

1 INTRODUCTION - BACKGROUND, CONCEPT, AND STRUCTURE OF THIS BOOK

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The introduction chapter gives an overview of the background and concept of this book. It outlines how the VISIONARY website and the book complement each other and gives an outline of each of the chapters in the book.

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1.1. The background and concept of this book

Violence in school, juvenile violence and crime have been among the major topics of concern in all Western countries in recent years. Spectacular incidents like the massacre in Erfurt, Germany, in which 18 people were killed in 2002 (mainly teachers), and teenage suicides due to bullying in Scotland in 2002, raised public attention and made people think that “American conditions” are not so far away any more in European schools as they were supposed to be only a few years ago.

Though not as dramatic as presented in the media, the amount of violence has been rising constantly in the last few years and has wide-ranging effects on our society. In recent years substantial efforts have been made - by the EU, national governments, communities, public institutions, schools and many others - to devise and establish programmes and activities in order to tackle bullying and violence. In 1997 the European Commission launched the “violence in schools” initiative¹ that supported several projects and aimed to create an overview of violence prevention in schools in all EU and some associated European countries. The TMR initiative of the European Commission² supported the “Nature and prevention of bullying project”³. Further European programmes can be found in the link collection of the VISIONARY Internet portal. In addition, a huge number of national programmes have been launched (Chapters 6-10 include overviews of violence prevention activities within Denmark, Finland, Germany, Portugal and the UK). Never before have practitioners had the choice between such a large variety of concepts, materials and other sources of advice.

The Internet adds an additional dimension. It not only provides various search options for finding information and materials but also allows users to interact globally in a number of ways. There is a huge and growing number of discussion forums, mailing lists and chat rooms etc. on various topics. In many European countries it seems that the main problem nowadays is not being able to find information, but rather to get an overview of the huge variety of concepts, programmes, materials etc. that exist.

¹ <http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/education/violence/home.html>

² <http://www.cordis.lu/tmr/scr/network1.htm>

³ <http://www.gold.ac.uk/tmr/#PD>

This situation was the starting point of the **VISIONARY project**⁴, a European collaborative project with partners in Denmark, Finland, Germany, Portugal and the United Kingdom, supported by the European Commission within the Socrates/Minerva programme⁵. The main focus of the VISIONARY project is to create an international **Internet portal** for violence prevention in school in each of the partner countries and in their national languages. In the project we are not developing new concepts or approaches on violence in schools. Rather, we *collect and structure information* that we find on the Internet and provide a platform that facilitates the search for relevant information. In the information section of our website we offer background information on violence and violence prevention in our countries, national and international news on the topic that is regularly updated, and a comprehensive and constantly growing database of links to websites. Furthermore our website aims at *networking* our users - teachers, parents, pupils, experts and anyone searching for information about violence in schools - at a national and international level. In the communication section of the VISIONARY website we offer discussion forums and mailing lists to facilitate this networking.

This **book** and the VISIONARY website are two components of a holistic concept that complement each other and take advantage of the benefits of each medium. Websites and print media are used in different ways. While websites are scanned for information and hardly any site is read from the beginning to the end, books animate readers and go into details. At the same time books are static, they offer a limited amount of information that is fixed and remains unchanged while websites provide access to an almost unlimited and constantly changing and growing pool of information. With this book we aim to give an overview of violence and violence prevention in school in our countries with an emphasis on sources that can be found on the Internet. In doing this we want to give our readers a starting point and animate them to continue their research for information on violence prevention in school on the Internet, preferably on our website. In each chapter of this book we mention and present links to websites that are part of the international and the national link collections of our website. On the VISIONARY website there is a part that is directly related to the book, and we offer a separate section that lists all the links mentioned in the different chapters of this book. As websites are subject to constant changes,

⁴ <http://www.violence-in-school.info>

⁵ <http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/socrates/minerva/action.html>

and sometimes change their address or disappear completely, we update this section regularly, and if possible, offer archived versions of sites in case they are taken off-line.

With this book we especially address practitioners who work in the field of violence prevention in school and who are interested in using the Internet as a source of inspiration for their work. We assume that, in spite of all the differences between our countries in terms of cultural background and educational systems, there is much our countries can learn from each other. We hope that both the VISIONARY book and the website can contribute to thinking about and the trialing of concepts that might come from other countries.

We do not claim to give a complete picture of violence prevention in school in our countries. Rather, we give an insight into selected examples of interesting websites, projects, concepts and ideas.

1.2. The structure of this book

Chapter 2, Supporting violence prevention in school using the Internet, gives an overview of basic concepts relating to the Internet, different ways of searching for information, communicating with others, and the concept of online communities. As an example of how these different aspects are combined and as the starting point for this book, the VISIONARY website is presented.

Chapter 3, Violence in school, introduces definitions of violence and bullying in school, and also its prevalence and sources, in Denmark, Finland, Germany, Portugal and the UK. It reveals the differences and similarities between definitions and concepts within and between our countries and presents common tendencies in terms of the prevalence of violence. Furthermore, this chapter reveals that aggressive and violent behaviour is caused by a broad variety of sources that interact in a complex way, and points out the necessity that programmes or activities that combat aggressive or violent behaviour should focus on multiple rather than single sources.

Chapter 4, Violence prevention in school, first clarifies the concept of violence in school and its sources (individual, academic, cultural and social). Based on international research, it stresses some of the main features of the pedagogical context and the problem of violence in school. The chapter introduces primary, secondary and tertiary preventive measures that can be

implemented in schools. It also presents a theoretical and practical set of measures to improve relationships within school and increase the participation of the different actors (teachers, pupils and parents) at the classroom and school level.

Chapter 5, Activities for violence prevention in school, outlines a variety of different types of activities against violence in schools, based on the system of categories in the link collection of the VISIONARY portal. For each category a theoretical introduction and several examples of websites are given.

Chapter 6, Violence prevention in school: Initiatives and Internet resources in Denmark, gives an overview about the Danish school system and crime prevention in Denmark. Furthermore it presents selected websites and projects from various fields and outlines trends concerning violence prevention in school in Denmark

Chapter 7, Violence prevention in school: Initiatives and Internet resources in Finland, gives an overview of school violence prevention in Finland, focusing especially on materials and projects that can be found on the Internet. In addition to this, the chapter includes information on Finnish projects, associations and organisations offering support and advice for children, adolescents and their educators. Included are examples of national organisations and local projects that focus on preventing violence in schools, supporting mental well-being, and improving the social environment of children and youth.

Chapter 8, Violence prevention in school: Initiatives and Internet resources in Germany, introduces violence prevention in school in Germany, and considers specific issues that stem from the federal structure and complex educational system in Germany. It gives an overview of German resources related to violence prevention in school on the Internet, such as for instance German portals, initiatives, organisations and campaigns. Selected websites and projects are presented giving an insight into popular concepts, ideas and resources in Germany.

Chapter 9, Violence prevention in school: Initiatives and Internet resources in Portugal, presents the main initiatives from the Portuguese educational system relating to violence prevention in school and the promotion of values that instil peace and good citizenship. It gives an overview of Portuguese resources related to violence prevention in school on the Internet and presents the main websites and projects.

Chapter 10, online communication and communities addressing bullying: A UK perspective, reviews some of the approaches to bullying and violence prevention that are currently being employed by schools within the UK. It also outlines the Internet's role in bullying and violence prevention in UK schools and presents selected projects and websites from the UK.

1.3. Links in this book and in the “book section” on the VISIONARY site

Entering URLs, especially long ones, can be a time-consuming and tedious activity. For this reason we offer a separate section within the VISIONARY website that includes all the links that we mention in this book, listed according to the respective chapters, to make the process of browsing through the examples of good practice from our countries easier.

Websites are subject to constant changes: They change their content, their layout, their URL and sometimes disappear completely. As some of the URLs we list in this book will become obsolete over time, we will offer cached versions of sites wherever this is possible (for instance the ones that are available via Google or the Internet Archive⁶). All the information relating to websites we present in this book was accurate in April 2003.

The “book section” can be found within the “information” section of the VISIONARY website.

⁶ <http://www.google.com> and <http://archive.org>