Title: Bullying in primary schools: Prevention through the implementation of Social Work programmes

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ABSTRACT

Bullying has become a widespread phenomenon in schools worldwide, over the last years. Very few studies have been performed in Greek schools so far, while there has also been very little experience in the implementation of long-term programmes aiming at the prevention of the phenomenon. The increasing diversity of school population due to the immigration seems to have made school environment even more complex. The present study focuses on the exploration of the phenomenon of violence and bullying, as it appeared during a certain period of time (February 08 – February 09,) in four different multicultural primary schools in Greece. The study of social and personal elements that constitute the problem and the ways that each school culture seems to influence/affect on the appearance of bullying were the main topics of research.

Combining qualitative and quantitative methods, research was conducted in two cross cultural schools in the region of Attiki and two in the region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace. Two hundred and twenty one (221) students attending the fourth, fifth and sixth grade, completed two questionnaires. The first one aimed at the assessment of the attitudes and behaviours concerning bullying, while the second one aimed at assessing the levels of self-confidence and self-awareness of the children and how it related to the appearance of violence (Manual for the Self Perception Profile for Children Harter, S. (1985).

In addition to this, a three-month social work group intervention (action research) was designed and implemented on a weekly basis, in two of the four schools, for a period of three months aiming at the prevention of the phenomenon of bullying. The fifth grade was selected for both schools, according to the questionnaires’ results and the teachers’ suggestions. The students attended a programme of 10 sessions. The teacher was in both cases present at all sessions with the students, the parents were aware of the existence and purpose of the programme. It was conducted under the permission of Greek Ministry of Education. A before – after evaluation was designed and implemented while two of the schools participated in the research as control groups. The results and outcomes of the action - research, as they appear through the qualitative analysis will be thoroughly presented.

Key words : school bullying, school violence, gender, ethnic diversity
Introduction

Bullying among schoolchildren is certainly a very old phenomenon, though it was not until the early 1970s that it was made the object of systematic research. Though research originally focused on Scandinavia, by the 1980s bullying among schoolchildren had attracted wider attention in countries such as Australia, Canada, Japan, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States. Recently, the problem of bullying in the state primary schools of Greece has become an issue of significant concern.

Olweus, (2001) considered that bullying occurs when a student is repeatedly exposed to negative actions on the part of one or more other students. These negative actions can take the form of physical contact, verbal abuse, or ‘making faces’ and rude gestures. Spreading rumours and excluding the victim from a group are also common forms. Bullying also entails a power imbalance between the bullies and the victim, what experts call an asymmetric power relationship.

Recent research studies in primary schools that took part in the city of Athens indicate an increase of bullying incidents among school children. According to the research study of the National Centre of Social Research conducted in 2006, (where 2000 students from 101 primary schools participated), the 37% of students accepted that they have been in the past victims of bullying, while 13% admitted participation in violent incidents. 60% of teachers declared that bullying usually occur towards new comers and weak students. Verbal victimization among primary school children is indicated as the most frequent form of violence according to various research studies (Petropoulos- Papatsylianou, 2001, Pateraki et all, 2000, Andreou & Smith, 2002, Katsigiannis, 2006).

It has been shown that bullying has a negative effect on the development of positive self-esteem in the victims (Boulton & Smith, 1994); victims of bullying blame themselves for what is happening to them. This attitude affects their concentration and learning (Sharp & Smith, 1994). In addition, some children experience stress-related symptoms (e.g. headaches, nightmares) and even school phobia (Sharp & Smith, 1994). In the long term, some children continue to present low self-esteem and depression (Olweus, 1993) or even commit suicide (Slee, 1994).
Olweus (1993) provided a holistic definition of the phenomenon of bullying as it is expressed within the school environment: ‘a student is being bullied or victimized when he/she is exposed, repeatedly and over time to negative actions on the part of one or more other students. It is a negative action when someone intentionally inflicts, or attempts to inflict, injury or discomfort upon another’ (p. 9). Moreover, Olweus argued that the term ‘negative actions’ need not refer only to physical contact but could also refer to verbal or other methods, such as making faces or obscene gestures, and intentional exclusion from the group. However, not every negative act could be considered as bullying as this presupposes an imbalance in strength between the participants. This definition of bullying became the basis for the development of a worldwide research activity on school bullying (e.g. Pateraki & Houndoumadi, 2001; Smith et al., 1999; Stevens, De Bourdeaudhuij, & Van Oost, 2000; Whitney & Smith, 1993), which revealed that bullying is a significant educational problem in many countries which can impair the school’s effectiveness. Studies have shown that teachers do not have a good understanding of bullying, thus also feel unable to deal with the phenomenon.

School consists of a context where attitudes are cultivated and expressed while it seems to be the most appropriate environment for the implementation of interventions based on social work theories and practices. Social Work as an applied social science, aims at empowering all the parts of the school in order to take action, individually or in groups and cope with disrupting situations as bullying among peers. School social work aims at social development, broadening of learning opportunities and enhancement of social skills to children. (Kandylaki, 2005).

The ‘dynamic systems perspective’ also provides a useful framework for study and research. In particular, it suggests that as well as identifying multiple risk factors (i.e. the structures) we should also focus on identifying the mechanisms through which these factors have an effect (Pepler et al., 1999). This multi-dimensional model acknowledges that the bully-victim relationship takes place in a much broader system. Thus, all parts of the ‘system’ are involved, not just the bully and the victim. This perspective implies that any intervention is unlikely to be effective unless it is carried out as part of a whole school anti-bullying programme. As noted by Pepler et al. (1999), ‘interventions aiming to reduce bullying must unfold simultaneously at the
individual, dyad, peer classroom, school, and family levels’’ (p. 449). The principles of psychodynamic approach (Payne, 2000, Jones, 1990) that emphasizes in enhancement of emotional awareness, cognitive – behavioural (Bandura 1997) that emphasizes in the development of personal and social skills, and cross-cultural approach (Georgogiannis 1997) that focuses on empathy cultivation and respect of cultural diversity formed the main theoretical framework of the present action research. Research in social work derives its methodology materials from the broader scope of social researches while at the same time adopts an applied nature that prerequisites an intervention focusing on a realistic goal. Research in social work aims at the thorough study of a subject, deep understanding of the existing circumstances. It brings to the forefront the ‘words’/ narratives of the participants, while aiming at planning, implementation and evaluation of a short term focused implementation (Kandylaki 2009).

Despite the Act of 1974 that acclaims the necessity of appointing social workers to all Greek schools, social workers only work in schools for children with special needs and during the recent years they consist members of cross scientific professional groups in Centers for the Diagnosis of Learning Disabilities (Kallinikaki 1988).

1. Aims of the thesis

The aim of the thesis is to study and explore the potential development of the phenomenon through social work interventions in Greek multicultural schools. Data indicating increasing of violence occurring within primary school children, the lack of professionals (social workers or psychologists) working within the school context intimate the need for design and implementation of school based interventions aiming at the prevention and management of the phenomenon during early adolescence. Children have to cope with a variety of biological and cognitive changes, emotional challenges and pressures within social and family context that seem unstable and insecure. Behavioral disorders as school failure, hostility, and drug abuse as well as mental disorders as depression and anxiety, appear as common symptoms of a whole system malfunctions. The school environment has been developed more complex due to the multicultural environment: increasing diversity of school population, different culture, religion, language.
This study has focused on the bullying phenomenon among school children (aged 9 – 11 y o) in primary education. Initially, the purpose of the study was to assess the attitudes and behaviors of two of the main parts of the school community (students and teachers) towards the phenomenon of bullying as it appears at school. They expressed their own point of view, providing revealing information about the school culture, concerning the effects of violence on school life and the whole educational procedure. Successively, the assessment and definition of the school’s expressed needs regarding the elimination of the violence followed. The design, implementation and evaluation of an innovative intervention, based on the research findings, aiming at the prevention as well as effective management of bullying incidents at school was one of the main purposes of the certain study. A thorough exploration was held concerning crucial issues such as the nature of violence, various ways of expression, frequency and consequences to students mental health, effects for the educational procedure, what is the school policy towards violent incidents, which procedure, if any, is followed for the monitoring and estimation of above incidents. Furthermore, the study attempted to examine teachers’ motives and personal desire to contribute to the prevention and effective handling of violent incidents. The certain study consists of an action - research, it is a qualitative methodology of research that combines research and action, aims at solving problems and provokes positive changes for the participants (Iosifides, 2003).

2. Methodology of the research

The study combines quantitative and qualitative methodology. It consists of three main phases. Initially the focus is to explore and study violence and the phenomenon of bullying and assess students’ self esteem through structured questionnaires given to a sample of students. At the same time focus group interviews were conducted both with students and teachers. The second phase of the research was an action research based on social group work intervention with a group of students. The action research, based on social work theories and practices, lasted eleven (11) weeks while the sessions were semi structured and aimed at the management and prevention of bullying. In parallel there was availability to meet any needs pointed by the teachers
or parents’ association. The last phase formed the evaluation process of the programme. An assessment of outcomes before and after the intervention, took place through structured questionnaires and focus group interviews with teachers and students and sessions with parents by using the observers’ detailed diaries. Changes according to the following issues were assessed: enhancement of personal and social skills, ways of interpersonal interactions among students, involvement in violent incidents at school, relationships among students and relationship with the parents. This paper focuses on the second phase, mainly the analysis of action research since the quantitative analysis is still in process.

The longitudinal goal of the study is to empower the school community through the psychological, social and environmental elements that promote healthy life attitudes. Furthermore, the aim is to highlight the crucial elements / aspects that co operate to the long term policy configuration. This case study of schools in actual – realistic circumstances, with contemporary characteristics, aspires to affect and also contribute to an academic dialogue concerning the implementation of health promotion programmes, aiming at showing the absolute necessity of the implementation of social work programmes at schools.

The action research conducted from February 2008 – June 2008 in two primary schools in Attici, a Cross Cultural primary school¹ (school A) and a general but multicultural population primary school (school B). During the period September 2008 – January 2009, an equivalent action – research was also performed in two cross – cultural schools (mentioned as Thrace school A and B at the present paper) in the north part of Greece, Thrace, in two different small cities with Muslim population².

¹ It was back in 1996 that the Greek Ministry for National Education and Religious Matters laid the foundations of a system designed to meet the educational needs of social groups with a particular social, cultural or religious identity (Act 2413/1996). The Ministry adopted cross-cultural education - a new form of education in Greece - as part of this policy. The aim of cross-curriculum education is to set up and run primary and secondary classes that provide education to young people with a specific educational, social or cultural identity. In cross-cultural schools, the standard curriculum is adapted to meet the specific educational, social or cultural needs of the students attending them. A total of 26 cross-cultural schools have been set up throughout Greece since 1996. Of the 26 schools, 13 are primary schools, while there are 9 junior high schools and 4 senior high schools. A school can only be described as cross-cultural when repatriated Greek and/or foreign students account for at least 45% of the total student body. The educators in these schools receive special training, and are selected on the basis of their knowledge on the subject of cross-cultural education and teaching Greek as a second or foreign language (www.ypepth.gr).

² Muslim minority is the only official recognized minority in Greece. The status of this minority is specified by articles 37-45 of the Lausanne Treaty, which was signed in 1922 and which designed the national borders of the Balkan States. The minority population members are officially recognized as based on religious differences. Since 1991, three ethnic groups have been officially recognized within the Muslim minority: those of Turkish origin, Pomaks (who speak a Bulgarian – Slavic dialect), and Gypsies – Roma (Kandylaki, 2004: 30-31).
All of the above-mentioned areas come with common cultural, social, economic characteristics, as low economic and social status, high unemployment records, high cultural diversity and frequent variation of school population. Multi cultural environment, co-existence of students coming from diverse social groups with different customs, religious beliefs, cultural and spiritual characteristics, consists of the contemporary profile of public schools in Greece, regardless whether they have the title of Cross – Cultural.

**Materials – Instruments (phase A)**

This paper presents a case study of the action research- social work intervention in four multicultural schools in Greece, aiming at the assessment of needs, attitudes and beliefs of the school community concerning the phenomenon of bullying during a certain period of time. Furthermore, the study focuses on the design of an intervention model aiming at the indication of effective ways towards the management and prevention of bullying. According to McMurran & McGuire (2005), intervention aiming to preventing deviant behaviour ‘is easier’ among primary school children. It is during childhood and pre adolescence period that attitudes are formed; values are shaped while children are in a level of growth that prevention programmes seem to be more effective (Moon, 1998).

Research studies (Flannery, 1998 – Moon, 1998 – Flaxman, 1996) indicate that the age of 14 is the critical age when deviant behaviour appears. Hostility, home escapism, drug abuse, suicidal attempts, consists of common phenomena occurring during adolescence. School community seems to be the most appropriate setting for the implementation of a prevention programme.

Therefore, crucial for the study of the school culture and estimation of the needs and system dynamics, was the gathering of information from students and teachers concerning the bullying phenomenon. Researchers as Porteous (1996), Strauss and Corbin (1990), underline that in many research studies, a combination techniques are
being used. The study of a multi dimensional and complicated reality of social life prerequisite a research strategy of multiple techniques (Kyriazis, 2001). The use of multiple research methods in studying a certain subject requires a multi-methodological approach (Brannen, 1992, Cohen & Manion, 1997). The present study attempted through a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods to describe and present a holistic view of each school current culture.

Questionnaire A aiming to assess students’ attitudes and beliefs concerning bullying  
Questionnaire B assessment of students’ self-perception and self-esteem  
Focus Group Interviews (groups of teachers)  
Personal session for teachers

**Questionnaires**

Two questionnaires were administered in class by the researcher. Students were instructed to complete the questionnaire anonymously. They were seated to avoid conferring or copying. It was explained to them that their views would contribute in an academic study in order to help children in their every day life at school. The importance of answering sincerely was stressed to them. The questionnaires were completed in the classroom within two didactic hours with the teacher of the class present. The researcher developed the Questionnaire A. The aim is to assess: 1) peer victimisation, 2) frequency, 3) feelings provoked and 4) ways of response. Five questions provide further information on the prevalence of different forms of bullying behaviour. It was based on the definition of bullying, proposed by Olweus (1993; see above), and consists of 12 (5 of which are closed while the rest are open ended) questions for the measurement of aspects of bully/victim problems: physical, verbal, indirect, racial, forms of bullying harassment; initiation of various forms of bullying other students; where the bullying occurs; pro-bullying and pro-victim attitudes; and the extent to which teachers, peers, and parents are informed. Questionnaire B is the Greek version of the HARTER, S. (1985) questionnaire. Manual for the Self Perception Profile for Children of 4th, 5th and 6th grade. The purpose of the certain questionnaire was to explore the possible correlation between levels of self-esteem with the involvement in violent incidents. The Questionnaire B ‘How I perceive
Myself’ consists of 30 closed questions, assesses six certain items: 1) School performance, 2) Peer relationships, 3) Sports and athletic abilities, 4) Physical appearance, 5) Behaviour and conduct, 6) Self esteem.

Focus Group Interviews

Questions mainly focused on deriving teachers’ views concerning the relationships among students. Furthermore, they expressed their own experience of violent incidents as they take part in the classroom or in the schoolyard. They described the difficulty and effort they put on handling such incidents. Additionally there was an exploration of their views and attitudes concerning the existence of particular school policy as a mean of effective management of bullying.

Participants

The sample of the students consisted of 221 children:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Athens School A</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athens School B</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thrace School A</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thrace School B</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Seventeen (17) students from the population of Athens School B did not took part in the research due to their parent’s denial to give their consent (15 boys and 2 girls). For the same reason nine (9) students from Thrace School B did not participated to the research (6 boys and 3 girls).

Concerning the sample of teachers, four focus group interviews were performed (one for each school): Athens school A: 15 teachers (2 men και 13 women), Athens School B: 12 teachers (10 women and 2 men), Thrace School A: 16 teachers (12 women και 4 men). Thrace School B: 9 teachers (8 women and one man).
Results

Schools Profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>INTERVENTION SCHOOL</th>
<th>INTERVENTION SCHOOL</th>
<th>CONTROL SCHOOL</th>
<th>CONTROL SCHOOL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ATTICA SCHOOL A</td>
<td>THRACE SCHOOL A</td>
<td>ATTICA SCHOOL B</td>
<td>THRACE SCHOOL B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POPULATION</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN / RELIGION</td>
<td>Greece, USA, Africa, Philippines, Syria, Gana, Afganistan, Pakistan, Germany, Poland, Holland, Rumania,, Albania</td>
<td>Greece, Greek Muslims, Greek Gypsy, Albania, Armenia, Russia</td>
<td>Greece, Pontiacs, Gypsy, Pakistan</td>
<td>Greece, Greek Gipsy, Greek Muslim, Albania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NUMBER OF TEACHERS</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHARACTERISTICS</td>
<td>Intense bullying phenomena, acknowledgment of the existence situation. Expression of request for the implementation of the intervention.</td>
<td>Intense bullying phenomena, acknowledgment of the existence situation. Expression of request for the implementation of the intervention.</td>
<td>Intense bullying phenomena, schools’ close culture, hesitant to cooperation</td>
<td>Intense bullying phenomena, schools’ close culture, hesitant to cooperation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Main outcomes as they derive from Students’ answers to the open ended questions

Not every respondent completed the open-ended questions; Open-ended questions were grouped into themes. Reluctance to inform adults (teachers, directors, parents) about a violent incident may indicate previous experience of nothing being done. If this is the case, it highlights the importance of students witnessing incidents of bullying being dealt with effectively. Students acknowledge the existence of violence in their schools in all its forms. They declare their support in cases their friends are involved in violent incidents. They describe a variety of ways of responding when they become subjects of hostile behavior. Three sub-scales of responding were established: 1) Counter-aggressive (they want to take revenge, fight back) 2) Helpless (e.g., starting to cry), and 3) Indifferent – passive (remain silent, stay still or try to
leave without any other reaction). 4) Inform adults, teacher, school director or parents. Making clear though that even if they inform the adults ‘it’s in vain since nothing is really done’. Helplessness was a more common answer in girls, and counter aggression for boys. Furthermore they describe intense feelings of sorrow, emotional pain, sadness, loneliness, while they do not hesitate to admit desire for revenge regardless of their actual response to violence.

Main outcomes as they derive from the qualitative analysis of teachers’ participation to the Focus Group Interviews

They hesitate to openly admit the existence of bullying among students at school. They consider family, society and the students themselves responsible for the problem. They feel incompetent of coping effectively with the violent incidents occurring in the classroom or in the schoolyard. They acknowledge difficult relationships and various obstacles in co-operation with the parents. All of them admitted that there is no clear school policy regarding the problem. They claimed that a particular school policy based on certain philosophy and values concerning the effective management of violent incidence consists of an absolute necessity. Nevertheless, they avoid including their role and attribution to the whole procedure of bullying management and prevention.

3. Methodology of the intervention (phase b)

Additionally/successively to the research, a three-month social work group intervention programme (action research) was designed and implemented on a weekly basis, in two of the four schools, for a period of three months aiming at the prevention of the phenomenon of bullying. The fifth grade was selected for both schools, and the students attended a programme of 10 sessions based on basic Social Work theories and practices. The teacher was in both cases present at all sessions with the students, the parents were aware of the existence and purpose of the programme and the whole programme was conducted under the permission of Greek Ministry of Education. A before – after evaluation was designed and implemented while two of the schools
participated in the research as control groups. The children who took part in the intervention programmes were followed up approximately one year later.

The intervention aims at the improvement of the interpersonal relationships, the elimination of verbal and physical violence among students. There was an attempt to work with all the systems and school groups through action research. The intervention programme was based on three basic elements: Development of self awareness, Acknowledgment – identification of feelings, Development of social skills. The general title for the whole programme was: ‘Communication Games’. Practices and theory of Social work with group and individual were the main techniques of the programme.

Sample of the intervention

According to the design of action research, the intervention programme would be implemented in two of the four schools, in Attiki and Thrace successively. A relevant proposal was addressed to all schools – since according to the research findings bullying incidents were massively occurring. There was an effort aiming at sensitising each school community to take action and deal with the bullying problem. Two of the schools (one in Athens and one in Thrace) were hesitant; the directors were reluctant of taking responsibility for the implementation of the programme. They considered that the hours needed for the programme would put extra burden to students. The need to ‘protect’ the school community was stronger so they denied co-operating with the researcher. For the two other schools, there was actually a formulation of request for the programme to be implemented. The school director and most of the teachers acknowledged the existence of the problem and considered that the implementation of the programme would potentially help the students and the whole system of school community.

According to the design of the action research, the selection of the fifth grade (10 – 11 yo) would allow the opportunity to follow up the children of the intervention one year after. Schools agreed to that and since there were two classes at the 5th Grade, suggested the one they considered to be the most ‘disgraced’. It consisted for both cases group at risk, with characteristics as poor school performance, hostility,
behavioral problems, difficulties in relationships and co-operation in the classroom, combined with high diversity. In close co-operation with the teachers of the certain classes, and after they gave their absolute consent, the final selection was made. The implementation of the programme started after student’s parents were informed about it and gave their written permission. Finally, 5th grade from Athens cross cultural school A consisted of 13 students (11 boys and 2 girls) and the 5th grade from Thrace cross cultural school consisted of 14 students (8 boys and 6 girls) was the two groups that attended the intervention programme.

Additionally, the selection of the control group took place in order for the results of the intervention to be assessed in comparison to the absence of it. Equivalent, according to the age and characteristics (group at risk), classes were selected from the other two schools that did not participate to the intervention. According to Harrell, (2005) experimental researches are reliable since they appoint strong evidence for the effectiveness of interventions’ implementation.

**Implementation of the intervention**

Ten (10) weekly sessions, of ninety minutes (90) duration, within the school programme took place for each school with the presence of the teacher and participant observers. The development of social skills, the effective interaction among the students, the personal growth and enhancement of self-esteem consisted of the main goal of the intervention. The programme attempted to empower the children to cope better with every day difficulties. In the context of the certain programme, themes concerning the children’s psychosocial development were analysed. Students had the opportunity to explore their relationships with the other students and the broader environment – the rest of the school, society, and family. They had the chance to discuss further issues that they brought to the group. This allowed them to get to know each other in a different way. They examined the ways they interacted, and challenged violent behaviour while they tried to develop alternative ways of dealing with their sentiments.

The methodology of the implementation makes use of the group dynamics and group processes as a main mean for understanding and explanation of behaviours. It is also taking advantage of experiential techniques as brainstorming, role-playing, positive
reframing, and experiential learning. Experiential learning enhances children to
develop empathy, free expression, participation, co-operation and decision-making.

**Thematic entities**

A. Development of interpersonal relationships within the group – opportunities for co-operation
B. Self esteem, self perception, self respect, respect for others
C. Acknowledgment, expression and control of emotions (communication skills)
D. Conflict resolution, violent behavior – examination of factors that affect the behavior - consequences

4. **The Evaluation Process (phase c)**

**Materials – Instruments**

Factors indicating behavioral changes according to the following issues were evaluated during the third phase of the action research: enhancement of personal and social skills, ways of interpersonal interactions among students, involvement in violent incidents at school, relationships among students and relationship with the parents.

Focus group interviews were conducted for the selected groups of students before and after the implementation of the programme while they also completed the A Phase questionnaires, before and after their participation to the programme. Since the Ministry of Education had rejected any record of the procedure (visual or hearing), the cooperation with participant observers was the only possible way to register in details all the narratives of the group sessions. Observer’s session diaries were utilized as they came out of the attendance to all sessions with students.

Content analysis of the observer’s notes (detailed diary for each session) took place after the completion of the programme. The participant observers were present in all meetings with students (sessions and focus group interviews). The co-operation with

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3 Two students attending the last year of their studies at Social Administration Dep of Demokritos of Thrace Univeristy, as well as one graduate of the same Dep took the roles of participant observers in Thrace and Athens successively.
the participant observers provided the opportunity of registration and analysis of the actual students’ words. Furthermore it allowed an important process analysis.

Each group had its own characteristics and different ways of interacting. In Athens cross-cultural primary school A, the students of the 5th grade had a ‘bad reputation’ concerning their behavior. High diversity concerning the country of origin was the main characteristic, since students were coming from Congo, Cameroon, Germany, Rumania, United States of America, Nigeria, Philippines, Albania. Further more diversity was made obvious not only in outside characteristics, mother language, but concerning the levels of understanding the Greek language, the age, the sex (11 boys and 2 girls), the school performance of each student. They had behavioral problems, difficult relationships with each other, severe rejection for co students expressed both verbally and physically, lack of respect and empathy, lack of communication based on rules. They expressed anger for their parents, hardly negotiated the rules, found relief in violent games.

On the other hand, the 5th grade of Thrace cross cultural primary school A had its own characteristics: Diversity concerning the country of origin and the religion (2 students from Russia and 3 Muslims). Different levels of understanding greek language, difficulties in relationships, indirect expression of rejection mainly in verbal and non verbal ways, lack of trust within the group, discrimination between bad ad good students (concerning the academic performance). Students remained silent, showing reluctance to express feelings, thoughts and opinions; they were avoiding interaction or dialogue with each other. Passive hostility was expressed from girls towards boys.

**Content Analysis of the session narratives**

Within the procedure of the programme implementation to both groups, slight elements revealed changes occurring slowly but visibly: Their constant need to play was facilitated since they had the chance to play various games within the group. They eventually made an effort to follow the rules – continuously reminded to them – since the realised rules made things more fair and clear. They took advantage from the opportunities to make dialogue and interact with each other in alternative ways. They
started showing trust to the group procedure, and gain trust for themselves by expressing feelings and attitudes. The group becomes ‘theirs’ and they find their way to have fun, express their talents by singing songs, dancing, laughing freely. They discovered new ways of self-expression and interaction. They take extremely seriously the conversations about their rights, the also wonder openly about the contemporary trends in outfits and behaviour of peers (trendy – emo). They are aware of the current social conditions and problems, they seek for space and opportunity to share concerns, doubts, and concepts. They show resistance, hence, they make an effort to listen, interact, express fears, anger, and they try to attach (relate) taking shy steps towards the others by showing respect and acceptance.

They described their own view about themselves and how the programme affected them:

‘We learnt not to call teasing ‘names” and cooperate’
‘Our goal is not to fight with each other, we want to be united, be together’
‘We need to love our friend, respect the others and talk politely’
‘We want the rules’
‘We learnt not to hit each other’
‘We want to have fun and co operate’
‘We want to love without hurting others feelings’
‘We feel ‘changed’ (that we have changed)’

Additional effectiveness criteria: Teachers expressed positive feedback towards the intervention programme and its influence to the school community. Furthermore, the relationship and co-operation between parents and teachers were viewed from a different perspective. The teachers who were present in the classroom during the sessions were actually trained in dealing with matters within the classroom with alternative ways. They even attempted to continue the work with children even after the end of the programme. The schoolteachers appreciated the presence of a social worker at school; they eventually showed much less resistance by identifying the positive effects of the co-operation. School Director successively to the programme implementation, addressed request to the Ministry of Education pinpointing the urgency and importance of appointing social workers at schools. Both schools started procedures in order to decide the philosophy and values of a whole school policy for
the management and prevention of bullying. All parts of the school, teachers, students and parents participated.

**Sub goals**

Cross-methodological social work was applied for working with school groups and systems
Networking between school and family was attempted
Activation and utilization of the family sources additionally to those of the community services aiming at asserting students various psychosocial and learning needs.

**Concluding notes**

The School community contains remarkable sources of energy deriving from the richness of interaction among students, teachers, parents and the local community. The schools’ dynamic also reflects characteristics of the broader economic, social, cultural contemporary situation. Therefore school community has to cope with the challenges that affect its traditional function and demand new ways of managing issues and student’s needs. Teachers want to defend schools adequate function therefore they are hesitant to admit the existing problems. At the same time they feel incompetent and helpless to deal with a variety of problems. They experience constant disappointment while they either struggle to respond to the needs of their profession or quit feeling that every effort done is in vain. Parents on the other hand, need to trust the school for their children’s cognitive and mental development. They expect much from the school as well as from the teachers and they often blame them for their children’s behavior. Furthermore the family, consist of a changing system in crisis the recent years with the parents (both immigrants and natives) struggling to earn living and cope with every day difficulties. On the other hand children receive all the double bind messages from significant adults that they have to succeed in something vague while at the same time they feel unsafe. They feel they have no space to express anxieties, desires and doubts. They lack basic skills of communication and positive
interaction mainly due to the fact that they have no such role model. They recognize/acknowledge their parents efforts but they reject them at the same time. Furthermore, they feel school demands from them and provide restrictions without trying to respond to their needs.

Anti-bullying interventions need to focus on how bullying is managed within a school setting. If students perceive teachers as being incompetent, they are unlikely to tell them that it is occurring either for themselves or others. This may result in the bullying continuing and students feeling unsafe. The implementation of social work programmes seems an absolute necessity in order for all school parts to cope with the contemporary complexity and a variety of challenges affecting every day life at school.

Finally, it’s worth mentioning that a number of restrictions and challenges came along this fascinating and rich full experience of cooperation with schools in Athens and Thrace two contradictory but in fact very similar settings. According to each schools culture (regardless of its location), it was either close or open to the challenge of interaction with the professionals. Resistance appeared often disguised in time limitations, bureaucracy, matters of responsibility, difficulties in communication, intention to protect the students. It is certainly a great challenge for schools to overcome all the resistance but it seems that besides the existing difficulties, the benefits are substantial. It is hoped that in the long run this attempt to implement long-term social work intervention at school community, may contribute to a more effective and organized process in the implementation of social work programmes to schools. This study also constitutes a starting point for further research on bullying in Greek schools, since it seems to be a growing problem with serious effects that seeks particular attention.
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