

CONCLUSIONS

Heading up this project has been a very satisfying experience. By going beyond our borders and sharing our problems and concerns with the other project participants we have been able to see just how much we have in common while at the same time identifying some of the specific points that differentiate us. We have worked and played together, worried and learned together. The use of the systems model as our basic methodological tool made it possible for us to analyse human relations in a wide variety of contexts, from the smallest or most limited to the very broad and all-encompassing. We looked at human interaction and relationships in the classroom and throughout the entire educational system, always aware of the fact that any behavior can only be understood as an “aspect of communication” within the system in which it occurs. This year we analysed these relationships from this perspective; we have studied them and compared our findings with those of our European partners. We have had the benefit of the knowledge of national and international experts. We have met on four occasions and have observed first hand the efforts undertaken by project members in their own educational and social contexts. As a result, we are now better prepared to understand violence as a symptom.

Through violent behavior, adolescents attempt to shorten the emotional distance that separates them from both the systems closest to them during their childhood (family and teachers) and those more removed (social and institutional agents). Violence in school, as a symptomatic behavior, warns us of dysfunction, is part of the precarious equilibrium that exists in the educational system, and offers numerous possibilities for change.

We have seen that there has been a process of detachment or distancing taking place in schools that is similar in many ways to that which occurs in the families of many of the adolescents who are considered to be problematic. Although these systems do offer some advantages, they also have the undesirable effect of lessening an individual's sense of identity and of belonging. Our research has shown that what adolescents most want is to be part of a family or to have a close friend and that they imagine realities in which they are not in any way involved with violence or violent behavior.

In a systems model, in which complexity and uncertainty are the norm, it is almost impossible for us to predict the future of a phenomenon such as violence in

school, but we can take action in the present. We must “stop talking about violence and begin to get close to those who are affected by violent behavior and listen to them.”

Adolescence is the stage of life in which the greatest number of changes take place. It is the quintessential “time of change” during which young people learn how to adapt and seek out ways to survive in the world with as little suffering as possible. It requires, as the sociologist M. Castells suggests “a safe and caring environment at school and if possible at home within the family, although the latter may be complicated and therefore the school will have to make up for that ...”

Just as it would not be appropriate to assign all the blame for problematic behavior on students, professors and parents, we can not assume that the lack of resources or sensitivity on the part of public institutions and government policies is the only culprit either.

Violence and conflict in school are problems that affect society in general, and isolated attempts to deal with these problems without taking the general context into account, is most likely destined for failure. If the increase in technical and human resources repeatedly sought by educators has no significant favorable impact on problems in the classroom, then this solution would not only be a failure in and of itself, but it would become part of the problem or even the problem itself.

We favor an overall response which is qualitatively different, one which combines problem solving with the development of interpersonal relationships and strategies for living together in harmony. This response would bring people closer together, reduce conflict and thus decrease the incidence of violence.