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Summary of the ABC-project

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In the ABC (Anti-Bullying Certification) project a European partnership developed a guide for self-assessment of secondary schools. The goal of the procedure is not only to create insight in the current antibullying policy, but also work towards recommendations and ideas for improvement and to create participation and commitment of all students and staff during the process.

The method

The ABC-method starts with collecting the documentation about the current antibullying policy and asking students and staff to fill in the surveys.

The results of the surveys are first shared with the students, who then do a one-day school review ("visitation"). Based on the survey results and their own qualitative impressions, they formulate recommendations.

The results of the surveys and the student recommendations are then shared with the staff (mainly teachers). In a workshop the teachers are informed about bullying mechanisms and what science says about what type of measures and interventions are effective to combat bullying. Based on all this information, the staff formulates their own recommendations.

Finally, the management team reviews all the data and recommendations and scores the school on one of 5 levels with a scoring checklist. Based on their score and strengths and weaknesses, the school can formulate recommendations to improve their antibullying policy.



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With the toolkit, the management can choose appropriate interventions to practically implement the recommendations.

The partners will offer schools assistance in implementing the self-assessment and offering advice on improved antibullying policy. In addition, we work with an ISO-certification institute to develop a formal external ISO-certification. This ideally could be a follow-up of the self-assessment.

The products

The Certification Procedure contains 5 products:

- (1) a guide to the entire procedure for the principal
- (2) a survey for students and teachers
- (3) a review/visitation of the school's antibullying policy by students
- (4) a workshop for teachers
- (5) a toolkit with interventions to improve the policy.

Here we give a short summary of the content of these products.

The guide to the procedure

The general guide to the procedure gives a detailed overview of the basic steps to be taken and how to plan the procedure. It contains a checklist that the school management can use to summarize the data and recommendations collected and to self-assess and score the school. The basic checklist offered is based on the level of commitment in the school for antibullying policy, because in organizational theory, the growth of commitment appears to be a most important factor for innovations in organizations. However, because the partnership is not yet in agreement on this, the guide also offers an alternative checklists based on a check of the availability of documentation of the policy and the extent to which it is disseminated among the school community. This type of assessment is more based on an ISO-like view of documenting the adequacy of procedures.

The guide also contains a chapter on scientific research on which type of methods are proven effective in schools, and a chapter on diversity, outlining how bullying and antibullying policy may be different for ability, body image, gender, sexual orientation, race, culture, poverty, Roma, immigrants and a context of populism.



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The guide has numerous appendices with information and templates for documents (like informing to parents, how to deal with privacy etc.) which can be used during the process.

The current version of the guide has 84 pages (45 without annexes), which was criticized to be too long.

The student survey

The student survey has 20 questions and takes students about 45 minutes to complete.

Most questions are taken from existing international research on school bullying and the question batteries have been tested and found reliable in measuring what they are supposed to monitor.

The questions are about:

- (1) their self-image and sense of empowerment
- (2) 23 forms of negative behavior, including online behavior
- (3) how often they experienced such things and if they found this unpleasant
- (4) if they did unpleasant things themselves
- (5) how often they were helped and by whom
- (6) the reasons for being unpleasant in school (diversity on looks, skills, nationality, culture, religion, gender, gay/lesbian, gender non-conformity, status of parents, and other reasons)
- (7) dominant emotion felt while being in school
- (8) Level of safety, where and why

The teacher/staff survey

The staff survey has 25 questions and also about 45 minutes to complete. Some questions are taken from existing international research on school bullying, but we did not find comprehensive surveys for teachers on this topic, so for the most part we had to develop our own questions. We also wanted to ask teachers similar questions to tot students in order to compare the two views. From research (and our own experiences in this project) we know that teachers often don't notice incidents or pattern of bullying, or they see such behavior with different eyes than students.



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The questions are about:

- (1) to what extent teacher perceive 23 forms of behavior as unpleasant
- (2) if there is a common understanding of this in the team
- (3) how staff perceives unpleasant behavior online
- (4) how the previous issues impact on school safety
- (9) staff views of victim profiles (diversity on looks, skills, nationality, culture, religion, gender, gay/lesbian, gender non-conformity, status of parents, and other reasons)
- (5) self-assessment of antibullying competences
- (6) type of measures staff take to counter bullying
- (7) opinion on need and reliability of student participation in school safety
- (8) what staff thinks is the dominant emotion of students in school
- (9) assessment of level of safety of students, where and why
- (10) how staff supports students in antibullying
- (11) cooperation with parents

The student review/”visitation”

The student review is done by a group of about 10 students who are selected by teachers based on their interest in antibullying policy, ages and diversity. The review takes one day.

In the morning, the students brainstorm about their view on the safety in the school, they are informed about the formal school policy, they get the results of the student and teacher surveys, discuss them, and then do about 30 interviews with other students and – if they want – with some teachers.

In the afternoon, the students analyze all the information. They brainstorm 3 positive and 3 negative aspects of the school, and then select a few key priorities to improve. They end the day by formulating concrete recommendations of how the change objectives can be implemented.



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The teacher/staff workshop

The teacher workshop is also planned as a one-day event. Ideally all, or a representative part of the staff team takes part. In advance, they are asked to fill in a short personal reflection on their competences relating to antibullying.

The workshop starts with a trigger video which show short and different bullying incidents. The staff is asked to reflect on how they would deal with such incidents. It is likely they would do this in different ways; most teams are not aligned on this and even if they are they may have personal preferences and styles, and forms of discriminatory bullying may be either taken more seriously or neglected.

After the trigger discussion, the staff is asked to formulate expectations of the workshop and it is discussed what the goals of the workshop are: to create a joint vision of living together and how to strive for a safe and pleasant school climate.

Then it is discussed how the team defines “bullying” and (pleasantly and non-violent) “living together” and how leadership works to create cooperation and team work on this. In subgroups, staff discuss how to do this based on concrete case studies. This is followed up by discussion on how “school culture” can be influenced.

The results of the surveys and the student recommendations are presented and possible interventions and measures to improve school policy are discussed. The day ends with developing the beginnings of an action plan for the school.

The interventions toolkit

The interventions toolkit is an overview of methods, interventions and projects that schools can use to act to implement the recommendations from the assessment in a practical way. The current version of the toolkit contains 37 interventions, this may be elaborated at the end of the project.

The toolkit is available in two formats: an Excel sheet, which allows the toolkit to be converted in an easily searchable online database in the future, and a pdf file, which makes it easier to scan and read for teachers. When the database becomes larger, a pdf version may become too big and unpractical.



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Overall, the ABC-Toolkit is primarily meant as a tool to make choices; it is not a full manual to implement the interventions. However, our descriptions include internet links to the original sources.

The review of national and European policies

The project made an analysis of the situation in each participating country and of European policy. It proposed six recommendations for further European policy.

1. The European Union could do a review of funded projects on antibullying. This could help focus future antibullying projects and develop a more focused European program.
2. The European Union could consider if European level guidelines for social safety and inclusion in schools would be possible.
3. The European Union could consider making it a priority to open a tender for an ongoing European antibullying campaign.
4. Part of such a campaign could be the development of a clearing house of projects and methods.
5. Another part of such a campaign could be the development of a European “map” of national antibullying policies and related best practices.
6. The international development to legitimize ideological and political hate speech should be recognized as a serious threat to antibullying and to democracy. The EU should consider developing a coherent view antibullying and democracy.

Products and more information of the ABC-project: <https://www.gale.info/en/projects/abc-project>

Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/How-schools-combat-bullying-247976002546108>