Structural Reasons for School Violence and Education Strategies

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∼   For the purposes of the research, we developed a concept of structural reasons that we theoretically assume appear as typical structural reasons for violence in schools. With empirical research, we determined how primary school teachers recognise violent behaviour and how they execute moral education in the areas of the specific structural reasons for violence. We found that the majority of teachers have appropriate pedagogical knowledge to recognise the specific structural reasons for violence and are able to identify the appropriate moral education or support strategy to address the identified violent or disruptive behaviour. However, even in cases of repeating acts of violence, teachers only begin to engage with the factors or reasons behind violent incidents in individual cases, and not systematically. We therefore suggest that schools introduce the systematic differentiation of structural reasons for violence and incorporate this approach in the school moral education plan and the work of teachers. Within such frameworks, violence and disruptive behaviour would be eliminated through moral education and/or support strategies appropriate to the specific structural reasons.

Keywords: structural reasons for school violence, moral education strategies, preventive programmes, behaviour management, bullying, inclusion

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Strukturni razlogi nasilja v šoli in edukacijske strategije

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∿   Za namen raziskave smo oblikovali koncept strukturnih razlogov, za ka-
tere smo teoretično predpostavili, da se pojavljajo v šolskem okolju kot
tipični strukturni razlogi nasilja v šoli. Z empirično raziskavo smo odgo-
vorili na vprašanje, kako učitelji v osnovni šoli prepoznavajo nasilno ve-
denje in vzgojno delujejo na področjih posameznih strukturnih razlo-
gov nasilja. Ugotovili smo, da ima večina učiteljev ustrezno pedagoško
znanje, da iz opisov tipičnega vedenja učencev prepoznajo določeni
strukturni razlog nasilja in da glede na ugotovljeno nasilno oziroma
moteče vedenje učenca prepoznajo, katera bi bila ustreznejša vzgojna
ali podporna strategija učitelja. Kljub temu se tudi ob ponavljajočih
se dejanjih nasilja učitelj le v posameznih primerih začne ukvarjati z
dejavniki oziroma razlogi, ki so v ozadju teh nasilnih dogodkov, ne pa
sistematično. Zato predlagamo, da bi šole uvedle sistematično razliko-
vanje strukturnih razlogov za nasilje ter ta pristop vgradile v vzgojne
načrte šol in delo učiteljev. V tako vzpostavljenih okvirih bi odpravljale
nasilje in moteče vedenje z vzgojnimi in/ali s podpornimi strategijami,
ustrezajočimi tem strukturnim razlogom.

Ključne besede: strukturni razlogi nasilja, vzgojne strategije,
preventivni programi, upravljanje vedenja, medvrstniško nasilje,
inkluzija

Introduction

Through an outline of our theoretical premises and a critical analysis of the theoretical basis of selected anti-violence preventive programmes, we developed a concept of structural reasons that we theoretically assume appear as typical *structural reasons for violence* in schools. With empirical research, we sought to answer the research question of how teachers in primary school, without any additional education or training, recognise violent behaviour, and how they act in the areas of the defined structural reasons for violence. Based on descriptions of typical student behaviour presented in five vignettes, we wanted to determine whether teachers recognise the specific structural reason for the described violence and, in view of the determined violent or disruptive behaviour of the student, whether they can identify which moral education or support strategy would be more appropriate for them to adopt. In addition, through a questionnaire and by conducting semi-structured interviews, the research focused on the teachers' current behaviour. Our aim was to establish whether teachers deal with the occurrence of violence by attempting to understand and identify the reasons for its occurrence and working towards eliminating the identified reasons, or, conversely, whether they seek to eliminate violence primarily as an undesirable consequence, without recognising and dealing with the reason for violence.

The purpose of the empirical research was to find out whether teachers in Slovenia have appropriate professional knowledge and educational behaviours that would allow schools to introduce the systematic differentiation of structural reasons for violence and incorporate such an anti-violence approach in the so-called school moral education plan and in the actual educational work of teachers.

Theoretical starting points

We should first point out some theoretical assumptions that are important in dealing with violence in education and that guided us in the preparation of the empirical research.

We live in a society in which the imperative of zero tolerance of violence has been established, which is binding for schools, as well (in Slovenia, the prohibition of violence is imposed by law). This does not mean that it is possible to eradicate violence. From the perspective of this social norm, the occurrence of violence is first of all a failure, which is why the general imperative of zero tolerance of violence in education is not enough, as it merely conveys what should

not be, it gives a name to something that is supposed to be absent. Nonetheless, education is a process and it takes place through actions, through success *and* failure. Even when violent events occur, we can, in education, operate from the imperative of *success in failure*: both the teacher (with regard to individual events) and the school (by preparing strategies for countering violence) can turn the negativity of violence into something positive. The precondition is that we take the failure as a starting point that commits us to recognising and understanding violence, to seeking moral education strategies and ways of supporting the student that will transform violence as a failure into a starting point for achieving subjective changes that provide everyone concerned, especially the student, with an exit from the closed circle of violence.

The commitment of the teacher to the dialectics of success in failure is, of course, a general basis of educational ethics. We highlight this fact because this dialectic also applies to the problem of violence, only with certain specificities. In moral education discourse, occurrences of violence are not simply "mistakes" as generally in learning; we evaluate and condemn violence as morally unacceptable. For moral education, there is an inherent and indispensable moral discourse that transforms failure from an "error" into an "offence", thus changing the educational perspective. Schools form lists of offences in the form of descriptions of specific instances of physical, psychological and other occurrences of violence. Due to the fact that they are morally unacceptable, offences ensure a view that reduces violence as a result of some reason to a pure undesirable consequence. As soon as the problem of violence is defined and identified *only* as an offence, it becomes ethically appropriate for the school to take measures against violence, which it understands only as an undesirable consequence. The result is that, in moral education discourse, it may seem justified to prevent violence as a phenomenon without at the same time addressing its causes.

When violence occurs in interpersonal relationships, the background is usually more complex than indicated by the immediate cause of the particular event. The fact that it is worth understanding the reasons for violence becomes even more apparent when certain forms of violence reoccur. This conclusion is in no way unusual. However, the fundamental educational role of the teacher, without consideration of the moral education aspect, *sets this conclusion aside*. The teacher can provide quality instruction in the context of established order, which enables a sense of security and ensures that the students are calm and focused on the learning process. From the perspective of knowledge-related objectives, the occurrence of violence is above all a disruptive factor. However, many occurrences of violence are seen *only* as "disruptive behaviour". In order not to break the teaching process, the teacher may try to react by ignoring

disruptive behaviour to a certain extent. The moral education role of education is an additional reason for the teacher to strive to establish a symbolic order in which the respecting of rules prevails. At the same time, students enter school at an age at which it is assumed that, at least on a basic level, they already "know what is right" or what their "expected behaviour" should be. If they do not behave this way, it may seem that all that is needed is to correct the inappropriate result of upbringing, to discipline them through punishment, and not to deal with the reasons for the inappropriate behaviour.

With this logic of the moral education role of education, at least since the Enlightenment (in terms of the philosophy of education, from Rousseau and Kant onwards), the insight has persisted in pedagogy that the individual does not come into the world already corrupted, but is the result of education that reflects the society or environment in which s/he grows up. Today, various pedagogical theories, despite sometimes being conceptually contradictory in certain respects, do not reduce violence to moral condemnation, but instead introduce an ethics of recognition and a perspective that attempts to understand the reasons for violence. Although the moral education role of the school persists, preventive programmes aimed at preventing violence have entered school systems and schools on a large scale.

School violence and preventive programmes

In their work *Comprehensive Behaviour Management* (Martella, Ron Nelson, Marchand-Martella, & O'Reilly, 2012), Martella, Ron Nelson, Marchand-Martella and O'Reilly analyse ten educational models or preventive programmes developed by various authors in the second half of the twentieth century as an alternative to the model of discipline through punishment: assertive discipline (Canter et al.), logical consequences (Dreikurs), reality therapy (Glasser), Fay's "love and logic" model, the programmes of Ginott, Kounin and Jones (these three programmes are named after their authors), character education, the Positive Action programme, and the Caring School Community programme. In their analyses of these models and programmes, the authors determine the strengths and weaknesses of each approach, and conclude that they all have one common trait: "they all rest on some form of consequence for misbehavior, although many argue against external control" (Martella et al., 2012, p. 21). We understand this common point as a weakness of all of the preventive programmes listed. Although *a certain form of consequence for inappropriate behaviour*, as proposed by a particular educational model or preventive programme, does assume a preliminary analysis and a *certain* understanding

of the reasons for inappropriate behaviour, the actual reasons for inappropriate behaviour are too complex for any "form of consequence for misbehaviour" of a pre-prepared model or preventive programme to be able to provide a universal approach with the potential to effectively eliminate the numerous different reasons for inappropriate behaviour. The programme therefore necessarily misses many targets. Preventive programmes can, to some extent, be successful and more or less appropriate in relation to various problems of violence, but the implementation of a particular programme does not bring a "universal solution".

In their work *Preventing Bullying and School Violence* (Twemlow & Sacco, 2012), which has a theoretical basis in psychiatry and social work, Twemlow and Sacco state that "there is a gargantuan amount of research literature on bullying and school violence, and that the United States alone has more than 300 programmes designed to ameliorate violence" (Twemlow & Sacco, 2012, p. 16). However, they find that, in the US, many anti-violence interventions may approach the problem from an oversimplified perspective or attempt to address only certain components of the problem in isolation. The authors add that we can find a large number of specific programmatic solutions to behavioural problems that only further burden teachers, who consequently ignore them or do not take them seriously (Twemlow & Sacco, 2012). As Biggs, Vernberg, Twemlow, Fonagy and Dill (Biggs, Vernberg, Twemlow, Fonagy, & Dill, 2008) determine in their research, for the successful operation of schools against violence, it is also crucial for teachers to feel a commitment to the programme they are implementing.

With regard to these findings, it is worth noting that Slovenia has a statutory regulation that requires every state primary school to prepare a "school moral education plan" (Državni zbor Republike Slovenije, 2006, Art. 60). The law allows schools to establish autonomous symbolic frameworks for moral education activities that are binding for all participants. In so doing, it also directs schools to manage teachers' commitment to school moral education strategies. If properly implemented, the annual preparation and implementation of the school moral education plan encourages the commitment of teachers to use moral education strategies applicable to the school, which includes systematically dealing with the issue of violence. However, we should also be critical. Although the provisions regarding the preparation of the "school moral education plan" by way of a "particular" list state certain key terms, they do not indicate that schools should also focus on the reasons for violence at school.

Especially since the introduction of inclusion in 2000, the perspective of attempting to understand the reasons behind the behaviour of the individual student should not be foreign to the Slovenian primary school. Many teachers,

particularly special education teachers, implement individually prepared programmes to support students with special needs (so-called additional professional assistance), which are directed towards individual learners and towards studying the reasons for the individual's behaviour and eliminating deficits. During their studies, teachers learn, inter alia, about the behaviourist-based approach of so-called functional behaviour assessment. This behaviourist-based model assumes that behaviour is entirely caused, and that the cause is ultimately external and physical, taking into account the fact that physiology, culture and environment all have an effect on the individual's behaviour (Martella et al., 2012). In order to understand the student's behaviour, it is necessary to analyse that behaviour and understand how it is shaped by culture, physiology (which can involve the cooperation of a clinical psychologist, psychiatrist or doctor), and the environment, including the school environment (school rules, interpersonal relations, curriculum, lessons, etc.). The analysis assumes a functional relationship between behaviour and consequences, or, in other words, a relationship between cause and effect, and it certainly attempts to achieve a contextual understanding of behaviour as an event (Martella et al., 2012). This type of analysis requires a systematic approach (instruments and measurement) and, due to its complexity, has various degrees of depth. Moreover, it is, of course, always oriented towards understanding the behaviour of the *individual* student. The behaviourist concept of functional behaviour analysis differs from all of the aforementioned preventive programmes and educational models in that the analysis is completely open to establishing links between student behaviour and external influences, that is, the causes thought to result in the specific behaviour, and that these influences in a particular student are determined and proven by measurement, that is, they are empirically demonstrable.

Functional behaviour analysis embraces complexity, individual orientation and openness towards connecting external influences with the student's behaviour and seeking changes in these external influences in order to modify that behaviour. Although this is an advantage of the approach, it is, from the perspective of the general educational role of the school and the teacher's work (even if we leave aside behaviourist assumptions), its weakness, as well. Firstly, the teacher teaches the students of a class, a *group* in which there can be specific subgroups of students. When working in interaction with twenty to thirty or more students, there is a need to ask whether the reasons for the occurrence of violence are entirely individual, or whether in the background there are actually factors that are common but emphasised only among a specific subgroup of students in the class or school. Secondly, the special education profession deals with students with specific problems and therefore takes into account the

possibility of physiological differences as an important factor for deficiencies and disruptive behaviours, as well. Is it really necessary to always take *physiology* into account among the causes of violence? Bullying can be a result of the student's own subjective involvement in interactions with others, in specific "closed circles of subjectivity", in repeating patterns of behaviour, or in characteristic relationships with others that have no connection with physiological predispositions. Expressed in the terminology of the aforementioned behaviourist model, there remain only two key factors to be explored in relation to violence: culture and environment. Thirdly, *recognising* violence in the school environment cannot be entirely "open"; it demands a certain prior preparedness of the institution and teachers.

The concept of structural reasons for violence

The school must therefore also take into account the fact that student behaviour can be due to certain *typical* cultural patterns and behaviours, certain *types* of authority that students are exposed to in both the domestic and school environment, certain typical forms of violence, and so on. A contemporary consequence of inclusion processes is the coexistence of two extremes: on the one hand, the teacher in the class does, of course, have certain general expectations with regard to all students, which are derived from the goals of the curricula, standards of knowledge, the age of the students, and, in the area of moral education, from the common values of the state and the prevailing social "norms of normality"; on the other hand, there is a completely individualised approach, the need to take into account individuality and the inclusion of each student, which is a feature of special education or of inclusion as a valid principle for all students. We assume that between these two extremes there are also typical structures of behaviour that are more frequent, and typical structures of reasons for violence that are also characteristic of certain groups of those involved. Between the extremes of the general and the individualised, the school must take into account the fact that certain patterns of behaviour in the home or at school typically occur, and that these interactions produce structural reasons for violence or disruptive behaviour not only of the individual, but also of specific groups of students.

We use the concept reason (not cause) because in all cases it refers to something that is important as a structure from the perspective of education and the impacts on the occurrence of violence, but that operates from the "background": it is a contextual reason rather than a direct cause of acts of violence. The term *structure* enables the introduction of various semantic levels

and institutional, socio-systemic and interaction contexts: it can refer to the structures of subjectivity, in other cases to the structure of social or cultural values and patterns, and in yet others to the structure of institutional factors or the structure of specific behaviours of teachers. It can even combine all of these contexts and is open to further interpretations.

It is well known that the phenomenon of violence is usually complex, and the structures that act as the key reasons for violence are also complex. An example of a theory that conceptualises the operation of various symbolic structures on the individual is Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), which points out that, in addition to direct interactions of the student with others (microsystem), s/he is also influenced by the interactions between the systems in which s/he participates (mesosystem), interactions between systems in which s/he does not participate (ecosystem), and the beliefs, values and norms in the wider community (macrosystem). However, the moral education role of the school requires specific consideration. As an example, we should state that the values and norms of the wider community – the macrosystem, which is "most distant" from the individual – also directly guide the actions of the individual and – as stereotypes or prejudices, for example – contribute to the occurrence of violence. From the perspective of moral education, the school must therefore treat this symbolic structure ("macrosystem") as a specific structural reason for violence.

Much like in behaviourist theory, the conceptualisation of the structural reasons for violence is derived from an analysis of the interaction between subjects. The knowledge that we have or can obtain about the functioning of these structural reasons assumes that there are certain connections between factors in the structure (or in connections of multiple structures), but not necessarily cause-and-effect relations. There is therefore an important difference between the conceptualisation of structural reasons and the behaviourist model: firstly, the conceptualisation of structural reasons must also take into account knowledge that can be obtained with regard to the operation of certain symbolic structures in connection with violence, although empirical research only proves correlations, not causal relationships. Another advantage is that the analysis of structural reasons is therefore not limited to exploring the context of the individual's activity. The conceptualisation of different structural reasons can be derived from empirically researched connections that are typical of groups of individuals, which is of paramount importance for the moral education activities of the teacher in the school context. Secondly, whereas behaviourist functional behaviour analysis, whose object is the individual, takes into account the common effect of three basic structures (physiology, culture and environment),

in a conceptualisation whose object is not necessarily the individual we can forgo physiology as an essential possible context that affects its functioning.

The concept of "structural reasons" assumes that violence and disruptive behaviour should be systematically analysed based on the structure of reasons. On the basis of this analysis, specific cases should be investigated and, with regard to the established reasons in the individual case appropriate, (different) moral education and support strategies should be developed. These strategies can therefore be suitable for use in relation to individuals or certain groups of students, depending on the reason and the specific context. Since the starting point of the research is the differences in the reasons for violence or disruptive behaviour, with the aim of enabling the school to determine and construct the basis of various structural reasons that correspond to specific circumstances, this conceptualisation also differs from those preventive programmes, or "programmatic solutions", that are based on *a certain form of consequence of inappropriate behaviour* with a preconceived understanding of the reasons for inappropriate behaviours.

The criteria according to which it is possible to organise the various structural reasons for violence into individual groups can therefore be different depending on the identified connections and the significance that can be attributed to individual structures in particular circumstances (such as the specific school, school system, society, etc.). It is necessary to take into account: theoretical knowledge and the knowledge of various areas of expertise – in the field of education philosophy this can be derived from the subject and patterns of subjectivity, while in the field of psychology it takes into account cognitive theories, etc. – and empirical research in which correlations between certain factors have been researched and confirmed; the existence of certain cultural and institutional/systemic factors that play an objective role in the occurrence or prevention of violence and in the way the teacher or school solves the occurrence of violence; and the fact that parents, teachers and others are always (directly or indirectly) involved in interactions with children or students, which means that their actions should be counted as a structural reason for preventing or establishing violence. Which connections act as the reasons for violence by forming a "structure", and what constitutes the key context, is always a matter of analysis and interpretation in specific situations.

Thirdly, in the school context, difficulties with recognising violence contribute to the complexity of dealing with it. Not every form of violence is visible; we recognise that which we have previously conceptualised. Therefore, the school must prepare concepts and instruments (simple and informal, or complex and standardised) that guide teachers in recognising that which

perpetrators, and often also victims, seek to conceal. This has been identified by various experts for decades. In their study, de Paúl and Arruabarrena (de Paúl & Arruabarrena, 1995) conclude that (1) the existence of different consequences for the child's social and behavioural development depending on the type of maltreatment suggests a need to establish different treatment strategies for physically abused and neglected children, and (2) there is a need for specific interventions based on the individual assessment of each child in order to correct the deficits in the patterns of social interaction and cognitive development shown by the children. A study by Culp, Howell, McDonald and Blankemeyer (Culp, Howell, McDonald, & Blankemeyer, 2001) indicates a need to develop a reliable way to assess whether children are having behavioural problems, either externalising or internalising, so that they can be dealt with earlier rather than later. Furthermore, a study by Holt (2015) points out that being aware of the types of behaviours that children may display while at school would significantly improve the identification of these children by staff members, thus allowing the child earlier access to support from teachers and external agencies. On the other hand, violence can be visible; moreover, it may be there for everyone to see, but the individual does not "recognise" it because s/he can "evaluate" it as a phenomenon that can be "overlooked" or that is "better" to overlook. Twemlow and Sacco believe that, in the USA,

> very few schools have personnel who are trained to recognize the signs that a student may be at risk of acting violently (…) It is critical that school personnel understand the range of signs of physical, social and emotional violence, because these signs provide the information needed to 'stand up' and address the problem and/or to seek help from others. (Twemlow & Sacco, 2012, pp. 15–16)

The authors also point out that more emphasis should be placed on *ways to prepare the school context* for addressing the problem of school violence, and less on the specific preventive programme chosen (Twemlow & Sacco, 2012). If we transfer these findings to the Slovenian context, the annual preparation and implementation of the school moral education plan could, among other things, be devoted to ensuring that, through the conceptualisation of structural reasons, the school has an organised influence on the recognition and understanding of violence, on the preparation of instruments for recognising the structures of behaviour, and on the application of moral education strategies that should be used in relation to specific forms of violence or disruptive behaviour in connection with the structural reasons.

Structural reasons for violence as a research problem

The starting point for the empirical research was the thesis that the school moral education plan should address the typical structural reasons for violence, the "wider background", within the framework of which the school must continuously engage in moral education strategies and, on their basis, operate educationally and supportively to prevent and eliminate the reasons that lead to undesirable or violent behaviour by individual students.

Regardless of the specific Slovenian context in which the research was carried out, the general question for every teacher, school and school system is whether teachers, when faced with the occurrence of violence at school every day, deal with it merely as an undesirable consequence and seek to eliminate it without having to deal with the reason for violence, or whether they deal with the occurrence of violence by trying to understand its reasons and by taking steps to eliminate these reasons.

For the purposes of the research, we devised a concept of structural reasons that we can theoretically assume appear in the school environment as typical structural reasons for violence among students. Prior to substantiating the reasons, we simply list them briefly: 1) the child is often exposed to physical violence; 2) permissive, very lenient upbringing; 3) in his/her environment, the child has examples of a hostile stance towards people (peers) who are different; 4) bullying; 5) violence and disruptive behaviour related to the specific characteristics of a student with special needs; and 6) abuse of the child in the home environment. This concept of reasons is not intended for an analysis of the occurrence of violence or undesirable behaviour characteristic of a particular school, nor does it have pretentions of being exhaustive; we assume that other reasons or combinations of structural reasons can contribute to the violence or undesirable behaviour of students. Furthermore, the purpose of the concept of grouping is not to remove the need to examine the individual circumstances in cases where violence occurs.

As stated above, *within the framework of each* structural reason for violence, consideration should be given to the fact that education takes place in interactions between participants. Although our point of departure is the behaviour of students, consideration must be given to the possibility of appropriate or inappropriate pedagogical practices of teachers or the school, which enable the school environment to either support or eliminate violence or undesirable behaviour. In the concepts of the structural reasons for violence and the elimination of violence at school, it is therefore necessary to always take into account the behaviour of teachers (the school) as an autonomous structural

reason. However, the present study was not intended to investigate specific forms or phenomena of inappropriate pedagogical practices. The assumption is more general: if the school were to develop strategies and instruments for identifying these structural phenomena and the related reasons for violence or disruptive behaviour, and on this basis also to foster moral education and support strategies and procedures for the measures of teachers and other professionals, there would be more likelihood of reducing less appropriate practices among teachers (the school). With the empirical research, we sought to verify whether teachers without additional training distinguish between the behaviour of students according to the different contexts that act as reasons for violence.

The concept has been designed so that the first two reasons ("the child is often exposed to physical violence" and "permissive, very lenient upbringing") are derived from two opposite models of moral education and attitude towards the child. The student's behaviour can therefore become "typical", while in more extreme cases both types of behaviour of adults can contribute to the student's disruptive behaviour or violence. If the teacher understands the student's violent or disruptive behaviour from more than just the perspective of an offence, s/he is more likely to have a greater awareness that the elimination of these two opposing reasons for violence also requires two different moral education and support strategies. Furthermore, from the point of view of the school, the individual teacher's moral education activity is no longer merely an arbitrary consequence of his/her behaviours, but instead becomes systematic.

In this case, we can justifiably speak about structural (and typical) reasons for violence, as student violence is the result of typical patterns of upbringing that can escalate into violence. In a recent meta-study that combines the results of 1,435 empirical studies identifying the relationship between family upbringing patterns and externalised symptoms in children and adolescents, Pinquart finds that harsh control and psychological control, as well as authoritarian, permissive and neglectful parenting were associated with higher levels of externalising problems (Pinquart, 2017). The first and second structural reasons are derived from two different forms of behaviour and parental attitude towards children in the home environment, which is also evident in the aforementioned research. Therefore, in contemporary society, patterns of violence among students who are (or have been) exposed to authoritarianism and violence outside the school environment (the phenomenon of violence resulting from repressive upbringing) are joined by the disruptive behaviour or violence of students resulting from permissive upbringing.

From the 1960s on, this question has been addressed in the context of various research areas, one of which is the three types of authority:

authoritarian, permissive and authoritative (Baumrind, 1967, 1971, 1991; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Behaving according to a particular type of teacher authority or employing different teaching methods can increase or decrease the effects of family upbringing on children (Mugny, Chatard, & Quiamzade, 2006; Paulson, Marchant, & Rothlisberg, 1998; Pellerin, 2005; Quiamzade, Mugny, & Falomir-Pichastor, 2009; Wentzel, 2002).

The first structural reason – the child is often exposed to physical violence – thus derives from the typical situation that the student may be exposed to repeated physical violence in the home environment. Children known to experience violence at home display aggressive behaviour and lack concentration in school (McGee, 2000). If the student is often exposed to physical violence prior to entering school (or also after that) – possibly also associated with other types of violence or dysfunctional behaviour of others in the home environment, which can increase the student's sense of danger – his/her experience with physical violence can lead to the adoption of defensive patterns of behaviour that, on entering school, result in physical violence against other students. The desired change requires that the teacher(s) and the counselling service design *resocialisation strategies* that will accustom the student to socially acceptable behaviours and eliminate the acquired violent or non-functional patterns of behaviour. In order to achieve change, parents or other institutions should, as far as possible, also be involved in the resocialisation process (Twemlow & Sacco, 2012). Instructions in the school moral education plan must also include references to moral education strategies and protocols.

The second structural reason – permissive early upbringing – has well-researched consequences for the child. Such behaviour of adults creates an erroneous level of self-esteem in children and fails to develop their sense of responsibility; they do not take on the symbolic criteria of culture through which they are able to judge what they are entitled to, they develop a minimal respect for authority – or rather, a specific attitude towards it – and they tend to blame others for their own shortcomings (Bernstein, 2013a). To address this case, the school moral education plan should include the preparation of instruments for identifying patterns of behaviour and protocols of conduct, including descriptions of examples of appropriate behaviours for teachers. Parents should be involved in the process of recognition and in achieving the desired change. If the student's behaviour reflects patterns that are typical consequences of very permissive upbringing, the foundation of the moral education strategy is *to establish authority that supports internalisation of the symbolic Law* (Krek, 2015). In the school environment, this concerns the rules and expectations of the school and the teacher (Bernstein, 2013b).

In both cases, the teacher should act in accordance with the authoritative type of authority. One common point of both structural reasons is that the school should commence efforts to modify the violent or disruptive behaviour as soon as possible, immediately after the student enters school or as soon as the problem is detected. These efforts should be incorporated systematically (through the school moral education plan), as violence in younger students can sometimes be regarded as "less problematic". However, the younger the student is, the more likely it is that violent or disruptive behaviour will serve as an emergency (uncontrolled) exit for the individual structure of subjectivity, which is still being formed. The moral education impact of school can therefore be more permanent. Although the moral education/support strategies are different, they have a typical moral education goal in both cases: that violence or disruptive behaviour is, according to the individual structure of subjectivity, no longer an "emergency exit" for the student.

The third structural reason – in his/her environment, the child has examples of a hostile stance towards people (peers) who are different – is mainly related to wider social or cultural patterns, beliefs and prejudices that can have very different content (social, ethnic, racial, gender and a number of other differences). The school must ethically oppose and eliminate these patterns, beliefs and prejudices, which should therefore have their own place among the structural reasons for violence in the school moral education plan. This issue should be included in the context of appropriate (simple) tools and strategies, providing everything that the teacher needs to identify, counteract and modify these inappropriate values and beliefs. The teacher's moral education role is to clearly and actively oppose these morally unacceptable values or norms, and to change the prejudices that have been acquired and modify the discriminatory or exclusionary behaviour of the student. The aim is for the unacceptable cultural patterns (values, prejudices, etc.) to no longer be morally permissible, and for students to adopt, as far as possible, common social values and norms (equality, respect for others, solidarity, etc.) that are in line with the concept of human rights (Donnelly, 2013; Krek & Zabel, 2017; Kuhar & Zobec, 2017; McLaughlin, 1995).

The fourth reason – bullying – is contextually, and partly in terms of behaviour (exclusion), associated with the previous structural reasons, but nonetheless needs to be considered separately because a key additional factor is present: the school as an institution that establishes the specific environments within which peer relationships unfold. In this specific context, the inter-peer struggle for dominance, which can take on various forms of violence (Messerschmidt, 2017), is potentially an ever-present possibility. Recognising and

opposing this problem is complex and requires conceptualisation, understanding, recognition instruments and moral education opposition strategies. Contemporary definitions of bullying are derived from Olweus's (Olweus, 1993) definition and emphasise three key characteristics of bullying: (1) acts are intentional, (2) acts are repeated, and (3) there is an imbalance in power between the bully or bullies and the victim (Saarento, Garandeau, & Salmivalli, 2015). These characteristics are recognisable by the typical roles played by students or groups of students in their mutual relations: the perpetrator, the victim, the perpetrator-victim, the observers, etc. The aim is to stop exclusionary or violent behaviour among students and to establish that such behaviour is no longer a morally permissible means of achieving certain goals.

The fifth reason – violence and disruptive behaviour related to the specific characteristics of a student with special needs – is based on the fact that there is already a "structure" of special needs education, social pedagogy, conceptualisation of inclusion, specific expertise and institutional mechanisms that together form an extremely complex context (Florian, 2014; Novak, 2015; Opertti, Walker, & Zhang, 2014; Thomas, 2014; Žic Ralić, Cvitković, & Sekušak-Galešev, 2018). The common assumption of this context is a *structural reason*: the difficulties/deficits of a particular group of students ("students with special needs") are such (the consequences can also be disruptive behaviour or violence) that the causes must be explored specifically and individually (or, in terms of functional behaviour analysis, the combined effects of physiology, culture and environment), and the moral education and support strategies addressing the student's difficulties/deficits must be adapted to the structural reason.

The sixth reason – abuse of the student in the home environment – has been defined as a specific structural reason associated with violence because, although it can also include characteristics of the other reasons, the context has several particular characteristics (Rudolph & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2018; Ryan et al., 2018). These particularities require attention in the school moral education plan and in the planning of support strategies. Firstly, although the school can detect the problem, other institutions (social services, justice, etc.) have the competencies and mechanisms to solve the problem, the source of which is in the student's home environment. Secondly, although the student may be exposed to various forms of abuse in the home environment, this does not necessarily result in poorer academic success or disruptive behaviour. The school should therefore systematically train teachers to identify signs of abuse. Thirdly, since the abuse does not occur in school, and because it is concealed by the student, it is difficult to recognise the consequences at school. Moreover, when it is recognised it requires professional measures and cooperation of

various other institutions, protocols of conduct, etc. However, teachers should be careful not to jump to conclusions regarding abuse: the results of two studies "suggest standardized assessments are more useful than behavioural observations in identifying abused children in the classroom setting" (De Jong et al., 2014, p. 315). The context is therefore quite different than in the case of students with special needs, although in specific cases there can be some overlap. As in the context of students with special needs, the school is, in cases of domestic abuse, strongly dependant on support that can only be provided by the state or other institutions.

Description of the empirical research

Research questions

With the empirical research, we sought to answer the basic research question of how teachers in primary school recognise violent behaviour and how they act in the areas of the individual structural reasons for violence.

Based on this research question, we established two related questions on different levels (knowledge, viewpoints): 1) Based on descriptions of typical student behaviour, do teachers recognise the specific structural reason for violence and, in view of the determined violent or disruptive behaviour of the student, can they identify which moral education or support strategy would be more appropriate for them to adopt? 2) Do teachers deal with the occurrence of violence by attempting to identify/understand the reasons for its occurrence and working towards eliminating the identified reasons (or, conversely, do they seek to eliminate violence primarily as an undesirable consequence, without recognising and dealing with the reason for violence)?

Research methodology

The empirical research was based on the descriptive method of educational research, with the use of a quantitative and qualitative approach. For the quantitative part of the research, the questionnaire *Factors of Violence* was prepared. Data collection took place in June and early July 2018. The study involved 175 teachers (90.3% women, 6.3% men, 3.4% undefined) from 7 schools in urban and suburban environments in various locations in Slovenia. All of the participants completed the questionnaire. Of the 163 respondents who answered the question about their field of work, 42.3% were first-cycle class teachers, 44.8% were subject teachers, 1.8% taught after-school classes, 4.3% were kindergarten

teachers, 4.9% were counsellors and 1.8% worked in other fields. In the qualitative part of the research, we prepared a semi-structured interview, which was conducted with 29 professional staff (teachers and individual counsellors or principals) in the surveyed schools. The sample of schools and teachers or professional staff was selected randomly on the basis of expressed interest in participating in the survey. The data were statistically processed using the statistical software package SPSS. The presented data from the questionnaire were processed on the level of descriptive statistics.

In the first part of the teacher questionnaire, we selected five structural reasons for violence and devised five different examples of violent behaviour at school (vignettes), with which we obtained answers to the first research question. The second part of the questionnaire sought to answer the second research question. In this part, the teachers responded to statements related to the reasons for violence using responses formulated as Likert-type scales. For two of the statements, the teachers indicated their agreement on a 5-point scale (I completely agree, I agree, I disagree, I strongly disagree and I don't know). For the other statements, the teachers evaluated how often they recognise the stated factors (six structural reasons for violence) as a reason for violence, choosing between the answers: always, sometimes, rarely, never, and I don't know. The results obtained in this way were supplemented with responses based on semi-structured interviews.

The content of the statements that were included in the second part of the questionnaire is evident from the results and interpretation. An outline of the individual examples (vignettes) from the first part of the questionnaire is provided below.

Each of the five examples (vignettes) is designed with regard to the individual structural reasons for violence and comprises three parts: (1) a description of the behaviour, (2) explanations of the behaviour (in the first vignette, the teachers chose from three explanations, while in the other four they chose between two explanations), and (3) a moral education/support action (given two descriptions of moral education actions, the teachers decided which is more appropriate according to the description of the behaviour). The teachers were requested: (1) to read the description of the behaviour or event, (2) to select from the explanations following the description of the behaviour the explanation that best explains the behaviour described, and (3) to choose what they regard as the more appropriate moral education or support action from the two descriptions of moral education/support behaviours that follow.

The following structural reasons for violence were included in the five examples with vignettes: permissiveness or very lenient upbringing (vignette

1); a discriminatory, hostile attitude (vignette 2); bullying (vignette 3); special needs of the student (vignette 4); abuse in the home environment (vignette 5).

Results

The table below shows the teachers' responses obtained on the basis of the five examples (vignettes).

Table 1

Identification of the structural reasons for violence and selection of the appropriate moral education action of the teacher with regard to the student's behaviour

EXAMPLES	Explanation of the described behaviour		Moral education action	
	appropriate	inappropriate	appropriate	inappropriate
Vignette 1 (permissive upbringing)	113 (64.4%)	5 (2.9%) 57 (32.6%)	153 (87.4%)	22 (12.6%)
Vignette 2 (discriminatory, hostile attitude)	162 (92.6%)	13 (7.4%)	170 (97.1%)	5 (2.9%)
Vignette 3 (bullying)	131 (77.5%)	38 (22.5%)	85 (49.1%)	88 (50.9%)
Vignette 4 (special needs of the student)	170 (97.1%)	5 (2.9%)	158 (90.3%)	17 (9.7%)
Vignette 5 (abuse in the home environment)	127 (75.6%)	41 (24.4%)	141 (82.9%)	29 (17.1%)

Note. N = 175

For vignette 1, in which the assumed reason for the student's violence and disruptive behaviour is permissive upbringing, we offered three possible *explanations* of the reasons for this behaviour. We proceeded from the theory of authority, as explained in the theoretical part above, which divides behaviour and attitudes into authoritative, authoritarian and permissive. From the results it is evident that only 2.9% of the teachers selected the explanation describing an authoritative type of moral education, about one third of the teachers (32.6%) chose the explanation describing an authoritarian type of education with elements of physical violence, and almost two thirds (64.4%) selected the correct answer that describes the permissive type of parenting behaviour. Despite the fact that one third of the respondents understood the descriptions of the *reasons for violence* incorrectly, the vast majority (87.4%) of the teachers chose a description of *moral education action* that we theoretically conceived as

an appropriate model of education, which describes an authoritative action of the teacher, as opposed to a less appropriate model of a permissive attitude and behaviour of the teacher.

The results of the other four vignettes show that, given dichotomous choices, the vast majority of the teachers selected the *explanation* of the reasons for violence that we had designated as the appropriate choice: 92.6% of the teachers recognised the non-acceptance of religious and ethnic diversity in vignette 2; 77.5% selected the explanation corresponding to a pattern of bullying in vignette 3; 97.1% chose the explanation corresponding to a behavioural outburst of a student with special needs in vignette 4; and, in vignette 5, 75.6% opted for the explanation stating that the student had been subjected to physical and/or sexual abuse over an extended period in the home environment.

With the exception of vignette 3, the vast majority of the teachers correctly identified the kind of *moral education/support action* that would be appropriate to the described pattern of violence: in vignette 2, 97.1% of the teachers chose the appropriate moral education action to counter violence based on religious and ethnic prejudices; in vignette 4, 90.3% identified the appropriate support actions to prevent the behavioural outburst of a student with special needs; and, in the vignette 5, 82.9% selected the appropriate procedures for the school to determine whether it was a case of physical or sexual abuse.

Only in the case of moral education strategies to deal with bullying (vignette 3) was there a split in the teachers' responses (49.1% versus 50.9%), with a slight majority of the respondents selecting the wrong moral education action, which involved mediation. The description of the behaviour in the vignette depicts a group of students who carry out a typical series of acts of bullying directed at one student. From the description of the violence there is no doubt that it is a case of imbalance of power (on the one hand, the victim, and, on the other, a group of victimisers), which means that mediation between the victim and the group is not an appropriate moral education measure in this case. From the teachers' responses, we conclude that, at least in the schools included in the survey, teachers are not sufficiently familiar with the concepts of bullying and/or mediation as a form of moral education action.

Apart from this exception, the results show that the majority of the teachers *have the appropriate pedagogical knowledge* that enables them, *based on a description of the typical behaviour of students, to recognise the particular structural reason for violence, and, in view of the established violent or disruptive behaviour of the student, to determine which moral education or support strategy would be more appropriate for the teacher to implement.*

The responses to the second research question were first obtained

through two statements to which the teachers responded on a rating scale.

Table 2

Do teachers deal with the reasons for the violent behaviour of students? Teacher assessments

Statement	I completely agree	I agree	I disagree	I strongly disagree	I don't know
If certain acts of violence are repeated in a particular student, the teacher begins to deal with the factors (with the reasons) behind these violent events.	71 (41%)	97 (56.1%)	5 (2.9%)	0	0
Dealing with the reasons (with the background, the factors) for repeating incidents of violence is primarily the task of the counselling service, not the individual teacher.	8 (4.6%)	42 (24.3%)	87 (50.3%)	35 (20.2%)	1 (0.6%)

Note. N = 173

The teachers' responses presented in Table 2 show that 97.1% of the teachers agree or completely agree that the teacher begins to deal with the factors (with the reasons) behind violent events if certain acts of violence are repeated in a particular student. The vast majority (70.5%) disagree or strongly disagree that dealing with the reasons (with the background, the factors) for repeating violent events is primarily the task of the counselling service, not the individual teacher. The vast majority of the teachers therefore believe that teachers deal with the reasons for violence and that the responsibility for this should not be shifted to the counselling service.

Table 3 shows the teachers' assessments of how often they recognise the factors listed below as the reason for violence in the case that repeated violence occurs in a particular student.

Table 3

Assessment of the frequency of recognising the structural reasons for recurring violence in students

Statement	always	sometimes	rarely	never	I don't know
1) the child him/herself is also often exposed to physical violence (*N* = 174)	17 (9.8%)	133 (76.4%)	17 (9.8%)	0	7 (4.0%)
2) permissive upbringing (*N* = 174) (example vignette 1)	52 (29.9%)	106 (60.9%)	9 (5.2%)	0	7 (4.0%)
3) in his/her environment, the child has examples of hostile attitudes towards people (peers) who are different (*N* = 174) (example vignette 2)	34 (19.5%)	106 (60.9%)	29 (16.7%)	0	5 (2.9%)
4) bullying (*N* = 173) (example vignette 3)	20 (11.6%)	110 (63.6%)	36 (20.8%)	2 (1.2%)	5 (2.9%)
5) violence related to the specific characteristics of a student with special needs (even if the student does not yet have a ruling on his/her status as a special needs student) (*N* = 173) (example vignette 4)	17 (9.8%)	121 (69.9%)	30 (17.3%)	1 (0.6%)	4 (2.3%)
6) the student detaches him/herself from the company of his/her peers due to abuse in the home environment (*N* = 172) (example vignette 5)	7 (4.1%)	84 (48.8%)	55 (32.0%)	6 (3.5%)	20 (11.6%)

If we compare the differences in the recognition of the structural reasons for violence only through the response "always", which expresses complete certainty in recognition, the results show that the teachers are most certain in recognising "permissive upbringing" (29.9%) and "examples of hostile behaviour" (19.5%). A slightly lower level of certainty (approximately 10%) is evident with regard to the recognition of three structural reasons: exposure of the child to bullying (11.6%), the child him/herself is exposed to physical violence (9.8%) and violence related to the specific characteristics of a student with special needs (9.8%). As expected, the least certainty was evident in recognising behaviour as a result of "abuse in the home environment" (only 4.1%).

If the differences in the recognition of the structural reasons for violence are compared in terms of the sums of the assessments "always" and "sometimes", in first place we again find the recognition of permissive upbringing (90.8%). In second place is recognition of the consequences if the child is him/herself exposed to violence (86.2%), followed by recognition of patterns of hostility (80.4%), violence related to the specific characteristics of a student with

special needs (79.7%) and bullying (75.2%). Least recognisable are again the consequences of abuse in the home environment (52.9%), which also has the highest percentage of "I don't know" responses (11.6%). With the exception of recognising violence whose structural reason is abuse in the home environment, more than three quarters of the teachers (75.2% to 90.8%) gave the responses "always" or "sometimes" in their assessments of their recognition of all of the other structural reasons.

These results of the quantitative part of the research answer the second research question and show that the vast majority of the teachers believe that teachers deal with the reasons for violence (97.1%) and that they should not shift the responsibility for this task to the counselling service (70.5%). Nevertheless, teachers are less certain in their responses regarding recognising the structural reasons for violence. The highest level of recognition is in permissive upbringing (always 29.9% and sometimes 60.9%), while the lowest level is, as expected, in recognising abuse in the home environment (always 4.1% and sometimes 48.8%). If we take into account the responses always and sometimes for the other structural reasons (the child is exposed to physical violence, the child has examples of hostility to people in his/her environment, violence related to the specific characteristics of a student with special needs, bullying), the results show that teachers, according to their own assessments, mostly recognise the structural reasons for violence.

From the results of the quantitative part of the research, we can conclude that teachers are mostly able to recognise the structural reasons for violence, the only exception being recognition of abuse in the home environment, and that teachers mostly deal with the reasons for violence in the case of repeated violence.

Regarding the question of the recognition of the individual structural reasons for violence by teachers, the responses of teachers and other professionals in the semi-structured interviews confirmed the assessments from the questionnaire, and are therefore not listed here.

In analysing the interviews (with coding), however, a difference emerged in addressing the reasons for violence by teachers in the case of repeated violence. Below we present a summary of how interviewees in individual schools expressed their views on this topic.

School 1 (4 interviews: 3 teachers, 1 counsellor): teachers do not go into the background, as they already feel overburdened without this; they do not view the repetition of an act as a deeper problem; in response to questions as to whether they delve more deeply into the background of violence, they list measures to reduce problems (such as changing the seating plan, etc.); they believe that such problems should be dealt with in more depth and that the

background should be explored, but there is often a lack of time due to the large number of students in the classroom; difficult cases of violence are too complex for the individual teacher.

School 2 (4 interviews: 3 teachers, 1 counsellor): despite recognising the contexts of violence (e.g., domestic violence, different culture, permissive upbringing, identified students with special needs), the view of teachers on the occurrence of violence is not such that they would take measures to start eliminating the reasons for it; they sanction or eliminate acute situations and seek causes of violence (student provocation), but do not try to establish a connection with the reasons; teachers leave difficult situations and dealing with reasons (e.g., when a student is a victim of domestic violence) to the counsellor.

School 3 (1 interview: counsellor): the interviewee believes that the reasons for violent behaviour should be dealt with, but that engaging with the reasons for and background of the violent acts of students is the task of the counselling service, as teachers have too much work with educating students.

School 4 (4 interviews: 3 teachers, 1 counsellor): from the interviews it was clear that it was difficult for the interviewees even to list specific examples of dealing with the reasons for acts of violence.

School 5 (6 interviews: 4 teachers, counsellor, principal): from the interviews with the teachers it was difficult to determine how they deal with the reasons for violence in the case of repeated violence, as they mainly emphasised the procedure (referring cases to the school counselling service); the school counsellor pointed out that teachers do not have enough knowledge to arrive at conclusions about the reasons for violence, and, moreover, they avoid engaging with the reasons.

School 6 (4 interviews: 3 teachers, 1 counsellor): in many cases the background of violence is so complex that the school does not have the appropriate competencies to take effective action; the counsellor believes that teachers do not have enough time (congested curriculum) or competent knowledge to explore the background to the problem of violence.

School 7 (6 interviews: 3 teachers, 2 counsellors, principal): responding to the question of dealing with the reasons for repeated violence, a first-cycle class teacher stated that her students did not behave violently; the two subject teachers believed that investigating the background can worsen the situation; teachers are not sufficiently trained and certain behaviour can therefore develop more than it would otherwise; some teachers are better equipped to identify reasons and deal with violence than others.

If we compare the responses from the interviews with the results of the quantitative research, we can conclude that the latter reflect the teachers' beliefs

about how they should behave, that is, the teachers perceive dealing with the reasons for violence as their task (not simply as the task of the counselling service). However, the responses in the qualitative part of the research do not confirm that, in cases where certain acts of violence are repeated in a particular student, the teacher begins to deal with the factors or *reasons* behind these violent events; they probably do so in individual cases, but not systematically. This approach is not the way the teacher works; quite the opposite. Certain explanations of the various professionals interviewed, as listed in the above summaries, suggest why they are unable to focus on the reasons for violence.

Conclusion: Pedagogical knowledge of teachers in relation to structural reasons for violence, but inadequate conceptual solutions and state support

The responses to the first research question demonstrate that teachers in Slovenia have the kind of pedagogical knowledge that enables them not only to engage with the immediate causes of violence or disruptive behaviour of the student, but to try to explain the student's behaviour. Although not systematically, teachers can explain such behaviour with structural reasons that require a broader pedagogical knowledge and understanding. In most cases (four out of five examples), the majority of teachers (87.4%, 97.1%, 90.3%, 82.9%, respectively) also have adequate pedagogical knowledge to correctly choose the appropriate moral education action.

On the basis of the questionnaire, the responses to the second research question show that the vast majority of teachers believe that teachers deal with the reasons for violence and are aware that they cannot and should not simply shift this responsibility to the counselling service. However, the responses from the interviews show that, despite the fact that teachers perceive dealing with the reasons for violence as their task and are aware of the importance of doing so, they often do not act according to this perception. They give several reasons for this: the number of students in the class, resulting in the teacher being unable to focus only on individual students; the need for the teacher to devote all of his/her available time to teaching, not to moral education issues and violence; the lack of expertise among teachers in the areas of the complex issues of violence, which leads teachers to avoid the problem due to uncertainty, while more difficult cases are regarded as the task of the counselling service, etc. In addition to the reasons given by the interviewees, we would emphasise that the reasons for the problems of teachers are not to be found only in the teachers themselves, in their pedagogical knowledge and in the heavy workload of teaching; we see

the problem primarily as a systemic and conceptual one. On the level of the school system, the problems begin with the legal instructions for the preparation of the "school moral education plan", which do not direct schools to deal with the structural reasons for violence. The difficulties then continue with a lack of professional support in this area for schools and teachers on the part of state institutions.

Teachers have pedagogical knowledge that enables them to "structure" their understanding of occurrences of violence. However, countering occurrences of violence would be more effective if schools instituted the systematic differentiation of the structural reasons for violence and countered them with moral education and/or support strategies appropriate to the determined differences. In the context of the Slovenian school system, this would entail each school incorporating the structural reasons for violence as a support point in the school moral education plan and, depending on the content of the structural reasons for violence, preparing descriptions, instruments, education and/or support strategies, protocols of conduct, etc. that teachers and other professionals would actually be able to apply in practice. Schools do, of course, need ongoing professional support in this regard, which can only be provided by the state and various specialised institutions.

In the theoretical part, we explained how such an approach differs from certain existing moral education and support approaches. However, existing approaches – ranging from general preventive programmes, such as the creation of an inclusive school climate, to specialised approaches, such as functional behaviour analysis – can, of course, complement the school's moral education and support strategies within the frameworks of the structural reasons for violence.

Acknowledgement

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