EDUCATIONAL CONCEPT FOR SAFE SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA (GOOD PRACTICES, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS)

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

The research focus of this work raises the issue that refers to the assessment of the effects of the project models for safe schools, which are derived from the National Strategy for Reducing Violence in Schools in Republic of Macedonia (2012-2015) through promoting a sustainable educational concept for safe secondary schools. This work offers answers, in the form of conclusions to the stated questions, such as: whether, and how much do the project models, which are realized in secondary schools, supported and in a "dialectic" relation with the relevant educational institutions from the governmental and non-governmental sector (Ministry of Education and Science, the municipalities, and non-governmental organizations), achieve the primary goal; what are the benefits from the implementation; and what are the models of sustainability? The goal of the research is to assess the conceptual insights and efficiency of the projects, and their influence on strengthening the educational concept of securing a safe school environment in secondary schools in R. Macedonia. Research of this issue is done with assessment research. Due to the complex and diverse nature of the issue under investigation, primary significance is given to the views and needs of all the relevant factors involved in the process. This benefits the idea that the research is of empirical character. It is also supposed that the conceptual insights of the projects have a positive influence on strengthening the educational concept for securing a safe school environment in secondary schools in Republic of Macedonia.

1. INTRODUCTION

Improving the quality of education is an existing problem, which can be explored from several aspects. The introduction of the project models is aimed towards implicitly improving the inter-ethnic relations through education, and "intervening" in the process of securing a safe environment in secondary schools. Such

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an educational concept, set in this manner, in a global framework means strengthening and supporting the relevant factors in the field of education in R. Macedonia. According to analogy, the need arises for consistency and continuity of the project models through their integration in the educational system on a national level.

This topic additionally implies new challenges being placed in front of the schools and generally the whole society, in the direction of preparing an educational policy for consistent strengthening of the capacities of all of the relevant factors, with the goal of more efficient handling of the challenges from the field of securing a safe school environment.

Hence, the need arises for establishing a system, which is treated in this work as an educational concept integrating the indirect

consumers (pupils) of the existing education and living in a present real-life context, as in the near future they will be active creators of a civil society. It is obvious that in this educational context, in a successive and simultaneous sense, such a significant role is played by the staff of teachers and the school services. On the other hand, in the "chain" of the educational concept, family is an important "link", taking up a justified place for their views and perception of a safe school environment for their children.

The project models for safe schools, which have just started to be implemented in educational policy and practice, are aimed towards improving and strengthening the good practices in the context of the school climate, and intervening in the recognition, reaction, and reduction of any kind of violence among secondary school peers.

1.1. Defining the term "safe schools"

The responsibility of the adults for creating even better conditions for safe growth and development of children is stated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Namely, in Article 19, Chapter 1, the responsibility of the country-signees is determined: *"to take all the legislative and administrative, social and educational measures for protection of the child from every type of physical or mental violence, abuse, neglect, bad behavior, mistreatment, or exploitation, including sexual abuse."* In addition, in Article 28, Chapter 2, it is declared that *"the member countries are taking all the appropriate measures for discipline in schools to be conducted in accordance with human dignity and this Convention"* (Ministry of Education and Science, 2012).

In the past decade in R. Macedonia, the media, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and many non-governmental organizations reported on dramatic and shocking violent incidents that have left all of us disturbed and surprised by the scope of potential of school violence. The Concept for the Nine-Year Primary Education by the Bureau of Education and the Ministry of Education and Science is linked to the basic principles set early in primary school, where it has been stated that the school itself will take every security measure in place:

a) an environment that does not represent a potential or real-life threat for the pupils' physical health and integrity;

b) a positive psycho-social climate in the school;

c) regular and consistent sensitive following of the principle of non-violence in any shape;

d) opportunities for all the pupils during the school year to acquire skills and insights as to how to keep and improve their health, as well as to handle stress and solve conflict situations with non-violent methods (Ministry of Education and Science and Bureau for the Development of Education, 2007).

1.2. Defining violence

There are many definitions of violence, and each one defines the intention of inflicting harm to another person, which in fact makes violence different from other negative occurrences. In this sense, violence will be defined in the function of its recognition, timely reaction, impeding, and sanctioning.

According to the World Health Organization, **"violence"** refers to any kind of intentional use of physical and psychological power. Violence can appear in the form of a threat or include the use of force directed towards oneself, another person, or a whole group/community. It ends (or it can end) with physical damage, death, psychological damage, or developmental impairment (World Health Organization, 2002).

1.3. Approach based on the whole school community

In order for there to be efficient obstruction of violence, schools must take into consideration the approach based on the whole school community, which focuses on the safety and well-being of all the school practices. The approach based on the whole school community has a variety of positive aspects. It is based on the concept of connecting the children with their families (home), their peers, and their teachers (at school) in the framework of a community, as part of the wider community.

The approach based on the whole school community emphasizes school violence as a collective challenge. Such an approach towards this issue involves the whole school community, including the children, the young, the teachers and the school services, the parents, the educational institutions, the local community, as well as the outer local and international organizations, and it is aimed to-

wards raising consciousness of the factors of risk or school violence and providing the pupils and school staff with skills for the development of protection measures. This approach is described in more detail in the "Reducing Violence in Schools – How to Change Things" Handbook, published by UNICEF, Skopje, Program of the Council of Europe (UNICEF, 2006).

However, the approach based on the whole school community depends on the mutual support among the members of the school community and their understanding for the key moral values, such as: responsibility, respect, trust, righteousness, care for oneself and for the others, civil responsibility, etc. The school approach additionally reduces the cases of violent behavior through strengthening the relations between the pupils and the school staff. In such a way the emotional health, well-being, and potential for learning is being supported (Cowie, H. and Jennifer, D., 2007).

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Subject of research

The subject of this research is the effects of the conceptual setting of the project from the very start of its implementation on the improvement and reduction of violence among pupils in secondary schools. At the same time the focus of the research is placed on its influence on strengthening the educational concept for securing a safe school environment in R. Macedonia.

2.2. Aim and character of the research

The aim of the research is assessing the conceptual setting and efficiency of the educational project models for the promotion of the prevention and intervention of school violence and their influence on strengthening the educational concept for securing a safe school environment. According to its character, it has the characteristics of an evaluative, empirical and theoretical research.

2.3. Research tasks

The character, multi-layering and comprehensiveness of such a research results in the realization of several tasks, grouped according the predictable steps of doing research.

1. Doing an analysis of the conceptual setting of the project models.
2. Exploring the views and educational needs of the pupils for the implementation of the project models.
3. Exploring the views and needs of the school services for the implementation of the project models.
4. Exploring the views and educational needs of the teachers involved in the project models.
5. Exploring the views of the parents for the implementation of the project models.

2.4. Research hypotheses

General hypothesis

It is thought that the conceptual setting and the implementation of the project models for the promotion and prevention of school violence as an educational concept of this research will positively influence the strengthening and ensuring of a safe school climate, reduction of violent acts, and improvement of inter-ethnic relations in secondary schools.

Separate hypotheses

1. Implementing the project models positively influences the views and educational needs of the pupils.
2. There is a statistically significant difference in the views of the pupils from different communities regarding the implementation of the project models.
3. The school services have positive views regarding the conceptual setting and implementation of the project models.
4. The school services have educational needs for the implementation of the project models.
5. Teachers have educational needs for the implementation of the project models.
6. Parents have positive views regarding the implementation of the project models.

2.5. Methods of research

This research employed several methods in order to provide quality insights: analysis (structural and content), synthesis, description, induction, and generalization.

2.6. Techniques and instruments of research

This research employed the following techniques: analysis of relevant pedagogical documentation, and surveying.

Research equivalents of the techniques are the following research instruments:

Participant questionnaire (P/U-2015);

Questionnaire for the school services (P/PS-2015);

Teacher questionnaire (P/N-2015);

Parent questionnaire (P/R-2015).

2.7. Population and research sample

This research covered a variety of samples:

2.7.1. Sample of communities

The project models were realized in 6 (six) communities of multi-ethnic variety on the territory of R. Macedonia.

2.7.2. Sample of secondary schools

The project models were realized in state secondary schools: the general and vocational stream in the given communities. They were realized in a total of 24 (twenty-four) secondary schools.

2.7.3. Sample of pupils

Pupils from each year (i.e. first, second, third and fourth year) from every secondary project school were included as a separate sub-sample in the project models. Every class determined three pupils that were directly involved in the whole project cycle. Of all the pupils included in the project models, a choice was made of three or four pupils in the framework of the school team involved in the project. 356 pupils took part in the research (***Note:*** Between 500 and 560 pupils participated in the realization of the project activities in the project schools (in the period between 2012 and 2014). The research covered a total of **356 pupils**).

2.7.4. Sample of members of school services

For successful realization of the project models it was necessary to involve the school services (pedagogical-psychological staff). On a school level one representative of this team was designated to play the role of a school coordinator of the project team. 41 members of this staff were involved in the research (***Note:*** Almost all the members of the school services (i.e. over 50) have successively been involved in the realization of the project activities in the schools (in the period between 2012 and 2014). The research covered a total of **41 school services members**).

2.7.5. Sample of teachers

A separate sub-sample of the project models involved teachers of secondary schools. 182 teachers participated in the research.

2.7.6. Sample of parents

At least 4 (four) parents were involved in the project activities of every secondary school, and at the same time they were part of the school team for safe schools. A total of 58 parents took part in the research.

3. ANALYSIS OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results and discussion - pupils

The data demonstrate numerous questions and dilemmas that deserve serious further analysis and reexamination of one's views and thoughts on the relevant factors that make up the choice of participants. The question posed was: Were the excellent pupils chosen because of a model of non-violent behavior or was it that these pupils might have more developed leadership skills among the other pupils as opposed to the pupils who have lower achievements, or maybe in the choice of pupils it was a question of "a dose of prejudice" towards the pupils with lower achievements following the idea that "he/she who manifests

violent behavior cannot answer to the requests of strengthening the concept of safe schools through manifesting non-violent behavior"? Research-wise it is right to stress that the expectations regarding the question: *Where does violence take place (different types)* move in an unexpected direction, i.e. the classroom is the place where violent acts happen the most, as opposed to the expectations of the research team that specifically that place should be the safest organized unit.

According to the analyzed data the conclusion that is brought is that in the future more work should be done on this component of the project, i.e. there should be work done on strengthening the pupils' abilities to discover and recognize the different types of violence as well as their encouragement in taking the next adequate steps. On the other hand, though, the reason for insecurity and absence of personal safety in school can be gathered from the statement by the pupils, according to who violent acts do take place in the classroom (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Question 2: Where do the following types of violence take place?

		N	%	C%
	Classroom	438	36.7	143.1
Where have	School hall	163	13.6	53.3
violent acts	School yard	223	18.7	72.9
taken place?	Close to the school	228	19.1	74.5
	In public	143	12.0	46.7

This research yet again places its focus on questions related to the initial conceptual setting of the project models. Namely, in the extra-curricular activities of the type: sports competitions and fair play tournaments, trainings on the topic of non-violent communication, organized school days dedicated to non-violence, creation of posters, school clubs for mediators, etc., the models of non-violent behavior are creatively and directly promoted, with the pupils themselves being their active creators.

The relevance of this data confirms the conclusion of the positive and functional reflection of the project mission on the views and behaviors of the pupils in their everyday life in multi-ethnic environments. Following this and other data from the research with the other target groups, which when cross-analyzed gave the same results, the need evolved for continuation and expansion with the real-

ization of the project models with a broader sample of secondary school pupils, as well as for simultaneously starting with its realization even at an early school age.

Stating the numerous topics for trainings and workshops for the prevention and overcoming of violent behavior by the pupils does not merely represent an analogy of knowledge from that field, but in fact it points to the developed consciousness of the pupils for strengthening their knowledge and developing moral values necessary in a contemporary civil society, as practical models for the prevention and overcoming of violent behavior among peers, regardless of their ethnic "substance". There is a relatively large variety of statements among the pupils on the level of cities, regarding "the mechanisms for the recognition of violent behavior and encouragement for stating them." The concluding insights once again confirm the hypothesis of the existence of differences in the views of the pupils from different communities on the implementation of the project models (Graph 1).
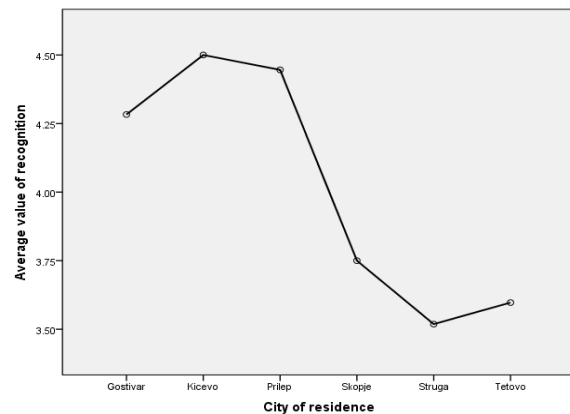
Graph 1. Ilustrative portrayal of the average value of the cities with project models according to the level of recognition of violence

Results and discussion - teachers

It has been determined that the correlation between the categories of frequency of violence among pupils is connected to the views of the secondary school pupils, which further confirms the consistency of the views of both participant-groups in the questionnaire (Graph 2).
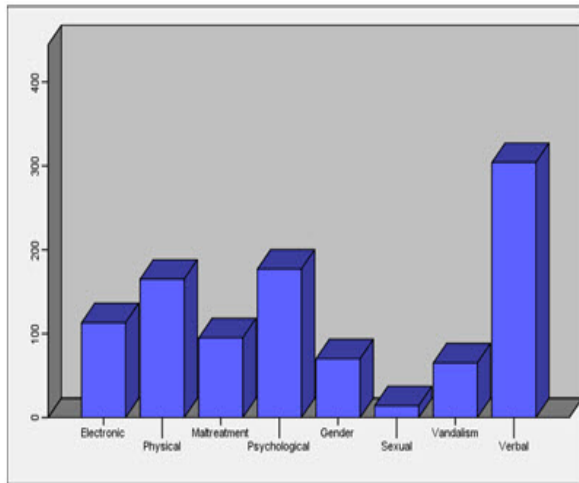
Graph 2. Types of violece according to teachers

The data confirm the hypothetical framework, according to which the conceptual setting of the project models, which predict "a corpus" of trainings and workshops as "a mid-goal", set the professional competence of the teachers and represent a significant element in the mosaic of improving one's quality of life in safe school environments, hence having the epithet – multi-ethnic.

The qualitative analysis of the data, according to which the teachers argument the benefits of the project, demonstrate that the project models influence the formation of the pupils' views and the decrease of physical and verbal violence, while at the same time increasing their degree of tolerance. Furthermore, the extra-curricular activities contribute to leading quality classroom and extra-classroom "situations" by supporting the continued communication among the pupils of different ethnicities, while developing the model of "safe participants" in the environment in which they work.
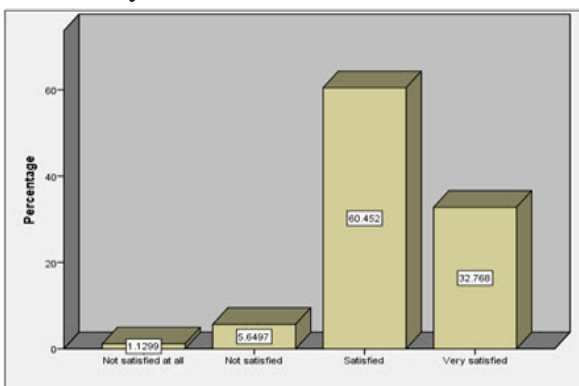
Graph 3. How satisfied are you by the project models

Through the promotion of a mutual and friendly relationship and cooperation among the young, the stereotypes and prejudices of "the other one different from me in language, culture and religion" are being overcome. The teachers firmly state that this model is projected even among the teaching staff of different ethnic communities. A recommendation from the research is that there is a need for analysis of the study programs of the institutions of higher education that create teachers for secondary school as well as for creating study programs/teaching content from the field of multicultural education. The relevance of the data received greatly benefits the conclusion of a positive and functional reflection of "the project mission" on the views and behaviors of teachers in their everyday life in multiethnic environments. Following these and other data from the research with the other target groups, which through cross-analysis give the same result, the need arises for continuation and expansion of the project models with a broader sample of secondary school population, as well as for simultaneously starting its realization from the early school age.

**Results and discussion - school services**

If one takes the approach of comparative analysis of the data received from analyzing the views of the teachers and the school services, regarding the frequency of violent acts among the secondary school population, it can be stated that the school services note a higher frequency in regards to the dynamics of the violent acts (Table 2).

	f	%	C%
Never	55	26.4	141.0
Several times a year	69	33.2	176.9
Several times a month	48	23.1	123.1
Once a week	14	6.7	35.9
Daily	22	10.6	56.4
Total:		100%	

Table 2. Question 1: How often is violence manifested in your school?

According to the ranking of the type of violence, the school services place verbal violence among pupils of secondary school at the top, followed by physical violence, then psychological violence, and cyber-

violence (cyber-bullying) as a new type of violence, according to its nature (Graph 4).
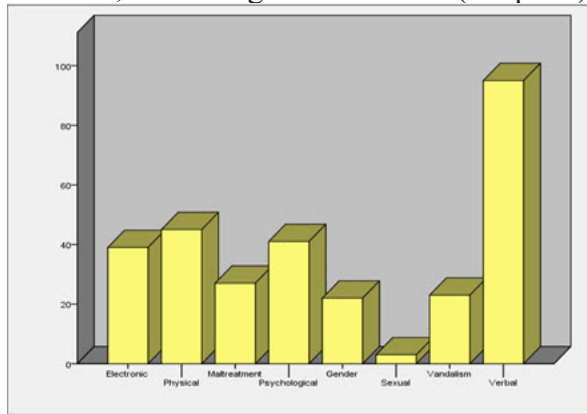
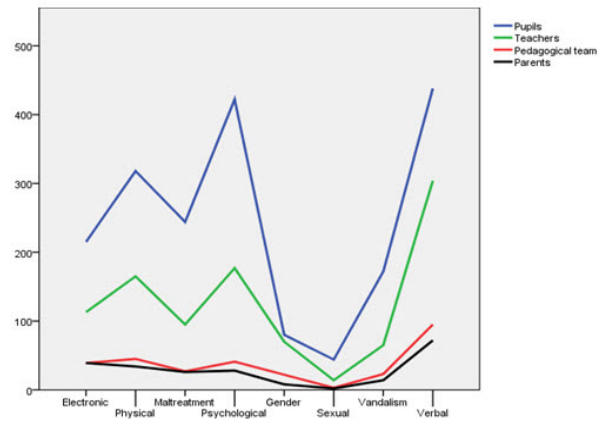**Graph 4.** Types of violence according to school services

The qualitative analysis of the data, according to which the school services give their arguments for the project benefits, have an influence on the formation of the pupils' views and the decrease of physical and verbal violence, while increasing their degree of tolerance.

Results and discussion - parents

The analyzed data illustrate the idea that the parents have relatively positive views regarding school safety. The comparative analysis of this data with the data received from the analyzed views of the pupils (in this case, their children) points to the fact that there is a high level of correlation in regards to the perception of their personal safety in the school.

The data received prove that the greater percentage of the parents think that they had "never" noticed violence in the school, while another significant percentage stated that there had been violent acts among pupils "several times a year". According to the views of the analyzed parents it can be concluded that the parents involved showed openness to cooperation in the project activities.

The data presented in Graph 5 represent a comparative analysis of the insights gained of every category regarding the types of violence that are manifested among the secondary school population.

Graph 5. Types of violence according to all the participants in the research

From the above-given summarized analyses one can confirm the importance of sustainability and a proper setting of the project models in secondary schools, and in this direction, confirm the general hypothesis of this research, according to which the conceptual setting and implementation of the project models for the promotion of the prevention and intervention of school violence as an educational concept, positively influence the strengthening and securing of a safe school environment, as well as the decrease of violence and improvement of the multi-ethnic relations in secondary schools.

4. CONCLUSION

According to the analyzed data the logical conclusion is that in the future more work should be done on strengthening the pupils' and teachers' abilities regarding being introduced to and recognizing the different kinds of violence, as well as encouragement in taking the appropriate steps.

The realization of this educational concept should start as early as the pre-school age, i.e. in primary school, with the aim of providing continuity of the process and prevention from an early age. However, on the other hand, the cause of insecurity and absence of personal safety can be found in the statements of the pupils that have come forward and according to which violence happens in schools.

Through the extracurricular activities of the following type – sports competitions and fair play tournaments, trainings on the topic of non-violent communication, organized school days dedicated to violence, the creation of posters, school clubs for mediators, etc. – the models of non-violent behavior are being cre-

atively and directly promoted, while the pupils themselves are the active creators and participants.

One of the reasons for hiding violence is that the pupils are uninformed concerning the manner of following the appropriate procedures. A second reason would be the existence of fear and insecurity among the young, as an indicator that should be treated seriously by the relevant institutions and other experts. In addition, a third reason is the fear and insecurity regarding revealing their identity and the possible repercussions that might happen if the pupils are uncovered in society.

The relevance of the data that was received benefits the conclusion of a positive and functional reflection of the project mission on the views and attitudes of the pupils and teachers in everyday life in multi-ethnic societies. Thus, following these and other data from the research with other target groups, which through cross-analysis give the same result, there has been imposed the need for continuation and expansion with the realization of the project models, with a wider sample of high-school population, as well as the need for simultaneously starting the realization even in the early school age.

It is necessary to organize "a corpus" of trainings and workshops that place the professional competence of the teachers and their assistants as a subsidiary goal, being an extremely significant "element" in "the mosaic" of raising the quality of life in safe school environments, with the adjective: multi-ethnic.

General Recommendations

- Establishing a national policy, procedures, and mechanisms for prevention and handling of violence in schools.
- Mutual defining of violent behavior in order to start a dialogue for the creation of preventative activities and activities for handling violent behavior.
- Responsibility-taking and participation of all the members of the school community in the creation and establishing of preventative measures as well as measures for handling violent behavior.
- Developing a school policy, procedures, and protocols for prevention and handling violent behavior.
- Reviving the topic of kinds of violence.

- Promoting knowledge of and skills for non-violence.
- Establishing activities and programs for being introduced to and showing respect for differences, cooperation, and mutual activities among pupils of different groups.
- More cooperation between schools and the local community, other institutions and organizations, with the goal of enabling full social care and protection of pupils' rights.

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Conflict of interests
The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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