



CyberBuddy



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The National Vocational High School of Computer Technologies and Systems was the coordinator of the project "Innovative ICT-based learning approach for restructuring school education and training - sCOOL-IT", Ref. No. 2019-1-BG01-KA201-062543. The project is based on the methodology of webquests for Improving student learning in 6 subjects.

The new project the school is coordinating is called CyberBuddy and is based on the same constructivist methodology, but takes it one step further by turning web quests into digital escape rooms.

Project objectives:

CyberBuddy's main goal is to create conditions to combat cyberbullying by equipping secondary school students and their teachers with the appropriate digital tools to increase their awareness and response to various forms of inappropriate online behavior.

The specific objectives are:

- creating conditions for digital empowerment of students
- increasing digital empathy among students
- promoting active participation by providing students, their parents and teachers with know-how and tools

Results:

CyberBuddy's digital challenges will challenge students to deal with situations involving cyberbullying, thereby improving their digital empowerment.

The CyberBuddy diary platform will feature real-life cyberbullying cases alongside cyberbullying videos from three different perspectives: those of the bully, the victim and the bystander.

Cyberbullying, especially among teenagers, is on the rise. "Cyberbullying" is defined as harassment and abuse that occurs in a digital environment through digital devices. These may include creating and distributing offensive, threatening and mocking images, photos and text messages that degrade or humiliate a child: taking videos/photos of a child with a mobile phone and distributing photos or videos without the child's consent, stealing identity/profiles, insults, spreading rumors on social networks, etc. If a child is involved in a risky situation online, it always has its repercussions in his/her real life. The experiences for the child can be even more humiliating because cyberbullying cannot be stopped immediately and is accessible to a much wider range of people. Recent research indicates that nearly half (46%) of teens ages 13-17 have been bullied or bullied online (Pew Research, Dec. 15, 2022).

The problem is exacerbated during the COVID-19 lockdown, according to a recent Joint Research Center (JRC) 2021 report. The study shows that the Covid-19 pandemic has affected the lives of most children in Europe dramatically. The lockdown that affected most European countries in the spring of 2020 led to a sudden change in most children's activities in the digital world. Since then, children's education, free time, social contacts, home life have remained mainly conducted at home through digital media. Adopting new tools and services and spending several hours a day online has dramatically changed daily schedules. Although the online world offers opportunities and new possibilities, it also opens the door to online risks (inappropriate content, cyberbullying, cyberhate,

misuse of personal data, etc.). Parents and teachers lack adequate tools to deal with cyberbullying. Teachers report that cyberbullying is their #1 classroom safety concern according to a recent Google survey (January 2019). Teachers are at the forefront of addressing student aggression, including in the form of cyberbullying (Spears et al., 2009). They are the ones who stand up to the students and often face all kinds of acts of bullying. Teachers are not confident in their abilities to identify and deal with it, but they are pressured by the principal to report difficulties in providing a safe learning environment for students (Eden, Heiman, & Olenik-Shemesh, 2013; Siu, 2004). .

Exposure to cyberbullying at a young age can have troubling consequences. Cyberbullying is an important topic worldwide and can lead to unpleasant consequences in real life. It causes strong negative emotions. Victims feel unhappy and depressed most of the time; have low self-esteem; feel rejected and isolated from their peers; show somatic symptoms such as headache, abdominal pain, fever; exhibit deviant behavior, even suicide attempts are possible. (Unicef, 2010).

Focus: although there are initiatives addressing cyberbullying, most of them focus on prevention and response. CyberBuddy applies a different perspective by promoting both digital empowerment and digital empathy in students to reduce the occurrence of this phenomenon. In addition, the project takes into account the role of bystanders.

Currently, the role of bystanders in cyberbullying has received little attention despite its relevance and conceptual differences with traditional bullying (Garaigordobil, 2017; Sarmiento et al., 2019). In cyberbullying, bystanders are reported to experience greater moral disengagement, less empathy, and lower perceptions of responsibility and self-efficacy because they do not see the victim's emotional reaction, which interferes with their assessment of the situation (Barlińska et al., 2018; Dominguez-Hernandez et al., 2018; 2018). CyberBuddy aims to address this passive position by stirring digital empathy in bystanders. All products encourage witnesses of cyberbullying to take a stand.

Innovative pedagogical approach: CyberBuddy will engage students in digital escape rooms. These digital challenges are game-based experiences that have only recently been considered as innovative pedagogical tools that can be integrated into education. While the first generation of escape rooms were designed for fun, they have now evolved and "grown up big".

Digital escape rooms are engaging and interactive; can be adapted to different age groups; they use technology to create immersive learning by incorporating multimedia elements such as videos, animations, images and sound effects to increase engagement and motivation.



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