

**Implementation of the adapted social competence training  
FIT FOR LIFE in schools in Greater London  
in conjunction with the  
Anti-Bullying Alliance (ABA) for London Team.**

A short report by

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## **The Project**

The German social competence training program FIT FOR LIFE by Jugert, Rehder and Notz (2002) has been implemented in its English version in schools in Greater London in conjunction with the Anti-Bullying Alliance (ABA) for London team. This project report describes an evaluation of the implementation in a Pupil Referral Unit with a group of 14-15 year old boys and girls. Students are placed in this unit for a variety of reasons, mainly emotional and behavioural difficulties, and some students have Statements of Special Educational Needs.

## **The Training**

The training program FIT FOR LIFE (Jugert et al., 2002) aims at developing social and pre-professional competence through improving and fostering social abilities and cognitive capabilities. It works on giving the adolescents a wider repertoire and a deeper understanding of options to act and react in various situations, and to sensitise them towards themselves and others. The program is structured into different modules, where each module focuses on a specific topic that will be worked upon with the participants.

The training intended to strengthen the social competence of the participants especially with regard to a reduction in conduct problems and peer relationship problems and an increase in pro-social behaviour. Problems in the classroom environment with regard to student cohesiveness and cooperation were expected to be reduced; and a decrease in bullying behaviour and changed attitudes towards bullying were also aimed at.

## **Evaluation/Study**

### *Design/Instruments*

A pre-test/post-test research design was used, and in addition to this a retrospective pre-test had been administered. This test was to be taken at the same time as the post-test to assess a possible response shift phenomenon. A response shift takes place when a participant's internal frame of reference is altered under the influence of a training program.

To assess changes, the students filled in the scales 'Conduct Problems', 'Peer Relationship Problems' and 'Prosocial Behaviour' of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) by Goodman et al (1998), along with items from the Bully/Victim Questionnaire by Olweus (2004) and the scales 'Student Cohesiveness' and 'Cooperation' of the What Is Happening In this Class (WIHIC) by Fraser, McRobbie and Fisher (1996) as self-report. Teachers were asked after the implementation of the training circle to assess the social competence of their students via SDQ scales, and to evaluate their behaviour in a retrospective pre-test. Qualitative data had been obtained through observation, training protocols, regular feedback from the participants and interviews with the teachers.

### *Results*

The pre-test SDQ student self-report ratings showed that in comparison to their peers in the UK general population, the participants differed significantly with regard to conduct problems and pro-social behaviour, where they showed more difficulties and problems. The teacher ratings in the retrospective pre-test also evaluate the students to have been significantly different in these areas. Students and teachers differ with respect to their evaluation of peer relationship problems. While the students rate themselves not to be significantly different from their peers, the teacher ratings in the retrospective pre-test show a significant difference to the normed data.

The post-test student ratings in comparison to the pre-test data show no significant improvements and at times deterioration, though not significant, in scores for the conduct problems scale, the peer relationship scale and the prosocial behaviour scale. This may be due to the change in the number of participants and changes within the group.

These results are balanced slightly if the retrospective pre-test scores are taken into consideration as well. A comparison of the post-test data with the retrospective pre-test shows encouraging tendencies; the improvements are more pronounced. The conduct problems scale even shows a significant improvement. The effects of the response shift

phenomenon seemed to have happened; retrospectively, and after learning more about appropriate and inappropriate behaviour and social skills, the students changed their evaluation about themselves and evaluated their skills more realistically at the post-test. The retrospective pre-test teacher data compared to the post-test shows a positive tendency for the conduct scale, which however is not significant. For the peer relationship problems scale, the teacher retrospective pre-test data shows the students to be significantly different to their peers in the UK general population, which had changed at the post-test. The data on the prosocial behaviour scale shows positive tendencies, but the changes are not significant.

The student data for changes in class climate show similar results. There is a positive change from the pre-test to the post-test, which gets more pronounced in a comparison between the retrospective pre-test and the post-test data for student cohesiveness. The data for cooperation shows a positive change from the pre-test to the post-test, and a slightly less pronounced change from the retrospective pre-test to the post-test, the results are, however, not significant.

The quantitative data also suggests that the training did not have a significant effect on bullying behaviour and attitudes towards bullying even though positive tendencies can be seen, especially with regard to the feelings while observing bullying behaviour.

## **Discussion**

These results and the results above should however not be interpreted as an iatrogenic effect and need to be put into perspective with the qualitative data, which shows an improvement in behaviour, cooperation and social competence. A bullying incident in the group got resolved competently and quickly by the participants. The students, which could not be taught together as a class before the training, worked well with each other. These positive changes have lead to the training being judged as a success by teachers and students in feedback rounds and interviews.

For further research the materials used to assess change need to be re-evaluated, as self-report tests seemed to be difficult for the students. The standardised questionnaires on their own were also not reflecting the training results, so further research should include structured qualitative data about key aspects. A larger sample should be used if possible. The response shift phenomenon needs to be assessed further, especially to avoid an interpretation of results as an iatrogenic effect; here as well structured qualitative data may help.