarded with attention, power, or recognition, it ceases to be an effective tool for social inclusion.

This approach draws on insights from positive psychology, which will be explored in the next chapter. Its central message remains that lasting change in the school climate cannot be achieved through individual correction alone but only through collective transformation. For example, Janošová et al. (2016), in their book *Psychology of School Bullying*, emphasize the importance of working with the entire group when addressing bullying in educational settings. Similarly, Miovský et al. (2015), in *Prevention of Risk Behavior in Education*, offer a comprehensive view of prevention, including bullying, and highlight the need for a systematic approach that involves the whole school community in preventive activities. Their work provides theoretical and methodological foundations as well as real-life examples that are useful for educators implementing group-based interventions.

6. Dialogical practice and the language of change

The language we use to speak about problems fundamentally shapes the way we understand them, respond to them, and the meaning we assign to them. Loek Schoenmakers (2014), a Dutch educator and expert in dialogical pedagogy, emphasizes that in school environments we often unconsciously use language that does not resolve problems but rather reinforces and deepens them.

His work is grounded in the principles of social constructivism, which holds that words create worlds. The way we ask questions, what we pay attention to, and how we respond not only determines the quality of interaction but also influences the kind of world we create within schools – *a world of problems, or a world of possibilities and hope.* A common practice in schools is to focus on the so-called problematic student and ask questions such as:

“What is your problem?”, “Why did you do that?”, “Who said what to you?”

Such questions force the child into the language of the problém**,** *they speak about what went wrong, who is to blame, and what failed. T*hese conversations reinforce the child’s identity as someone who has a problem. Even though the intention may be to help, the result can often be further stigmatization.

Schoenmakers therefore suggests a different kind of question:

“What do you need?”

“What would help you?”

“What do you want to manage?”

“What do you already know?”

“How do you see the solution?”

These questions evoke a language of desire, hope, and responsibility. They allow the child to see themselves not only as someone with difficulties but as a person capable of change, growth, and meaningful contribution. The child shifts from being an object of care to becoming an active agent in their own life.

Changing the language is a small but fundamental step. It requires greater attentiveness and presence from the teacher, who must be aware that every word shapes the reality of both the child and the group.

In the dialogical approach, it is not only about what the teacher says, but how they are able to listen, withhold judgment, suspend interpretation, and truly be present.

This approach is closely linked to the previous chapter. Changing the school climate cannot be achieved through external measures alone, but through the quality of everyday interactions. And language – *what we choose to put into words* – is one of the most powerful tools for this transformation (Šeďová et al., 2016).

Practical examples of dialogical techniques in everyday school settings

Whole-class discussions can be initiated by the teacher using open-ended questions that stimulate critical thinking. For example, in a history lesson, the teacher might ask, *"How might the events of World War II have unfolded differently if...?"* Students are encouraged to share their ideas, listen to others, and build on their classmates' thoughts.

Group work with rotating roles can be applied when solving complex problems in science, where students work in teams and rotate roles such as facilitator, recorder, and presenter. This approach promotes active participation and develops diverse communication skills.

Literature circles in language arts allow students to discuss assigned reading in small groups, with each student taking on a specific role, such as *"connector," "illustrator,"* or *"questioner."* This supports deeper comprehension and strengthens interpretative skills.

Philosophy for children is a method that can be applied across subjects to foster critical thinking. The teacher introduces a philosophical question or dilemma and facilitates a discussion where students explore various perspectives and arguments.

The *Socratic seminar* is a discussion model often used in the humanities, where students collaboratively analyze a text. The teacher poses probing questions to deepen understanding but refrains from offering direct answers.

Peer assessment and feedback are frequently used in creative subjects, where students present their projects and provide each other with constructive feedback. The teacher moderates the discussion and guides students in how to formulate useful comments.

Debate clubs can be organized in civics or social studies, where students engage in structured debates on current topics. This helps them learn how to construct arguments, listen actively, and respond to counterarguments.

Project-based learning with presentations involves students working on long-term projects and regularly presenting their progress to the class. Their peers are invited to give feedback and ask questions, encouraging collaborative learning.

These *techniques foster* active student engagement and *develop* critical thinking and communication skills. It is essential that the teacher creates a safe environment for dialogue, where all opinions are respected and students feel free to express their ideas (Miovský et al., 2015).

7. Positive psychology and the search for personal strengths

While traditional education focuses primarily on identifying deficiencies, correcting errors and minimizing weak performance, approaches based on positive psychology emphasize the recognition, development and application of individual strengths. This shift in how we view a child and their potential proves to be essential not only for academic development but also for the prevention of risky behavior and violence.

Positive psychology is grounded in the belief that human well-being and resilience do not arise solely from the elimination of problems but through the cultivation of internal resources such as gratitude, courage, kindness, perseverance, creativity and hope. When individuals are able to identify and develop these resources, they become more stable, engaged and capable of facing challenges (Slezáčková, 2012).

In school settings, it has been shown that children whose strengths are recognized and appreciated demonstrate higher levels of self-esteem, better peer relationships and lower involvement in problematic behavior (Janošová et al., 2016). Nevertheless, many schools and teachers continue to focus on grading, comparison, criticism and corrective feedback, which often leads students to feelings of incompetence and alienation. In practice, supporting students' strengths can be implemented through several simple but effective strategies, such as

– *regular sharing of successes,* for example through a *"circle of joy"* or a *"successful day"* where students share something they accomplished

– *introducing the language* of strengths into everyday communication, such as naming courage, perseverance or cooperation as ordinary qualities rather than rare exceptions

– *activities aimed at self-awareness,* such as mapping personal strengths through VIA surveys or classroom-adapted versions, creating a "competency portfolio" or working on projects like "What am I good at and what can I do with it".

This involves feedback that focuses on growth and effort, not only on outcomes. A positive climate built on recognition, progress and supportive relationships has proven to be the most effective way to prevent risky behavior and violence. A child who knows their strengths, experiences success and feels accepted within the group has no need to seek attention or respect through destructive means (Miovský et al., 2015).

In the broader context of the educational system, it is therefore desirable that the principles of positive psychology become part of school culture as well as the training of future teachers, school psychologists and other professionals in the field of education.

8. The teacher as both a professional and a human being

Contemporary educational practice is largely built on expertise, knowledge and competencies that are systematically cultivated during teacher training. However, as Loek Schoenmakers points out, this expertise is often understood in a limited way, where the teacher is expected to know, lead, evaluate and manage, while the student is expected to listen, respond and adapt (Píšová et al., 2013).

Such a perspective restricts the space for mutuality, humanity and genuine connection. Teachers are often encouraged to maintain distance, professionalism and a pedagogical overview. This may lead to a loss of presence, emotional responsiveness, deep listening and the ability to acknowledge uncertainty.

Children are highly sensitive to authenticity. They recognize when an adult is truly present and when they are only formally following the rules. When a teacher enters the relationship not as an authority figure but as a person who is interested, attentive and respectful, it opens up space for trust, openness and meaningful change (Janošová et al., 2016).

A teacher who learns to be genuinely attentive, present and reflective gains the ability to see each student as someone with a unique story, experience and potential. *This does not* mean giving up professional boundaries or expertise but enriching them with relational capacity, empathy and the courage to be real.

This relational dimension is often lacking in teacher education. Training usually focuses on planning, assessment, didactics and methodology, but less on communication skills, group dynamics, emotional self-regulation or reflection on personal attitudes. If we want to change the school climate, we also need to change the teacher – not by diminishing their authority, but by integrating them into the life of the community (Miovský et al., 2015).

This is not about losing professional identity, but redefining it. The teacher becomes a guide who co-creates a safe and supportive learning space. Someone who gives others the permission to be seen, heard and accepted, and who is also willing to be seen, vulnerable and responsible.

One possible direction for such transformation is working with teaching teams, providing community-based education, offering supervision, encouraging open reflective dialogue and supporting personal development. Educational institutions that build relational culture not only between teachers and students but also among colleagues create an environment where violence cannot take root.

9. Practical recommendations for building a positive and safe school climate

As outlined in the previous chapters, effective prevention of violence in schools does not lie in isolated interventions or monitoring of individuals but in the long-term cultivation of a relational climate that includes every member of the community – students, teachers and parents. The following recommendations are based on research and the experience of experts introduced earlier in the article, including Gutiérrez, Schoenmakers and Roffey (2011), as well as on long-standing professional practice. These strategies are applicable across various types of schools.

Creating spaces for everyday connection

Daily contact between teacher and student should be more than routine. It should serve as a conscious affirmation that the child is seen and welcomed. Personalized greetings, brief rituals and genuine interest in how the student is feeling contribute to a sense of safety and belonging.

Introducing morning circles and community rituals

Morning circles (10 to 15 minutes at the start of the day) help to create a trusting atmosphere, support communication, empathy and group cohesion. Older students can take part in facilitating these gatherings, which strengthens their competence and sense of shared responsibility.

Focusing on strengths and positive identity

Instead of emphasizing mistakes, it is more effective to highlight what students are good at, where they excel and how they can grow. Simple tools such as strength maps, competence portfolios or activities like *"a successful day"* can have a positive impact on self-perception and peer relationships.

Using a language of hope rather than deficit

In daily communication, teachers should use questions that lead students to reflect on possibilities, needs and goals rather than only analyzing problems. Language shapes reality, and school can become a place where a world of trust is created rather than one shaped by fear.

Activating the silent majority

Children must be continually reminded that passive bystanding is not neutral but contributes to the problem. The use of stories, games, model scenarios and role plays helps build the courage to stand up to injustice.

Supporting teachers in their human role

Teachers need support, training in relational and emotional competencies and space for sharing and reflection. Schools should provide conditions that allow teachers to learn how to be, first and foremost, human among humans.

Adopting a community-based approach to conflict resolution

Instead of isolated responses to incidents (for example, working only with the aggressor or victim), schools should implement whole-school approaches such as community circles, mediation teams, participatory rule-setting and peer support programs. Relationships change collectively, not in isolation.

These recommendations are not exhaustive but offer a foundational framework for transforming school culture from a performance-oriented system to one based on trust, respect and shared responsibility. Below are selected examples and case studies of successful implementation.

School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS)

This model uses a system of positive discipline organized into three tiers of support for students. Rather than punishing students, it connects those at risk with appropriate support such as mental health services or social skills training. Schools using SWPBIS respond to antisocial behavior through instruction, consistent enforcement of behavioral expectations, analysis of behavioral motivations and reinforcement of positive behavior (Horner, Sugai and Anderson, 2017).

Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP)

Implemented in New York City public elementary schools, RCCP was evaluated in a study involving 11,160 students from first to sixth grade. Findings showed that children whose teachers taught more lessons in creative conflict resolution were less aggressive in interpersonal interactions and exhibited fewer behavioral problems, depressive symptoms and aggressive fantasies. These positive effects were consistent across gender, economic status and racial or ethnic background (Brown, Jones and Aber, 2004).

PeaceBuilders Program

This program, introduced in elementary schools, reduced aggressive behavior, improved students' social competence and promoted peaceful behavior in kindergarten through grade five. It teaches students and staff simple rules and activities focused on enhancing social skills and increasing the frequency of prosocial behavior. The program's guidelines include praising others, avoiding put-downs, seeking out wise people as mentors and friends, recognizing and repairing harm (PeaceBuilders, n.d.).

International examples of effective school-based violence prevention

A case study from Indonesia demonstrates the successful implementation of a child sexual abuse prevention program in primary schools in the city of Padang. The program used a visual, auditory and kinesthetic

(VAK) learning model that included films, songs, role-playing, storytelling and group discussions. The study found that children's knowledge and assertiveness in saying "no" or seeking help from a trusted adult increased significantly (Neherta et al., 2015).

These examples illustrate that comprehensive, long-term approaches focused on positive school climate change and the development of social skills can be highly effective in preventing school violence.

International trends in school violence prevention

School violence prevention is a global issue that requires a comprehensive and systemic approach. UNESCO supports the prevention of school violence through education with the goal of creating safer environments for all students. The organization promotes a whole-school approach and encourages the active engagement of the education sector alongside other stakeholders.

International research shows that effective interventions are often holistic and include activities within classrooms, the broader school environment and collaboration with parents and communities. For instance, the Good School Toolkit program in Uganda reduced the risk of physical violence by school staff against students by 42% within 18 months of implementation.

A randomized controlled trial also demonstrated a statistically significant reduction in the prevalence of violence against children in intervention schools, including violence against girls, boys and children with disabilities. This included violence from both teachers and peers. The program was implemented in more than 750 primary schools across 50 districts in Uganda (Knight et al., 2018).

In Pakistan, the Positive Child and Youth Development initiative showed a significant reduction in both peer violence and corporal punishment by teachers. A study involving 1,752 children found that peer victimization decreased by 33.3% among boys and 58.5% among girls in the intervention group, compared to 27.8% among boys and 21.3% among girls in the control group.

Perpetration of peer violence decreased by 25.3% among boys and 55.6% among girls in the intervention group, compared to 11.1 % among boys and 27.6% among girls in the control group. The program also resulted in a significant decrease in average depression scores among children (Karmaliani et al., 2020).

As noted in the previous section, the School-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS) model has been successfully implemented in the United States. This approach uses positive discipline and focuses on connecting students with appropriate support services rather than punishment (Horner, Sugai and Anderson, 2017).

Cyberbullying and digital violence

With the growing influence of technology on school environments, cyberbullying has become an increasingly serious issue. Effective prevention of cyberbullying requires a comprehensive approach that includes educating teachers, parents and students about safe use of the internet and social media. It is also essential to establish safe reporting channels for cyberbullying and to promote positive digital citizenship.

Successful strategies include project-based learning focused on raising awareness about cyberbullying, anti-cyberbullying campaigns and school policies that support responsible internet use. Research also shows that parental involvement and peer-led programs can be effective in reducing the prevalence of cyberbullying. For example, Kowalski, Limber and Agatston (2012) emphasize the importance of multi-level interventions that combine school-based prevention, family engagement and student empowerment as effective means of addressing digital aggression.

These international trends and the technological dimensions of the problem provide a broader context for school violence prevention and can inspire the adaptation of effective approaches in our own educational settings.

10. School as a space for human connection

The relationships we build within the school environment are not a mere supplement to education. They are its foundation. As evidenced by tragic events and supported by research in psychology and education, school violence can no longer be viewed as a problem of isolated individuals. It must be understood as a reflection of the culture, climate and relationships that prevail in schools, often silently, naturally and without being questioned.

Teachers, students and parents are increasingly confronted with manifestations of aggression, frustration, alienation or silence. These phenomena are not accidental. They emerge in places where the need for acceptance, recognition, safety and belonging is not fulfilled. And they persist where the response relies solely on individual interventions without considering the group context.

This article has offered alternative perspectives on the phenomenon of school violence, especially through the work of Rocío Chaveste Gutiérrez and Loek Schoenmakers. These authors point to the importance of the silent majority, to the significance of the language we use when talking about children and to the strength of a pedagogical stance that values relationships over performance. Their approaches are not only theoretical. They are practical, validated and deeply meaningful on a human level.

Changing the culture of a school does not mean introducing a new assessment system or launching another prevention program. It means opening space for real encounters among those who share the school space. Children and adults, teachers and parents, individuals and communities. It means returning to what should be the true purpose of education, which is to nurture the ability to be a human being among others. Perhaps it is time to reformulate our guiding question.

"Are we teaching children too little about themselves"? Or rather

"Are we as adults learning enough about children, about one another and about the relationships we create together"?

If we want a school with less violence and more trust, we must begin where everything begins. In everyday, small, authentic relationships. Because real change does not start at the level of policy or systems. It starts with our attitude. And that is something each of us can choose to change. Starting now.

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