Violence in Schools Training Action

VISTA
www.vista-europe.org

A resource for practitioners and policy-makers and all those working with children and young people affected by school violence

Welcome to VISTA, a training resource that addresses the issue of school violence through a whole school approach (WSA). The VISTA materials are aimed at educators, non-teaching staff, parents and policy-makers

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Acknowledgements

Foreword by Isabel Fernandez, Madrid

It is my pleasure to be granted the opportunity to introduce such a reliable, updated and practical work as VISTA. The following material will be a useful tool for dealing with violence at schools and for developing good school procedures to maintain and support any initiative that is undertaken in that domain. The need for improving *convivencia* or "school well-being" is a must in all the school systems of the developed countries. It is as important as promoting school improvement as both aspects are rooted in the same ground, creating societies where people feel at ease with themselves and others, and where they respect the contexts they live in, with implications for education to promote Citizenship and Human Rights.

The key feature of VISTA is the whole school approach, which takes into account not only the problem that it is dealing with (violence in school) but also its context, whether in school itself, the school community (students, parents, teachers and governors and outside members of the social context) and even more important, in the procedures for change and school development which happen when a group of teachers start working on any given proposal for school improvement.

VISTA has been developed by renowned scholars and practitioners from different countries of the EU, which means that it has been evaluated by a multicultural audience of professionals to assess its relevance to most European school systems. The diversity of school structures, aims, and vision in different countries and not least in each individual school, has to be taken into account when looking for a common basis for dealing with school violence. Each community has its own unique characteristics which need to be taken into account when dealing with the processes of change and needs analysis, because each community will need to find the key aims to tackle those aspects of school violence which they consider to be most relevant in their context. In this sense, VISTA has a multidimensional approach with no closed answers, nor procedures, but rather with open proposals which can guide and exemplify the way to attain specific aims such as working in cooperation, implementing conflict resolution strategies, working with parents, identifying types of school violence and the strategies to deal with it.

However, VISTA offers not only materials to be used in the classrooms with students, but it has produced a TRAINING kit, valid for a wide range of contents and for different audiences. It is a valid set of materials for teacher trainers, for schools that want to start working on their own on school violence and prosocial behaviours and for administrators who are developing general programmes for their teachers and local authorities. The training therefore, is an essential and innovative aspect which can be extremely useful and insightful for a large number of users. The structure of the five modules is remarkable because each connects updated relevant data on the subject it deals with, together with procedures and activities to incorporate those concepts and knowledge on a day to day basis.

Finally, we would like to recommend the readers of VISTA to keep in contact with the website and to support and maintain feedback about the strengths and difficulties which have arisen during the implementation of the training. Feedback from users will be the best test possible, so that VISTA can become a resource to enrich and improve the quality of life in schools worldwide.

Why VISTA?

For centuries, violence has been a commonplace feature of school life with its causes embedded in the social, cultural, historical and economic contexts of its time. The focus of violence can be individuals, objects or the school itself, and the nature of the damage can be psychological, physical or material. Since the middle of the 20th century, however, violence against children has increasingly been viewed as a violation of their fundamental human rights, in particular of their right to physical safety and psychological security and well-being. In addition, there has been recognition that either schools can help to prevent violence against children or that they create an environment that reinforces violent attitudes. More recently, there has been a growing concern to understand the roots of violence and the effects on all members of the school community (children and young people, teachers, families) and on the school culture and ethos itself, and to find constructive ways to reduce it when it occurs and, if possible, to prevent it.

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The VISTA project is a joint initiative arising from previous work on school violence (CONNECT, 2002, http://www.gold.ac.uk/connect/). The training has been developed by a unique combination of experts in research, practice and training from the disciplines of sociology, psychology, education and criminology. The VISTA training is designed to benefit and inform not only teachers and educators but also local authorities and policy-makers Europe-wide and, of course, young people themselves.

What is VISTA?

The VISTA training focuses not simply on individual skills to address the problem of violence in schools but on the needs of a particular school as a system within a community linked to wider society. The VISTA project adopts the WSA to the promotion of non-violence and prevention of violence which can be applied in any educational setting. In taking up the WSA, VISTA believes that the phenomenon of school violence is best addressed as a collective challenge, and not as a problem rooted in the individual. From this perspective, a WSA involves as many actors as possible including children and young people, teachers, school management, non-teaching staff members, parents, governors, the local community, external organisations and wider society as a whole.

> A successful WSA approach to the promotion of non-violence not only addresses violent behaviour it also improves the climate and ethos of the school, improves relationships among staff, children and young people and parents, it also supports the emotional health and well-being and learning potential of children and young people, and all adult members of the school community.

One of the core principles of a WSA is to encompass the rights of democracy, participation and citizenship in harmony with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989, http://www.unicef.org/crc/) and the European Charter for Democratic Schools without Violence (2004, see Figure 1).

Figure 1. European Charter for Democratic Schools without Violence (2004)

European Charter for Democratic Schools without Violence (2004, http://www.coe.int/t/e/integrated_projects/democracy/02_activities/15_european_school_charter/04_Charter.asp#TopOfPage)

🜋 All members of the school community have the right to a safe and peaceful school. Everyone has the responsibility to contribute to creating a positive and inspiring environment for learning and personal development.

🜋 Everyone has the right to equal treatment and respect regardless of any personal difference. Everyone enjoys freedom of speech without risking discrimination or repression.

🜋 The school community ensures that everybody is aware of their rights and responsibilities.

🜋 Every democratic school has a democratically elected decision-making body composed of representatives of pupils, teachers, parents, and other members of the school community where appropriate. All members of this body have the right to vote.

🜋 In a democratic school, conflicts are resolved in a non-violent and constructive way in partnership with all members of the school community. Every school has staff and pupils trained to prevent and solve conflicts through counselling and mediation.

🜋 Every case of violence is investigated and dealt with promptly, and followed through irrespective of whether pupils or any other members of the school community are involved.

🜋 School is a part of the local community. Co-operation and exchange of information with local partners are essential for preventing and solving problems.

The focus of a WSA is on both the school as a formal organisation (i.e., the institutional aspects of the school) and the school as a community (i.e., the informal relationships and networks). VISTA recommends that schools work through the WSA to help children, parents and teachers prevent violence in school and create an environment that promotes non-violent attitudes.

In adopting this focus, the VISTA training takes account of four inter-related perspectives: the individual, the interpersonal, the social context of the school, and the context of the wider community and society.

From the first perspective, **the individual**, VISTA considers how individual differences or experiences might increase an individual's potential for being a victim or a perpetrator of violence. From this perspective, addressing violence involves attending to individual risk factors and taking steps to modify individual risk behaviours.

From the second perspective, **the interpersonal**, VISTA considers the manner in which adults and young people inter-relate and how these interactions may then lead to the development of particular patterns of behaviour. For example, the socialisation that a young person experiences (with both adults and peers) may contribute to the development of healthy and effective strategies to cope with violence. Alternatively, the young person may be drawn into violent anti-social peer groups. The VISTA training places strong emphasis on the development of pro-social relationships and effective communication. Learning about peer relationships is achieved through co-operation with others in a whole variety of social settings, with peers, teachers, parents and other people who are significant to the young person and through the development of skills in emotional literacy, constructive conflict resolution and reparation of wrong-doing. The VISTA training strengthens young people's opportunity to develop a sense of responsibility through, for example, participation in a system of peer support under the guidance of adults or more experienced peers. They may be taught how to resolve conflicts constructively so that each protagonist comes away from the argument or disagreement with a sense of having gained something positive out of the encounter.

From the third perspective, **the social context of the school,** VISTA offers training in the development of whole-school policies and practices to prevent violent behaviour and actively promote pro-social behaviour and the values of non-violence. Research findings indicate that school practices can make a difference to whether a school is resilient to violence, regardless of the levels of violence in the community in which it is situated. Factors of particular importance include: (a) the quality of relationships within schools amongst staff and between staff and pupils; (b) the quality and extent of communication within schools, including staff-pupil communication over violent incidents; (c) the range of policies and practices for dealing with violence and its potential emergence; and (d) the engagement with, and the relationship to, the neighbourhood of the school and its communities of interest*.*

Finally, VISTA's fourth perspective, **the wider community and society**, focuses on the role of cultural and community values and goals and how they influence communication and social interaction. The approach and extent to which violence against children is either challenged or promoted by families and communities varies widely and positive parenting initiatives can offer some support in counteracting youth violence. Although some important government initiatives target particular communities or at-risk groups, it is also necessary to strive to engender society-wide changes in attitudes towards violence, so that teachers, parents, and children alike have a clear understanding and ability to recognise and prevent violence against children.

Tell me about the VISTA training Modules and Units

Modules and Units

The VISTA training is a flexible package of materials designed to meet the training needs of schools throughout Europe. It is arranged in five Modules. Each Module contains a number of Units as described below. Materials are suitable for use by all members of the school community, including educators at pre-school, primary and secondary levels and specialist provision, policy makers, NGOs, parent groups, local communities, social services and young people themselves. There are three main elements to each Unit in the training materials: pre-reading texts or activities, Unit materials and resources, and further reading and activities. Unit materials take the form of lectures or presentations, activities and discussions. Participants who wish to continue studying a topic between Units are encouraged to do so by following the additional materials listed at the end of each Unit.

The VISTA training activities include:
- information on current research and practice about violence reduction and prevention
- needs analysis including preparation and planning, implementation, and review and evaluation
- pupil and school self-audit, and strategies for improving the school and classroom climate
- exercises on conflict resolution, mediation, restorative practice, peer support
- exercises for integrating a WSA with political initiatives

Module A: Definitions, Context and Knowledge of School Violence
The two Units in this Module raise awareness of some of the key issues regarding school violence, an understanding of which forms the basis of the VISTA training approach.

Definitions of school violence are problematic with no consensus reached, as violence is socially constructed from a range of viewpoints with meaning varying according to the individuals, culture and environment concerned. This means that finding a definition of school violence requires an awareness of perspectives from a range of disciplines, including psychology, sociology, criminology, education, political science and social policy. This multiplicity of viewpoints also includes the notion that children do not share an adult conceptual understanding of bullying and violence, therefore, basing educational practices and policies for children solely on adult definitions of violence is counter-productive; we need to complement adult perspectives with those of young people.

 In Unit A1, we offer the opportunity to reflect critically on a multiplicity of definitions of violence that take into account individual factors, interpersonal relationships and the social context of the school and its community; and that include both adult and child definitions of the phenomenon. In this Unit, participants will be able to construct a

definition of school violence that takes into account the different types of violent behaviour within their school setting. We also consider the particular contexts in which violence may flourish and those where it is prevented or reduced. We take account of the idea that in order to understand the complex phenomenon of school violence, a thorough understanding of the economic, cultural, school and family factors that contribute to the problem is necessary. This Unit makes appropriate links with current debates and dialogues on emotional literacy, resilience, moral panics, young people and crime, school exclusions, disruptive behaviour and gangs.

There is a widespread popular view, fuelled by the media and by governments, and not necessarily supported by empirical evidence, that violence in schools has increased. This sense of 'moral panic' is a counter-productive form of social control that does not address the underlying causes of the problem. Our view is that there is a need to disseminate the available information on violence including, for example, incidence and causes. In Unit A2, we take account of high-quality research findings on the nature and origins of school violence and the impact of best practice, innovative interventions and whole-school policies on reducing or preventing it. This Unit offers participants the opportunity to increase their knowledge and understanding of the concept of school bullying and violence; to identify violent behaviour and differentiate it from less serious behaviour; to increase their understanding of the characteristics of perpetrators and victims; and to familiarise themselves with the role of new technology in preventing school violence.

Module B: The WSA to School Violence
Given our understanding that the problem of school violence extends far beyond the individual children involved as aggressors or victims, the VISTA training adopts the WSA to the promotion of non-violence and prevention of violence as an essential framework from within which the elements and initiatives of an intervention are carefully co-ordinated at different levels. In Unit B1, we present a 'bio-ecological approach' to the promotion of non-violence that takes into account: the individual characteristics of perpetrators, victims, bystanders, and adults; the ethos of the school; the quality of the learning environment of the school; and the links with the wider community, society and natural environment. This Unit offers a unique framework for the prevention and reduction of school violence in the form of a "prevention pyramid".

Implementing a WSA to school violence requires an active learning process on the part of the school as organisation, a process that occurs within a wider context. Today, we live in a complex knowledge-society and, as such, we require educated citizens who can learn continuously, and who can work with diversity. Complexity means change and specifically it means rapidly occurring, unpredictable, non-linear change in our organisations and our world. Such changes are not easy to control. Different ways of thinking about change are required – ways that our conventional approaches to planned change have not allowed. Consequently, schools must become learning organisations or they will fail to survive as an organisation creating knowledge. Unit B2 presents participants with strategies for implementing a programme or an idea that will support them in arriving at a clear rationale for leading a change process in preventing and reducing violence in schools. The aim of the Unit is to assist participants in the process of change and to support staff involved in its development. Participants will become familiar with possible barriers and resistances they are likely to meet during an implementation process and learn about ways for overcoming these.

A WSA is important in effecting a sustainable and positive influence on the school environment. As such, account needs to be taken of the style and quality of leadership and management practices; the quality and delivery of the curriculum; playground activities and the social aspects of the curriculum; the formalised and agreed procedures to deal with a bullying and/or violent incident; and, the building relationships with others and with the self. In Unit B3, we explore the key role that school management staff, teaching staff, parents, young people and the wider school community play in the development of a school ethos of non-violence. The Unit offers a set of skills and strategies through which a positive school ethos of non-violence can be practically implemented in school. By the end of the Unit, participants will be familiar with the skills involved in planning work with different groups within school communities.

The role of parents has been identified as an essential part of the WSA towards the prevention and reduction of bullying and violence in schools. In order for the WSA to be effective, together with school personnel, parents have a responsibility to ensure that their children and young people are not involved in inappropriate behaviours such as bullying or harassing other school pupils. Bullied young people are more likely to report their experiences to their parents rather than to staff at their school indicating that parents can play a critical role in a school community's efforts to address bullying and violence. Unit B4 focuses on the role of parents in addressing bullying and violent behaviour in collaboration with their child's school. Participants will become familiar with the skills involved in planning work with parents in school communities and with the strategies for engaging parents in activities that will support them in taking their part in the promotion of non-violence and the reduction of violence. The WSA provides guidance to parents themselves in working productively at home with their children in countering and preventing violent and bullying behaviour in schools.

Work with school staff is central to the practical implementation of the WSA towards the prevention and reduction of violence in schools. Not only do we rely upon teachers to deliver the content of anti-bullying programmes, and even to act as trainers within such programmes, but on a day-to-day basis, school staff are and always have been very much at the 'coal face' in terms of having to deal with incidents of violent behaviour in their schools. In Unit B5, we focus on the key role that staff (senior management, teachers, classroom assistants, lunchtime supervisors, caretakers, administrators) play in the application of a WSA for addressing school violence. We also present guidance on how to work productively in the classroom with young people in promoting pro-social attitudes.

One of the major challenges facing teachers in the 21st century is the issue of school violence. Three main problems that have been linked with school violence include interpersonal conflicts, low-level disruption and lack of discipline. When such problems as these affect teaching and learning, there is a feeling of unrest throughout the school population. Daily life in school becomes more difficult and dealing with problem behaviour starts to take precedence over academic tasks. The first step to addressing such problems is to differentiate between conflicts, lack of discipline and disruptions, as causes, consequences, and lines of intervention are different depending on the behaviour. Unit B6 explores how to implement the WSA with all children, both with vulnerable children most at risk of being either victims or perpetrators of violence, and with young people such as peer supporters. In this Unit, we describe strategies that have been found

to be effective, and critically reflect on the ways in which teachers can respond to the diverse reality of the problems they encounter in their daily life. We explore ways of breaking the cycle of lack of motivation that can lead to young people becoming disaffected and therefore more prone to engage in disruptive and aggressive behaviours.

Module C: Responsibilities and Rights
For the Units in this Module, we consider the concept of human rights with particular reference to the rights of the child and recent policies and legislation. We draw upon the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the Children Act (2004) as well as the Council of Europe's European Charter for Democratic Schools Without Violence (2004), designed by young people themselves. We acknowledge that the legal system has both a positive and a negative impact; on the one hand, it acknowledges the rights of young people but on the other, it imposes restrictions on rights as well as obligations. We consider how law and children's rights are inter-related and we explore the concept of justice as both moral order and a source of law.

In Unit C1, we explore the principles that promote ethical and lawful behaviour among young people and strategies for raising moral standards at school. Key concepts are explored including, the basic concepts of ethics, law and children's rights. The Unit offers material for promoting ethical and lawful behaviour among children and young people and strategies for raising pupils' awareness of moral standards at school.

It is widely recognized that the focus of young people and crime should be on the prevention of offending and re-offending. In this respect, identification and assessment of risk factors as well as an appreciation of protective factors have a high priority. Reducing the impact of, or exposure to risk factors, reducing chain reactions to negative experiences, promoting self-esteem and achievements and providing positive relationships and new opportunities, all of these could be the contribution of school education and environment for the prevention of youth offending. In Unit C2, we focus on young people and crime, and consider the basic concepts of youth offending and punishment. The Unit offers ideas and suggestions for promoting lawful behaviour among children and young people and strategies for crime prevention at school.

Unit D: Managing and Evaluating Change
The VISTA training recommends carrying out a needs analysis in order to gain a full understanding of the problem of bullying and violence in your school. A needs analysis can provide a structured and reasonably objective approach to identifying the requirements of a particular school, assessing the resources available to meet those needs, planning an appropriate set of interventions and evaluating their effectiveness.

In Unit D1, we offer practical guidance for a school preparing to address change. We describe what a needs analysis is, focus on what is going to take place during the needs analysis process, and provide exercises that will enable all members of the school community to prepare to carry out a needs analysis. In preparation for the needs analysis, the Unit offers ideas for how to go about generating issues, topics and questions that need further exploration, how to set priorities for the initial consultation and how to develop a working group to direct and guide the needs analysis. We illustrate the whole process with exercises and activities.

The aim of Unit D2 is to provide participants with some ideas and tools for actually carrying out a needs analysis. The different methods (e.g., questionnaires, focus groups, interviews, task-based activities) that can be used to carry out the needs analysis are reviewed and participants are encouraged to think critically about the suitability of the methods available for collecting information from the different groups within their school community.

In Unit D3, we consider the trends in public policy that influence schools' approach to the management of change, and explore its impact on practice in violence reduction within schools. We focus on developing a WSA for reviewing existing policies and practice, and highlight the contrasting perceptions of different stakeholders in the management of change within the organisation. The Unit is illustrated with exercises and activities.

Module E: Preventative and Integrative Practice
Addressing the issue of violence in schools involves working towards the well-being of all members of the school community through, for example, the promotion of quality of life, citizenship, social competence skills, emotional literacy, restorative approaches, peer support, law and democracy. In this Module, we present examples of a range of interventions that have been shown to be effective in challenging school violence and in creating an ethos of non-violence and positive emotional health. We explore the following interventions: children helping children through peer support, co-operative group work, emotional literacy, restorative approaches and developing a school plan of action.

In Unit E1, we promote the idea that young people play a central role in fostering and promoting peer support in their school community. We consider strategies for engaging staff in activities that will support them in arriving at a clear rationale for the application of peer support in their school. The Unit offers a range of approaches for developing the necessary skills to set up a peer support system including planning, training peer supporters, and addressing common 'blocks and barriers' whilst addressing the concerns that may underlie them.

From a social interaction perspective, Unit E2 explores the learning potential of the co-operative group as a strategy to prevent violence in school. From this starting point, co-operative learning seems to provide a suitable curriculum-wide educational strategy for the promotion of positive attitudes and values towards non-violence, and positive behaviours such as, co-operation, dialogue, negotiation, solidarity and altruism. We highlight the advantages and disadvantages of co-operative learning as an educational strategy within the classroom, focusing on the key issues that maximise the social, emotional, and moral learning potential of children and young people. The Unit is illustrated throughout with activities, exercises and case studies.

In this Unit E3, we focus on emotional literacy: what it means and how its development can promote non-violence and the reduction of violence. The Unit focuses on why it is important to spend curriculum time on teaching emotional literacy, and the skills involved in providing opportunities for the development of emotional literacy. The Unit aims to raise awareness of the types of materials that are available to support schools' work in delivering opportunities for children and young people to develop their emotional literacy. Exercises and activities are provided, which aim to help teachers

identify whether the establishment in which they work is conducive to developing young people's emotional literacy.

Unit E4 focuses on the principles, ideas and values of restorative approaches in schools and aims to familiarise readers with contemporary restorative practice applications in the school setting. Exercises and activities offer preparation for the promotion of a restorative climate in schools. A range of strategies is considered for the application of a restorative approach model in school, including a restorative response to violence, wrongdoing and everyday school problems. In this Unit, we promote the idea that individuals need, and are able, to resolve their own problems and recognize the need for sufficient training time for teachers, school staff and pupils. The Unit is illustrated with case studies throughout.

The final Unit in this Module, Unit E5, focuses on the development of a School Plan of Action for handling bullying and violence. Based on the four main principles of detection, problem solving, prevention and violence, the action plan approach offers a tool for mapping a school's attitude toward the promotion of non-violence. This Unit considers strategies for engaging staff in activities that will support them in arriving at a clearer rationale for creating a shared understanding of school bullying and violence as a pre-condition for implementing effective anti-violence measures. Exercises and activities offer the reader ideas on how to assist staff to develop an agreed understanding of the concept of school bullying and violence and to decide on the best course of action.

Who will benefit from the VISTA training?

The impact on children and young people will be to develop their capacity to:
- enhance their emotional health and well-being;
- participate in decisions that affect their school community;
- respect others' rights and integrity;
- value cultural diversity and develop solidarity among peers from different backgrounds;
- work co-operatively and recognise responsibilities towards others and society as a whole.

The impact on educators will be to develop their capacity to:
- enhance the emotional well-being of pupils;
- identify psychological, social and environmental risk and protective factors in their own school context;
- carry out an appropriate needs analysis of violence in their own settings;
- identify and implement their own training needs;
- design and implement effective school policies;
- become familiar with best practice Europe-wide to counteract violence in schools.

The impact on policy makers will be to develop their capacity to:
- develop appropriate links with relevant bodies in the community and nationally (e.g., in education, social services, police & justice, youth & social sectors, NGOs);
- facilitate action at the level of government based on the best available evidence collated from research and practice Europe-wide;
- contribute to legislation designed to protect children and young people from violence;
- create systems for monitoring the magnitude and patterns of violence amongst children and youth;
- create systems for the continued documentation, co-ordination and dissemination of best practice on a national and European level.

Helen Cowie and Dawn Jennifer
University of Surrey
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