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# TOWARDS WELL-BEING AT SCHOOL WITH INTEGRATIVE PEDAGOGY

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this presentation is to consider intervention for developing school well-being and preventing bullying. Intervention is realized with the Integrative Pedagogy [1] [2] and viewed from the perspectives of the school community and the professional development of the school staff.

Finnish comprehensive school teachers are highly educated and motivated for their jobs. This has been seen as one of the reasons for the good learning results in the academic skills of pupils. There is, however, a need for improvement of the well-being of pupils. Bullying in schools is also a common issue. The teachers together with other school professionals need training, both as individuals and as a community, to develop their expertise in creating a culture of well-being.

Based on earlier research, certain factors need to be taken into account in effective interventions: 1) Development and intervention should cross the boundaries between different subjects and professionals. 2) Intervention should be long enough. 3) Both the intervention and its implementation should be research-based. 4) The action of the intervention should be critically considered as both an evaluator tool and a tool for development. 5) Intervention should be evaluated from the viewpoint of both individual and community levels.

This qualitative interventionist case study examined how teachers and other professionals in school community prepared working methods for improving school well-being in everyday schoolwork. The formal knowledge of the intervention is based on the Balanced Well-Being Promotion Model® [3] [4]. The data is composed of focus groups, interviews, memos and observations in intervention during three semesters 2009-2010.

The results show that teachers experienced pedagogical discussions to be the most important working method in the development process. Through pedagogical discussions, school professionals built a shared understanding and shared practices in the complex phenomenon of school well-being. That also reflected occupational well-being and job satisfaction. Furthermore, the results indicate that when trying to advance school well-being, it is important to take the time for pedagogical and reflective discussion in the whole work community. There is also a strong possibility that target-oriented and holistic understanding of school well-being in the school community effectively prevents school bullying. Overall the creation and development of individual and collective expertise presumes innovative thinking of teachers' in-service training. The intervention for school well-being also presumes more research and evaluation of its impacts.

Keywords: School well-being, bullying, expertise, Integrative Pedagogy, professional development of teachers, in-service training of teachers.

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

Finnish pupils achieve excellent academic results [5]. Despite good academic results, there is, however, a need for improvement in the social skills and well-being of pupils [6] [7]. In counterpoint to good academic achievements there is some concern in Finland about the well-being of pupils [8] [9]. In international studies there is also some concern, that Finnish pupils not feel comfortable in school and that bullying is also a common issue [10] [11] [12] [13].

Historically each generation of children has typically better welfare than their parents in childhood. However since 1990 this development has changed in Finland: young people's well-being began to decrease [14]. The physical health status of children and young people has actually improved during the last decade but social and psychological welfare has decreased [15]. In 2005, the Ministry of Education established a task force for improving and supporting well-being in schools [16]. Since the beginning of this century, there has been several studies carried out alongside those relating to school

well-being - into bullying in school, school attitudes, school engagement, school attachment and school drop-outs. There have been many variety of actions and development programmes in schools for improving student guidance and counseling, and the agency of children and young people at school [17] [18].

As mentioned above well-being in school can be studied from several viewpoints. In the conceptual model of school well-being of Konu and Rimpelä [19] well-being is viewed through four viewpoints: 1) school conditions, 2) social relationships, 3) means for self-fulfillment and 4) health status. In this model, well-being, teaching and education, and achievements and learning, are all interconnected. The model emphasizes health education, which is not the aim of this study, although the model effectively describes well the sociological phenomenon of well-being in school and takes into account the psychological phenomena involved well-being. In recent years the term “psychosocial” has been used with increasing frequency to describe children’s health and wellbeing at school [20].

In a recent article school well-being is analysed in four countries: Finland (Lapland), Sweden (Norrbotten) and Norway (Finn mark) and North West Russia (Murmansk region) incorporating in total 1,424 participants, comprised of 13-15 year old school children, using a HBSC-questionnaire (Health and Behavior of School Aged Children). The article reports that experiences of bullying were most frequent in Russian schools, followed by Finnish and Norwegian schools. In Swedish schools bullying, was not a big problem.

Bullying has been widely studied especially in Finland and Norway during the last decades. It is one of the most significant risks to well-being. On the basis of earlier research, certain factors need to be taken into account in interventions or programmes that aim to reduce and prevent school bullying and promote well-being, if the process is to be successful. These critical factors are the creation of general awareness and collective understanding of bullying phenomena and the commitment of adults in the community to pre-emptive action[21] [22] [23] [24].

At present there are several different methods available, both for intervening in bullying and for teaching social skills to students. The problem with these programmes even in international studies is their low impact [25] [26]. In addition, when teachers, parents and pupils encounter bullying situations, they usually feel powerless. Is it possible, that the methods for reducing bullying concentrate only on individual factors affecting well-being? Or is it that only few individual teachers in schools are trying to make an effort in creating well-being? In this study it is alleged first, that *schools and the professional community of teaching staff needs a targeted and systematic culture of the development of well-being*, in which the teacher is the strategic leader of social well-being in the classroom. Secondly, *teachers together with other school professionals need training, both as individuals and as a community, to develop their expertise in creating a culture of well-being*.

Finnish comprehensive school teachers are highly educated and motivated. This has been seen as one of the contributing factors in the good learning results achieved in the academic skills of pupils. Initial teacher training gives teachers the opportunity to study the prevention of school bullying or the improvement of school well-being. If the assumption is that the whole school community needs to improve well-being at school, it means that some factors need to be taken into account in effective intervention and the in-service training of teachers: 1) Development and intervention should cross the boundaries between different subjects and professionals. 2) Intervention should be long enough. 3) Both the intervention and its implementation should be research-based. 4) Action should be looked at from the viewpoint of its impact on both evaluation and development. 5) Intervention should be evaluated from the viewpoint of both individual and community.

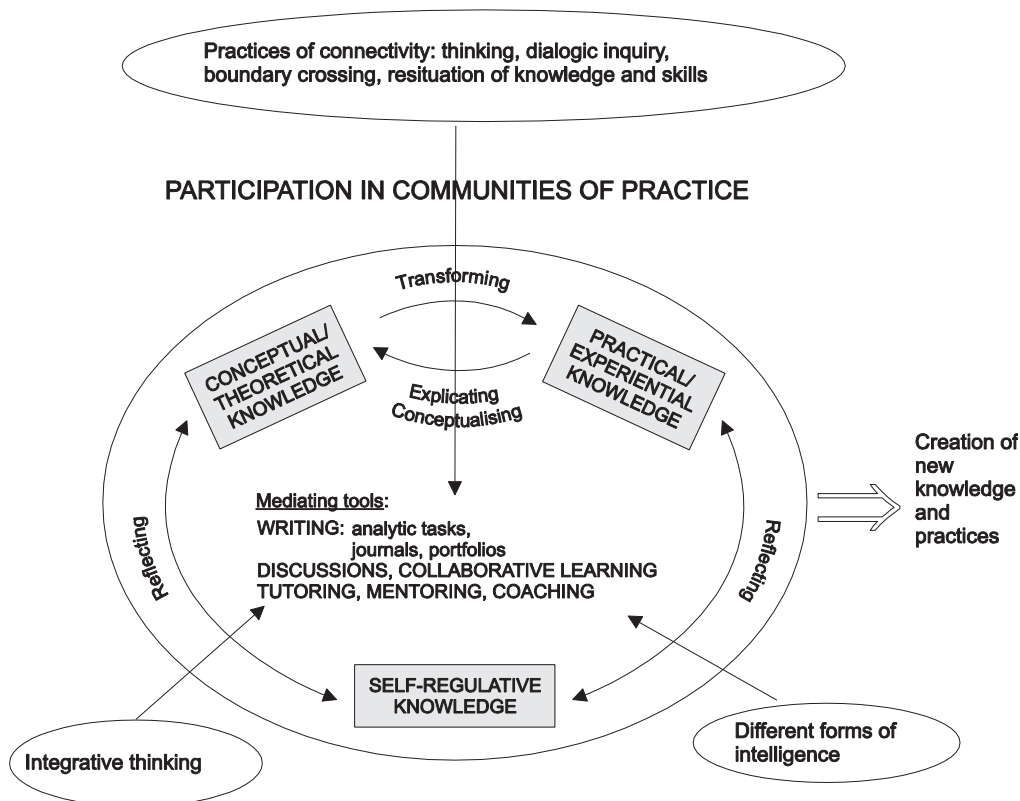
In this article, well-being is viewed through the intervention of preventing bullying. Intervention and the development process of school professionals was based on Integrative Pedagogy. Integrative Pedagogy has focused on developing professional expertise in higher education. Integrative Pedagogy integrates the components of professional expertise: theoretical or conceptual knowledge, practical or experiential knowledge and regulative or self-regulative knowledge and enables the combining of individual and social learning toward a collaborative learning model [27] [28] [29].

## 1.1 Theoretical background

The different components of expertise can be analytically separated from each other but in high-level expertise those components are closely integrated. Therefore it is important to create learning environments and pedagogical practices which will integrate different forms of expert knowledge. Integrative Pedagogy in a formal learning environment (in such as for example teachers' in-service

training) means that in the ideal case the learning environment is carried out so that the participants have to apply theoretical knowledge to the practice, have to conceptualize and explicit and have to reflect their own actions and practices of the job in the light of the theoretical information. So in order to the different components of the expert knowledge will be connected, it requires the connective practices and tools. In practice these learning tasks which connect and transmit the information are for example writing tasks, learning diaries, group discussions, mentoring, tutoring and the exercises. In figure 1 is presented the model of Integrative Pedagogy, aimed at developing professional expertise in higher education. *Rather than a pedagogical method, the model should be seen as a general principle of how education should be organised in order to support the development of professional expertise [30].*

**Figure 1.** The model of Integrative Pedagogy  
(adapted from Tynjälä et al, 2006; Tynjälä, 2008, 2009) [31]



In this study, the creation of collective awareness and understanding was a critical element in constructing the well-being oriented school community. It means that in any intervention, the learning should extend from individual learning to the professional development and expertise and there after toward learning organisations. Learning will then be seen more as social participation rather than cognitive activity and a professional expertise seen more as a collective rather than an individual phenomenon.

On the other hand well-being in this study is viewed through The Balanced Well-Being Promotion Model® [32] which is a sociological and holistic model for developing school communities towards school well-being. The informed model is explained in detail in references [33] [34] and will not be described here anymore. The Balanced Well-Being Promotion Model® brings to the study of school bullying not only the perspective of intervention but also a pre-emptive, community viewpoint for promoting school well-being.

## 1.2 Aim and purpose

The aim of this paper is to consider an intervention at a Finnish comprehensive school realized through the Integrative Pedagogy introduced before. The aim of the intervention was to develop school well-being and prevent bullying from the perspectives of the school community and the professional development of the school staff.

The purpose of this article is to study a particular school well-being intervention. This article will respond to two questions: 1) How did the professional community of teachers built their understanding of school well-being and bullying? 2) Was there any transformation in the understanding of school well-being or bullying during the intervention?

## **2 STUDY**

This qualitative case study examined how teachers and other professionals in a school community prepared working methods for improving school well-being in everyday schoolwork life. The research was conducted in the Finnish comprehensive school context, in one primary school, grades 1-6 including the pre-primary grade, and in one secondary school, grades 7-9. Finnish basic education is constructed of 9 grades (or years) of comprehensive school. Children have the opportunity to attend preschool at the age of six where the teaching goals are not academic. Actual comprehensive school starts at the age of seven. Children have single class teachers during their first six years (age 7-13), after which for the next 3 years (age 13-16) their teachers are specialised in different subjects. The essential element in the Finnish school system is the idea of an equal education for all children. In comprehensive school, pupils are entitled to welfare services and to special-needs education where necessary.

Two schools or communities will be discussed below; one of the teachers' being teachers' community at the primary school and second being the teachers' community at the secondary school. Both schools are under same administration but both schools have their own headteachers. The schools are located in the suburbs and represent are considered representative of the average Finnish school.

The participants in the research were the teachers and other teaching staff, 35 persons in total, including teachers, student counsellors, school helpers, pre-primary school teachers and special education teachers. In this article they are all referred to as "participants" or "teachers". The school and all participants were voluntary in this study. At the primary school the whole teaching staff was involved in the study but at the secondary school only 1/3 of the teachers were involved in this process. At the planning stage at the secondary school, the headteacher and the school staff were set to participate as a whole community of school professionals. A year into the research period, a new headteacher was appointed, and it transpired that many other concurrent projects were ongoing at the school. Thus the teaching staff and the new headteacher decided that only teachers in the seventh grade should participate in the study.

In this research, the intervention necessitated using the interventionist approach, which is described further in the section "methods and data", below. The intervention amongst the school staff is referred to in this article as a "development process", which better describes in practice the developmental target and potential of the intervention. During the development process, the researcher along with the process trainer worked together, guiding the development process and at the same time evaluating the impacts and results of the development process. The process, including a survey at the beginning and end of the process, lasted one school year in the primary school and in the secondary school one and a half school years. The research data was collected during the years 2009–2010.

In both schools, planning sessions and the selection of the steering groups for the development process were carried out before the process started. In both schools, there were 10 sessions during the process: at the primary school each session lasted 1–3 hours and in the secondary school, sessions lasted 2–4 hours. The role of the headteacher was important because they could arrange the time and other resources for these sessions, including steering group meetings, during the teachers' working time.

The idea of the steering group was to ensure that the process would continue after the researcher and trainer had left the school. In the initial sessions, the researcher and trainer had bigger roles in guiding the development process. However, step by step, they handed responsibility to the steering group and the participants.

### **2.1 Methods and data**

The study was conducted using an interventionist research approach. Interventionist research is a cluster of research approaches, where the researcher is more or less deeply immersed within the object of study. Interventionist study is also proximate to the action, clinical research constructive research, innovation action research or also the development and evaluative case studies approaches [35]. In practice, interventionist study is usually applied along with case studies using conventional

ethnographic methods. In interventionist study, the researcher sits outside the host organisation but becomes an active and competent actor during the research. At the end of the study the researcher will disengage from the host organization [36].

The interventionist research approach means here, that in the development process, the researcher is one actor in the organisation and has opinions and knowledge of their own. The researcher can with their actions help or guide the organisation to identify its professional knowledge and expertise. The researcher can work alongside the organisation with the principles of integrative pedagogy and support the community of participants to develop their expertise towards school well-being. One role of the researcher is to help the participants to indicate and articulate their routines, attitudes, values and informal knowledge of the community and also their unwritten or unofficial rules and the norms of the community. Interventionist research here also consists of the evaluation of the actions and engaging the participants in the creation of their collective expertise. According to the Integrative Pedagogy participants are constantly reflecting, processing and creating new knowledge and practices.

The data in this study consists of focus group surveys at the outset and at the end of the development process, an observation diary kept during the development process sessions and memos for the participants in the development process sessions. The data also included 9 interviews with key informants made near the end of the process. The key informants for the interview were selected on the basis of observations made as to which persons were either enthusiastic or uninspired by the process. There are also photographs from the process as well as the written material and documents produced during the process. The analysis of the data is made using content analysis [37]. Even though the realization of the development process is strongly based on theory, the analysis of the data is inductive.

### 3 RESULTS

The idea of the development process, according to Integrative Pedagogy, was to apply the theory knowledge to the practice with the reflection of the teachers so they could test and use new practices in their own classes in the course of developing school well-being and preventing bullying.

How then did the professional community of teachers build their understanding of school well-being and bullying? Immediately at the beginning of the process it was apparent that the process would take effect differently in the primary school than in the secondary school. In the primary school in which the whole staff team participated in the process, it began with doubtful and confused feelings. Furthermore, the staff moderately criticized the process for its excessive theory content which was in this process described using The Balanced Well-Being Promotion Model®. At the secondary school, the absorption of the theoretical information into practice caused problems due to the structural differences of the secondary school. The secondary school staff, however, also seemed to be more responsive to thinking about theoretical information and transforming it into practice, although the secondary school teachers also experienced some confusion. At the secondary school there were only 1/3 of the teachers involved in this process. Because of the voluntary involvement, it is also possible, that those who were in the process were also the most enthusiastic about testing new practices. It might explain why the process started more fluently in the secondary school.

There were common concerns, however, in both communities immediately in the first steps of the process. For example, what did the theory mean in practice and how could it be adapted to teaching? The atmosphere in the first sessions is best described by the participants asking: *"How can we make this concrete in our teaching?"* The researcher and the trainer also had to process their own ways of action in relation to the principles of Integrative Pedagogy balanced with participants' demands for concrete actions. But the purpose of the process was not to give the communities any ready-made models, tools or practices. Instead the idea was to create a way of action suitable to that community, in particular based on the knowledge and practices already apparent in the community. So the actions of the researcher and trainer seemed at first to contradict the expectations of the participants:

*"... et ois tavallaan sellanen helposti työhön sujautettava työkalu jonka avulla tulis loistavia tuloksia"*

(in Finnish; primary school teacher)

*"...so that there would be a tool that's sort of easy to put in practice, that could be used to get great results"*

[translation; primary school teacher ]

At the beginning of the process, the participants mainly reflected on their own experiences and their ways of acting. For example, teachers reported how they usually encounter and try to solve difficult situations in bullying and what practices they have for promoting well-being. Or they reported experiences of how they had solved or at least tried to solve some problems. When the process advanced, the participants noticed they had many individual ways and resources to deal with difficult situations. They also began to picture these individual ways of acting as a part of an unofficial culture of the school which they all maintained.

This reflection on the collective actions in the community was the first real step towards the possibility of transform or of the creation of new knowledge and practices. This happened sometime in the middle of the process in both schools. It was also the point where some participants discovered the idea of collective learning. The theory of well-being was further dealt with alongside the practices of the community but by now the participants considered the teamwork in which the practice and the theory were sewn together especially successful. Participants began to refer to both this teamwork and the discussions in larger groups as 'pedagogical discussions'.

Participants stated that these pedagogical discussions were the most important working method in the development process. Through pedagogical discussions, school professionals built a shared understanding and shared practices in the complex phenomenon of school well-being.

*"semmosen pedagogisen tiedon jakaminen, mikä jo on, semmosen olemassa olevan tiedon nostaminen niinku tähän kaikkien käyttöön"*

(in Finnish: secondary school teacher)

*"the sharing of pedagogic knowledge that we already have, bringing forward this existing knowledge for everyone's common use"*

[translation; secondary school teacher]

But was there any transformation in the understanding of school well-being or bullying during the intervention? The foregoing pedagogical discussion can also be considered a transformation in understanding. In addition, at the beginning of the process, school well-being was seen through the lens of reducing bullying. The most important issue for almost all participants was how to handle bullying situations, e.g. when to intervene in bullying and how to do it. In both schools, teachers had many resources and tools for intervening in bullying, with varying ways of using these tools.

During the process, teachers reflected on their actions and knowledge of well-being and built a shared model of intervening in bullying and promoting the well-being of pupils. Participants tested new methods in their classes and in different subjects with the pupils and found some ways to be more practical than others. When confidence within the community increased, the participants also dared to confess mistakes and bad experiences. However, not all participated in the testing of new ways of acting but neither did they resist, nor indicate a lack of confidence.

In both communities, the participants felt that the shared knowledge of well-being and shared and collective ways of intervening in bullying situations came as a great relief in their daily work. In both schools participants together defined bullying, based on formal knowledge of identifying and intervening in bullying situations. In the primary school the formalization of intervening was different than in the secondary school, but the shared understanding of bullying was the same in both schools. According to the participants' experiences, when a pupil feels bullied, it is reason enough to resolve the problem. Also, the imbalance of power between the bullied and the bully must be considered when attempting to build a shared understanding of bullying among pupils. Participants reported that this was, in their opinion, a useful definition of bullying in both school and everyday life. They felt that when somebody feels they are bullied, their own subjective experience is the most reliable tool for defining when to intervene.

Over time of the decade, a lot of work has been done at Finnish schools to reduce bullying. There are too available several methods for reducing bullying and teaching social skills for pupils. Hamarus [38] has also examined the definition of the school bullying and made a conclusion that in defining bullying, the intensity of any bullying incident is of great importance irrespective of the duration or recurrence involved. She suggested that schools should actively seek a broad definition that promotes early intervention. Otherwise certain common bullying identifiers (e.g. prolonged and recurrent) might even hinder early detection and intervention. To avoid this, it is vital to recognise both the imbalance of power between the bullied and the bully, and the individual's subjective experience.[39]. Teachers in this process absorbed the parallel definition and found it workable in the school context.

In both communities, participants reflected on occupational well-being and felt themselves emancipated through shared understanding and practices about bullying and promoting well-being. Newly qualified teachers in particular experienced the shared practices to be a great support in their everyday work. Participants also reported that their understanding of school well-being had transformed. Bullying was compared to an iceberg: before the process, they had seen only the top of it. After the process, they understood the issues that lay below the surface. Furthermore, at the beginning, school well-being was seen through preventing bullying but after the development process participants felt that they should and they could promote well-being in collaboration with each other. In addition, participants reported that their understanding of bullying had expanded.

*“kyllä tää on tuonu ihan toisella tavalla semmosta selkeyttä ja rauhaa siihen asiaan että, että on niinku se semmonen ymmärrys et missä tässä mennään ja mitkä asiat on mihin tässä pitäis puuttuu”*

(in Finnish: primary school teacher)

*“yeah this has brought in a whole new clarity and confidence on the matter, so there’s a sort of understanding about where we are headed, what things are, what things need addressing”*

[translation; primary school teacher]

The state of emotion and attitudes seemed to have also some impact in the process. The state of emotion and attitudes varied during the sessions in the process. Participants showed and shared their experiences and feelings in community. It was relevant for the learning process how active the community was using this information in its learning process. Apart that there was substantial variety of the involvement with the process: some participants were very active and innovative teachers but also passive teachers who just came along in the process. Despite the fact according the interviews and surveys every participant experienced the process as a positive episode.

In sum, the use of Integrative Pedagogy seemed to be making possible for developing both individual and communal expertise and creating new knowledge along with new practices for enhancing school well-being. However the trainer(s) of the development process have to master the theoretical basis of the Integrative Pedagogy and the school well-being and they have to have enough experience of practice. In addition to cognitive elements, the trainers also must pay attention to the dimensions of the collective actions such as for example the attitudes and emotional state of the community.

#### **4 CONTRIBUTION**

In this research the aim was to consider an intervention a primary and secondary Finnish comprehensive school, realized with the Integrative Pedagogy introduced before. The aim of the intervention was to develop school well-being and prevent bullying from the perspectives of the school community and the professional development of teachers. Intervention -or the development process as it is called here- was based on socio-cultural and theoretical knowledge of well-being and bullying at the school. The actual development process was executed based on the theory of Integrative Pedagogy.

The professional community of teachers built their understanding about the school well-being and bullying through pedagogical discussions. Their reflected their expectations, attitudes and emotions and transformed their collective knowledge and practice through their own and shared teaching experiences. A theory-based intervention which is also long enough provides to the teachers a possibility to get to know each other besides learning. Teachers transformed their expertise and ways of teaching toward shared practices and to their everyday work. The collective understanding of bullying and well-being relieved the stress and powerless feeling related to bullying situations.

Participants reported doubtful and confused feelings at the outset of the process. Participants and the learning community demanding concrete actions, however, makes sense in many ways. It can be seen as one way of resist the change and transformation. In everyday life it is easier to carry on with existing routines and old habits. So it is understandable to receive demands for easy solutions because learning requires work and tolerating uncomfortable feelings. Stepping out of one’s comfort-zone also requires trust in others, because the first time of carrying out new practice also risks doing it wrong. That is where the trust is needed.



Zimmermann [40] presents a literature review of the barriers to change among teachers. The first step is to determine the persons who are resistant and why by recognizing teachers' attitudes, habits and behavior within the context of the social norms of the schools. Then it is important to take notice of teachers' past experiences or previously unsuccessful efforts at change, fears of the unknown, threats to their expertise, threats to their power relationships or social relationships and threats to their resource allocations. At the beginning of the study, the focus group discussion was very an important method for finding out the attitudes, values and social norms of the school. It can easily be used as an evaluation and developmental method for the process, and not only as a resource for the research.

In brief, the basic idea of Integrative Pedagogy is through reflection to turn theoretical knowledge into practice and to transform a new collective expert knowledge. In other words, the purpose is to create a way of action suitable to those communities, in particular based on the knowledge and practices already appeared of the community. In this study the participants experienced the pedagogical discussions to be most rewarding way of learning collaborative but also other ways of connective practices and tools were used. Through pedagogical discussions, school professionals built a shared understanding and shared practices in the complex phenomenon of school well-being.

#### 4.1 Conclusions

When it is question about the community, attention must be paid to the fact that the community consists of individuals. The individuals develop the process with their own investment each one. Essential is to understand that the investment of every individual is of a different size. During the process some participants worked much more eagerly than others. Nevertheless the most relevant issue was to target the whole community work in parallel. The aim had to be in promoting well-being. The challenge was to posit the intervention concrete enough but still keep the principles of the Integrative Pedagogy. Thus essential from the point of view of the trainer(s) is to pay attention to the emotional state and to attitudes alike cognitive elements of the development process. However, the findings of the first phase of this study display that it is possible to find the cycle of the Integrative Pedagogy in further analysis of the data.

The results indicate that it is possible to create collective and shared understanding about school well-being. Also it is possible that shared understanding of school well-being in the school community effectively prevents school bullying. For further research there still need for wider and deeper understanding of the learning processes of the communities, about the barriers and the primitive elements. Overall it is important to study in the future also how the teachers' expertise of well-being impacts on the pupils' level and how the well-being influences in school community. Furthermore, the creation, development and evaluation of innovative teachers' in-service training presumes fresh and at the same time critical thinking based on both individual and collective expertise.

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