FACING AND PREVENTING BULLYING THROUGH IMPROVING THE SCHOOL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT:
THE THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF THE PROJECT

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INTRODUCTION: DEFINITION OF BULLYING

Although bullying is not just a contemporary phenomenon in education, only recently it has received substantial research and societal attention.

One reason for this delay may be its *multidimensional character*, which has raised a variety of constraints in its definition and measurement.

A student is being bullied or victimized when he/she is exposed, *repeatedly and over time*, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students.

There should also be an *imbalance in strength*: the student who is exposed to negative actions has difficulty in defending himself/herself.

INTRODUCTION: DEFINITION OF BULLYING

- Bullying involves not only the individual students who act as bullies, victims or bystanders but is an issue that concerns **all the school stakeholders**.
- Bullying affects the *quality of the school* and its *learning environment*.
  - Victims of aggressive behavior feel useless, experience depression, and this fact has a negative effect on their learning and on their academic achievement (Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1994, Slee, 1994).
  - Bullying can increase teachers' stress (Byrne, 1992; Charlot & Emin, 1997; Nakou, 2000).

WHOLE SCHOOL ANTI-BULLYING INTERVENTIONS

⌗ Programs preventing school bullying should have **multiple components** that operate simultaneously at **different levels** in the school community.

⌗ Various research syntheses of the effectiveness of whole school approach have been conducted (e.g., Smith et al., 2004; Wilson et al., 2003).

   ⬛ **School-based programs** have additional effects on outcomes such as reduced truancy and school achievement (Wilson & Lipsey, 2007).

   ⬛ **Theoretically grounded interventions** which are able to disentangle the effectiveness of the different program components should be developed in order to increase the effects of comprehensive school based programs (Baldry & Farrington, 2007).

MAIN THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS OF THE PROJECT

- This theoretical foundation can emerge through integrating research on bullying with Educational Effectiveness Research (EER) which refers to factors that operate at **different levels** and need to be considered in order to improve practice.

- Programs promoting a positive and safe school learning environment are successful (Rigby et al, 2005).

MAIN THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS OF THE PROJECT

- A framework based on research on bullying and on the **dynamic model of educational effectiveness** is offered to schools in order to help them identify what can be achieved and how, in order to deal with and prevent bullying.

    - A longitudinal study revealed that the dynamic model can be used to describe and explain why some teachers and schools are more effective in dealing with bullying (Kyriakides, Creemers & Charalambous, 2008).

    - The dynamic model gives emphasis to the role of the **school learning environment** in understanding effectiveness and also attempts to establish links between **EER** and **improvement of education**.

MAIN THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS OF THE PROJECT

- Schools are helped to identify factors of the dynamic model which contribute to explaining and/or facing bullying.

- Schools are encouraged to treat bullying as a challenge for introducing and achieving relevant **affective** and **cognitive aims** (i.e., social cognition, understanding of social values, emotional recognition, and positive attitudes towards peers) beyond those included in the formal curriculum.

- **School Self-Evaluation (SSE)** is treated as a starting point for developing strategies and actions aiming to face bullying.

DYNAMIC PERSPECTIVES ON PROMOTING QUALITY IN EDUCATION

- A major element of this approach is the emphasis on the **evidence** stemming from *theory* **and** *research*.

- The knowledge-base of EER should be taken into account in developing **SSE mechanisms**.

- The **dynamic model** of educational effectiveness is used as a framework for establishing SSE mechanisms.

- This framework is expected to help schools collect data, through **school self-evaluation** mechanisms, and take decisions about **priorities for improvement** and for developing appropriate **policies** and **action plans**.

DYNAMIC PERSPECTIVES ON PROMOTING QUALITY IN EDUCATION

The dynamic model help schools establish school improvement strategies by:

- Establishing clarity and consensus about the aims of school improvement

- Collecting evaluation data and identifying priorities for improvement.

- Establishing a developmental evaluation strategy

DYNAMIC PERSPECTIVES ON PROMOTING QUALITY IN EDUCATION

- The dynamic model does not only refer to factors that are important for **explaining variation** in educational effectiveness but it also attempts to explain why these factors are important by **integrating different theoretical orientations to effectiveness**.

- Teachers may become aware of both the **empirical support** for the factors involved in their project and the way these factors operate within a **conceptual framework.**

- School stakeholders are offered the opportunity to use in a flexible way this knowledge-base, adapt it to their **specific needs**, and develop their own strategies for school improvement.

MAIN AIMS OF THE PROJECT

\# The project aims to help schools in the five participating countries use an *evidence-based and theory-driven approach* to face bullying among students of diverse socio-ethnic backgrounds.

\# The project aims to find out whether this approach of establishing strategies and actions at school level on bullying is effective.

\# We measure the impact of school based strategies on the improvement of the functioning of school factors included in the dynamic model and on reduction of bullying.

SCHOOL FACTORS OF THE DYNAMIC MODEL

- The following **overarching factors at the school level** are included in the model:

  - policy for creating the **SLE** and actions taken for improving the SLE

  - school policy for **teaching** and actions taken for improving teaching practice

  - **evaluation** of school policy and SLE

SCHOOL FACTORS OF THE DYNAMIC MODEL

- Most bullying incidents occur *outside the classroom* and thereby schools should have a clear policy for the following aspects of the SLE:

1. **student behaviour outside the classroom** (e.g., facing bullying incidents during school breaks)
2. **collaboration and interaction between teachers**
3. **partnership policy** (e.g., cooperation with parents in sharing information and taking actions to face bullying)
4. **provision of sufficient learning resources** (e.g., organisation of school based INSET programmes for facing bullying)
5. **values in favour of learning**, (e.g., understanding of social values, emotional recognition, development of positive attitudes towards peers).

SCHOOL FACTORS OF THE DYNAMIC MODEL

School policy on teaching may encourage teachers introduce new teaching aims that are associated with bullying.

- Bullying is not an isolated phenomenon independent of teaching.

- Reducing bullying can be achieved by **providing learning opportunities** to bullies, victims and bystanders to develop their socio-cognitive skills and their attitudes towards peers and schooling.

SCHOOL FACTORS OF THE DYNAMIC MODEL

- School policy on the **quality of teaching** should be developed further in order to help teachers develop a safe and caring classroom learning environment.

  - This aspect of school policy provides suggestions to teachers on how to deal with classroom misbehaviour and with bullying incidents that may occur during teaching.

- School evaluation mechanisms help school stakeholders to find out who are involved in bullying incidents and which aspects of the SLE and the policy on teaching need to be improved.

- School evaluation mechanisms are expected to help school stakeholders to redefine and improve the school policy on facing bullying.

SCHOOL FACTORS OF THE DYNAMIC MODEL

The above procedure stresses the importance of a share responsibility of the **whole school community** in developing and implementing strategies and actions to face bullying.

The **role of teachers** and their active involvement is crucial for the success of this intervention.

The successful implementation of this project depends on the **active involvement of teachers** and their contribution in designing their action plans by bringing their knowledge and experiences in dealing with bullying.

Thank you for your attention!