

'Discipline From Within', which was praised by the Committee on the Rights of the Child. As this policy is a rare exception, the experience ought to be evaluated and the lessons applied elsewhere.

Violence committed by children against other children is partly a hidden problem, the apparent scope of which is frightening, not least in the industrialised countries. Though statistics are difficult to find, it is clear that systematic bullying does take place in a great number of schools: stronger boys intimidate weaker boys; girls are victimised and sometimes suffer sexual harassment; and even school personnel are sometimes victims of this type of violence. Psychological harassment can be as damaging, but is usually more difficult to identify and remedy.

The school should be a violence-free zone. It is totally unacceptable that children should have to go to school in fear. There should be a clear policy that school personnel intervene in all such cases, as soon as possible and preferably at a preventive stage. Adults must demonstrate that they care for people and the environment. Each school should have a plan of action against violence and pupils should, of course, be involved in the shaping and implementation of such a plan. To be effective such plans will have to relate to - and include - parents and the community. Violence, vandalism and the breakdown of discipline in a school reflect ill on the surrounding community.

In Sweden the school authorities and the Children's Ombudsman have launched campaigns against bullying. Even so, it has now been reported again that each semester 1,500 boys and 500 girls have to get medical or dental treatment because of violent abuse from other pupils. Another survey showed that 11 per cent of the pupils had suffered bullying, 7 per cent regularly.

Reports from other European or North American countries give similarly alarming pictures. There are also great differences between schools in the same country or even within the same city or district. There

are, however, examples of non-violent schools in the worst districts - flowers in the asphalt one could call them - a fact which gives one hope.

The school is, of course, a social arena; the relationships developed there are important for each child. Studies have shown how important the school can be in providing a support structure and safety net for a child in crisis. In areas of armed conflict or social turmoil, the school can be a pillar of strength when parents can no longer cope as caregivers and protectors.

Also, in more normal situations, the school is an important social environment, which can supplement the family as a point of stability for the child. This role, however, requires that the school has personnel educated for this wider responsibility. When countries in Europe, east and west, have cut budget allocations to schools in recent years, the consequences have been precisely to reduce their capacity for social support. Extra teachers assisting children with problems have been the first to be dismissed. In poorer countries such personnel have never been recruited. The consequence is a reduction of the potential role of the school in contributing to a better and fairer society; opportunities are thereby missed to tackle social problems early and economically.

7. Pupil Participation

The Convention on the Rights of the Child argues for a democratic school. Article 12 not only says that the child should have the opportunity to express herself or himself, but also that these views should be given "due weight". The school is of course an important arena for providing this right; it is not by chance that the Committee on the Rights of the Child in discussion after discussion has asked government delegations to explain how Article 12 is implemented in their school system.

Again, there should be a link between the message in school textbooks about democratic values and human rights and daily life in the school. Judging from the State Party Reports on the Convention, this