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The Interaction between Theory and Practice in Social Pedagogy: A European Campaign and an Interactive Social Pedagogical Tool against Bullying in Schools

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THEORY

PRACTICE

RESEARCH

Bullying is a phenomenon that has intensively concerned the scientific community over the last decades. A lot of research has been undertaken about this phenomenon, and a variety of actions have been planned and developed by state services as well as non-governmental organisations both at a level of prevention and management. The Smile of the Child *is a recognised and certified NGO in Greece which, since 1996, has developed a wide range of social pedagogical actions concerning children's problems, particularly child abuse and neglect, school and cyber bullying, missing and exploited children as well as health and welfare issues.*

The first part of the present article refers to the results in Greece, in the time of crisis, of a pan-European survey conducted in 2011 and 2012 and coordinated by The Smile of the Child. *The second part of the article presents a European social pedagogy oriented interactive educational tool tackling bullying. All data derived from the survey and the educational tool itself are available at* www.e-abc.eu.

Key words: *social pedagogy, bullying, cyber bullying, interactive educational tool, secondary education*

Introduction

Bullying is a phenomenon that increasingly concerns Greek as well as global reality. According to Olweus (1993), bullying is defined as a behavior by which 'a student is bullied when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students. An action is considered negative when a person intentionally inflicts injury or discomfort upon another person' (p. 9). Moreover, according to Olweus (1993), bullying is characterized by three main components:

1. It is an aggressive behavior
2. It is repeated over time
3. It occurs within an interpersonal relationship characterized by an imbalance of power

Bullying may have several forms (Smith & Sharp, 1994; Boulton, et al. 2001; Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Olweus, 2007; Psalti & Konstantinou, 2007):

✦ Physical bullying
✦ Psychological bulling
✦ Verbal bullying
✦ Visual bullying
✦ Social or indirect bullying
✦ Blackmail
✦ Cyber bullying

At this point, it is important to stress that bullying is not just a fight, a conflict or a joke in a school classroom or on a schoolyard. It is something more. Bullying does not involve people who are friends; the main feature of their relationship is an imbalance of power. Moreover, joking and teasing do not cause physical pain. Nevertheless, if joking and teasing happens for a long period and, most of all, if the child feels that the actions of other people are not jokes within the limits of a game, then joking and teasing may turn into bullying.

The first section of this article will provide some of the main findings for Greece resulting from a European survey simultaneously conducted in Greece, Italy, Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia within the framework of the project 'European Anti-Bullying Campaign' *Make the Difference – Talk Now* under the DAPHNE III programme. In the second part of the article the European, social pedagogy oriented, interactive educational tool which was created in the framework of the same project, will be described.

European survey about school bullying

The survey covered the six countries of the partnership scheme and was implemented in a particularly extended sample of secondary schools. 16,227 students participated in this survey by completing an online questionnaire within the framework of special cooperation with the relevant ministries of each country.

In Greece, 4,987 students participated from 167 schools selected through random sampling amongst secondary schools. The students were provided with a structured, anonymous electronic questionnaire uploaded to the programme's website. The questionnaire was designed for the specific survey and covered 6 main thematic axes concerning:
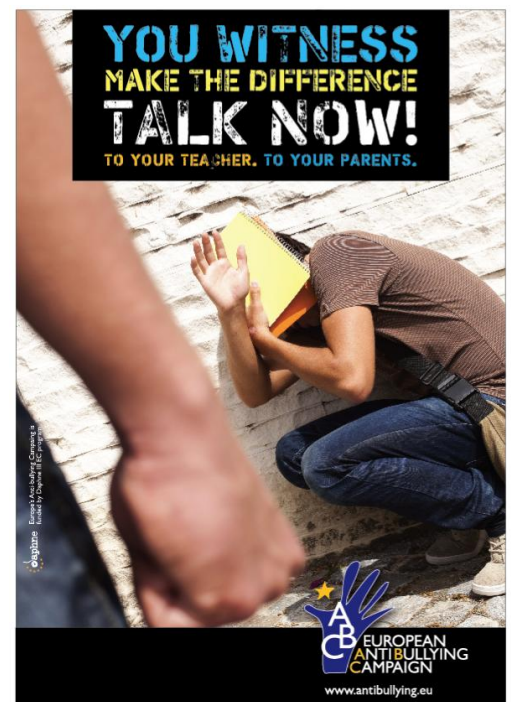
i.   The profile and the feature of the child who bullies
ii. The profile and the features of the child being bullied
iii. The profile, the features and the attitude of those who observe bullying events
iv. The phenomenology of the problem (tension, extent, forms of occurrence)
v.   The ascertainment of the necessity to confront this phenomenon
vi. The formulation of proposals concerning the way and the means that the students want for tackling bullying.

Results

With regards to understanding the phenomenon from the side of the Greek students, the level was particularly high since the students appear to recognize most of the forms that bullying may take in school. However, the factor that seemed to be unclear was the repeatability since a significant percentage (30.26%) believes that one occurrence of such a behaviour is enough to be considered as a bullying event.

With regards to the factors of victimization, 57.03% of the students in Greece believe that the main factor is the child's inability to defend themselves. Other factors are the child's sensitivity [44.6%], nationality [44.34%], body weight [31.6%], sexual preferences (25.05%) and the existence of a physical deficiency (23.88%). Religion as well as nervousness or stress are not considered significant factors of victimization by Greek students.

It is observed that bullying occurs away from school (35.38%), in the school's corridors (32.7%), in the classroom (24.4%) and finally in the neighborhood or the park (21.84%). A significant percentage of 20.93% stated that they have experienced school bullying through the internet.

The answers of students concerning the forms that school bullying may have are shown in Table I.

Table I: Forms of School Bullying

FORMS OF BULLYING	PERCENTAGE
Use of mocking names / nicknames	60.69%
Pushing / punching	45.39%
Teasing due to the outward appearance	36.30%
Narration of mocking stories	27.60%
Other	27.60%
Exclusion from activities – isolation	27.40%
Coercion to actions using violence	21.91%
Light sexual harassment and spreading relevant rumors	21.06%
Forced actions against my will	20.54%
Taking personal things / money	19.69%
Spreading mocking messages – emails	19.16%
Uploading or threats to upload humiliating videos or photos onto the internet	14.26%
Spreading humiliating videos or photos via mobile phones	12.82%

Profile of the child-victim

In addition to the above, 31.98% of the respondents in Greece stated that they had been a victim of school bullying either repeatedly or a few times. Boys presented a higher victimization rate, with 34.2% stating that they had been school bullying victims, whereas the corresponding percentage for girls was 29.71%.

After statistically analyzing the data, there was no statistically significant relationship between victimization, area of residence and ethnicity. In contrast, statistical dependence was found between the victimization degree and the parents' work status. Specifically, the percentage of children being bullied is higher in cases where both parents are unemployed. This situation in relation to other problems increases the child's insecurity and affects their behaviour. In all cases, the existence of family problems is associated with a high percentage of victimization. This raises additional concerns about a possible future increase of bullying in Greece, given that unemployment is growing during the economic crisis we are experiencing, such as the percentage of families where both parents are unemployed. This negative perspective on bullying intensifies the need for organized development of social pedagogical programmes in schools aimed primarily at prevention.

An important factor of victimization seemed to be the relationship of the child with their parents. Specifically, 56% of children reporting 'a very bad relationship' with their parents had been school bullying victims.

Another factor that drastically affects the level of victimization is the way in which their families choose to resolve disputes. More specifically, victimization rates are the highest in cases where disputes are resolved in a violent manner. Finally, students with poor or very poor school performance tend to be victimized at a higher degree.

The 67% of children who had been victims of school bullying talked about it to the persons shown in pie chart 1.

Pie chart 1: Persons to whom victims disclose
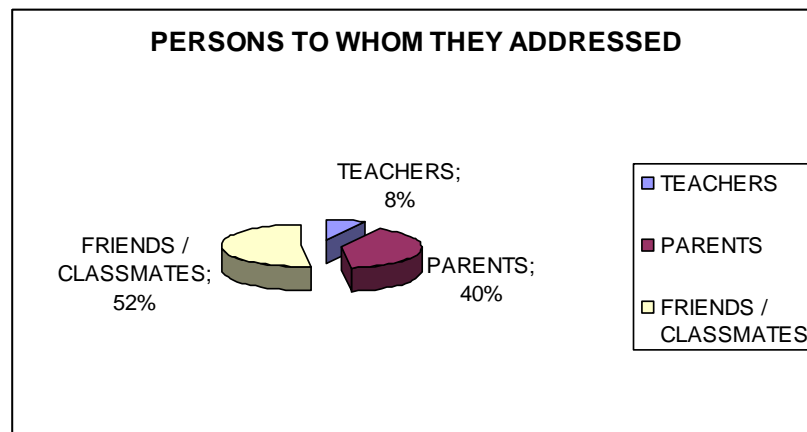
The bullied children that chose not to speak about their experience preferred not to do so due to embarrassment or fear. A significant percentage of those children believe that no one can help them (14.7%). In conjunction with a very low percentage of students (8%) that actually addresses to the teacher in order to discuss the problem, this pessimistic conception highlights the fact that social pedagogy oriented bullying prevention programmes must be systematically developed and organized in schools. These programmes also reinforce confidence in the child and emphasize the important social pedagogical role of the teacher and the school[1] in general to prevent bulling and

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[1] Similar findings and conclusions also came up during research conducted between Greece, the UK and Norway concerning the perception that students have on bullying (Kyriacou et al., 2014).

any anti-social behaviour. Within this context, the need for creating supportive social pedagogy oriented educational tools also emerges.

Profile of a school bully

According to the answers, 30.2 % of the respondents in Greece stated that they had been a school bully either occasionally or repeatedly. There is an intense deviation between the two genders. Specifically, 42.2% of boys against 18.57% of girls reported that they were school bullies.

The results showed that the data of certain demographic characteristics of the child-victim correspond to those of a school bully. Whilst the area of residence and ethnicity do not seem to have any relevance within the act of bullying, family problems seem to affect the psychology and behaviour of school bullies. Specifically, 56.5 % of students whose parents have encountered law issues tend to bully to a higher degree. Also, high statistical dependency (51.00%) is noted in cases where the family faces alcohol or other addiction issues. There is a statistically important relevance between the bullying phenomenon and the child's relationship with their parents as 73.53% of students who reported a 'very bad' relationship with their parents also reported bullying other children.

The way families choose to resolve their disputes affects to a great degree the percentage of school bullies. Specifically, 48.84% of students whose families choose to resolve their disputes in a violent manner stated that they have been a school bully.

Information

64.61% of the respondents stated that they need more information on the bullying phenomenon. Specifically, they stated that they prefer to be engaged and refer to this matter at school (26.28%), in movies (27.56%) and during their discussions (24%).
The detailed results of this research can be found on the website www.e-abc.eu.

The Interactive Educational Tool against Bullying

The Interactive Educational Tool against Bullying has been developed within the frame of the project *Europe's Antibullying Campaign* which was funded by the DAPHNE III programme of the European Committee's DG Justice. The specific tool has been designed in order to be used by teachers in secondary education together with teams of students at their school (the choice of students is made by the teachers) and is available via the project's website (www.e-abc.eu). The tool is accompanied by a manual specially designed for teachers, which is provided free of charge in digital format upon request at the above mentioned website.
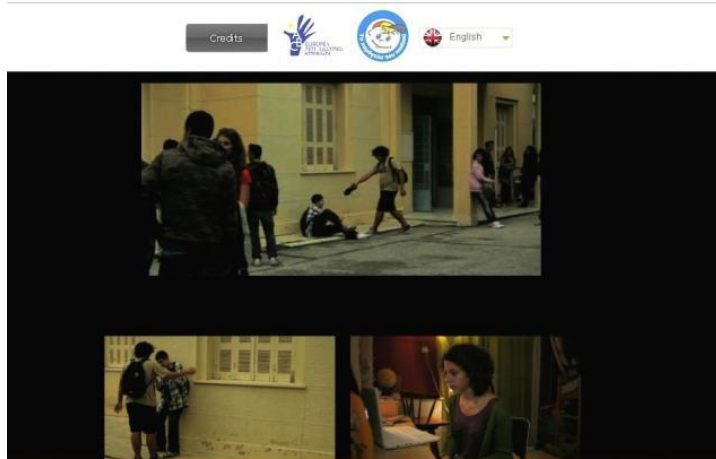
Interactive Educational Tool

The tool presents two bullying stories, one of which takes place in a school and the other one in the cyber world. It is important to notice that the stories are being performed in natural environments by children who are amateur actors. The first story is about a student's physical, verbal and psychological bullying by another student in the school (class, corridor, school yard) while the second story is about cyber-bullying.

The tool gives student-users the option to watch the story from 3 different viewpoints: that of the bullied child, the perpetrator and the bystander. After choosing each character, they introduce themselves by making reference to their family and social environment, and consequently the story unfolds through their own eyes. It should be mentioned that all choices related to the interactive training tool are being made after the group's voting. After choosing the character, the teacher analyses their profile based on the way that they have introduced themselves and what they have said. After that the student-user can choose between three suggested solutions which end of the story they prefer.

Working with the scenarios featured in the educational tool

After choosing the bullying story that takes place in a school we can then choose the character. In the specific story the choices are as follows:

- o Child that is being bullied – Philippos
- o Child that bullies – Mpampis
- o Child that observes – Victoria

By choosing Philippos the environment is changing and the user watches Philippos describing the story in the way that he experiences it, while after that the bullying scenes are presented. At that point, and after the video is completed, the teacher can initiate a discussion with the students on what they have just watched and heard, for example:

Discussion topic 1: Is this, what Philippos is experiencing, bullying?
Answer suggested in the tool's manual: This is bullying, since the power imbalance is obvious ('some kids at school… and specifically Mpampis and his mates' one group of kids against one kid) and also the frequency ('They've annoyed me for almost a year now' and 'Lately I do not have a good time at school or at home') state that this is neither an accidental incident nor a tease.

Discussion topic 2: Why have they chosen the specific kid?
Answer suggested in the tool's manual: At this question students can freely express themselves based on their opinion and also their experience. At the same time, the teacher should focus on the issue of being different and also on the power imbalance.

Discussion topic 3: How does the kid feel?
Answer suggested in the tool's manual: Philippos keeps his head bent all the time, he speaks with a low voice and he sits very close to the camera (just like whispering a secret while at the same time his voice is low and he speaks really slowly). All these are signs of the great embarrassment that he feels for what is happening to him. His embarrassment is also obvious in what he's saying: 'I don't know where to tell it, who I should speak to, I do not feel comfortable about discussing that with my teachers or another child'. The fear is also present at the point where he says: 'The time at school seems eternal'. The emotional and physical isolation that the child experiences are obvious: 'I don't have any friends' – 'I hope … not to be alone at the end'. His feeling of helplessness is obvious, especially at the point where he says: 'I don't know where to tell it, to whom I should speak, I do not feel comfortable about discussing that with my teachers or to another child, and my family – I cannot say it at all because they have their own problems – financial – I don't want to bother them with mine.'

The next step is finding a solution to the story, with users able to choose between the following:

- o No reaction
- o Call a hotline for help
- o Talk to the teacher

The order in which the choices are presented has not been rated since it is a matter of choice. The choice can be made through voting. However, all choices will be presented by starting with the one with the most votes.

Generally speaking, the choices that an abused child can make vary and depend on the individual characteristics of the child, the characteristics of the family, the school environment, the teachers, the nature of the bullying and many other factors. In the specific story the protagonist can react in three ways:

'*NO REACTION*'**:** In this choice the interesting part is the emotional word of the child shown on his face: fear and embarrassment. He 'freezes' when the child who bullies talks to him, and the move that he makes in order to leave is almost non-existing. Additionally, the protagonist chooses perfect silence, he accepts the hits and the teasing without trying to stop them. This is the most common type of the child-target who silently accepts whatever happens, does not react and has no secret friendships in the classroom. Actually, this is exactly how the bullying attitude is being carried on. The reason for which the kids chose this attitude is because they cannot react (power imbalance), there is lack of a supportive network. and at the same time they feel fear and embarrassment.

'*CALL THE HOTLINE FOR HELP*'**:** This is a solution that can be chosen by the kids since it is immediate, it is free of charge and the kids can talk to a specialized professional who is appropriately trained in order to offer solutions to children's problems. Taking into account the feelings of fear, embarrassment and guilt, this line is anonymous, and all essential rules of confidentiality are kept. The telephone call does not provide the solution. It is the appropriate emotional processing of the fact that gives the child the ability to understand the range of solutions they can try in order to avoid the solution of 'NO REACTION'.

'*TALK TO THE TEACHER*'**:** During a bullying incident that takes place in the school environment, the person that will provide a solution to the phenomenon is the teacher. The kid in the story discusses with the teacher in order to find a solution. Usually, children reject this possibility because they feel that in this way they will be rejected by the other children and also by the bullies. However, the teacher should highlight the following:

- The cycle of repetition if nothing active happens (combination with the choice '*NO REACTION*')
- The main characteristic of the school bullying is the power imbalance. The teacher can reestablish power balance.
- The difference between 'I am looking for help' and 'I am asking for someone to be punished'. When a child is asking for help they do so in order to be fine and not in order to punish someone.
- The teacher can help in the gradual solution of the phenomenon.
- In this story, after the teacher's interference, the child who bullies does not attack when he meets the child-target again. His eyes still have the will to bully, but finally he doesn't do it. Gradually, and in the right framework, the phenomenon can be eliminated.

As it was mentioned in the classroom, other suggested solutions can be developed and discussed. In the accompanying manual, the following are mentioned:

- The possibility of communication with the parents and their involvement in a positive way;
- The possibility of communication with kids of the same age and their collaborative action.

Up to this point only a part of the interactive training tool against school bullying has been presented. The same theoretical approach exists throughout the whole training tool.

The tool and the accompanying manual can be found at the programme website www.e-abc.eu.

The website of the programme

Concluding thoughts

This article originally presented certain research results derived from Greece, during a period of economic crisis, which emerged in the context of a European survey on school bullying. This research has highlighted, among others, the need for organized development of social pedagogy oriented bullying-prevention programmes in schools and the creation of educational tools to support this goal.

The educational tool, which was briefly presented, offers an opportunity to student-users to acknowledge all the roles of the persons involved in the phenomenon of bullying. Furthermore, the student also has the opportunity to learn about different possibilities and responses concerning this phenomenon. This tool is based on some fundamental principles, priorities and standpoints of social pedagogy[2] since it emphasises and focuses on the following:

1. the unity of theory and practice,
2. to establish a value system (a 'social pedagogical ethos'),
3. the pursuit of dignity, personal empowerment and well-being,
4. the cultivation of empathetic thinking, reflective observation and discussion within a group of students that leads to a review of certain behaviors and the emergence of new opportunities and positive role models,
5. strengthening a culture of self-respect and respect of diversity,
6. to highlight the value of dialogue,
7. the positive response to all forms of diversity
8. in taking personal and collective responsibility and action,
9. in the cultivation and development of emotional skills and interpersonal communication,
10. the value of group participation and collaborative teamwork,
11. to highlight the role of the teacher,
12. the possibility of engagement of the family context.

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[2] See Mylonakou-Keke, 2013.

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