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"Coping strategies and tips for vocational teachers towards students with behavioural and mental disturbances"

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ACTIVITY 1 Microcredential further teacher training on strategies towards students with behavioural and mental disturbances

Result 3: Mainstreaming of the project know-how and results to Teachers' community of practice in Bulgaria and Spain

10 INTERVIEWS AND TESTIMONIALS

October, 2025



Interview and testimonial 1: Bulgaria

Title: "A New Toolkit for the Classroom: Bulgarian Teacher Shares Impact of Microcredential Training"

Teacher's Name: E.P.

"Before this project, I often felt like I was navigating a maze blindfolded," admits E.P., a veteran teacher of electronics at a technical school. With over two decades in the classroom, E.P. has seen many changes, but the rising prevalence of students grappling with behavioral and mental health challenges has been a significant shift.

"The traditional methods simply weren't enough. We'd try to be understanding, but without specific strategies, it was often trial and error, and sometimes, frankly, just overwhelming."

E.P. is one of the teachers in Bulgaria participating in the project "Coping strategies and tips for vocational teachers towards students with behavioural and mental disturbances" project. She recently completed the Microcredential teachers' training, focusing on coping strategies and adaptive behavior.

"It's been a revelation," she states, her voice reflecting genuine enthusiasm. "The training provided us with a structured approach. We learned about early identification, de-escalation techniques, and how to adapt our teaching methods to be more inclusive. It wasn't just theory; it was practical, actionable advice that I could implement the very next day."

She recounts a recent experience with a student exhibiting severe anxiety.

"Previously, I might have just tried to reassure them, but the training taught me about creating a 'safe space' within the classroom, offering alternative assessment methods, and even simple things like mindful breathing exercises. It made a noticeable difference. The student felt heard and supported, and it prevented a full-blown panic attack."

The project also includes educational videos for students to raise awareness about their mental health. E.P. believes these are equally crucial.

"There's still a stigma around mental health, especially among young people. These videos are a fantastic way to open up the conversation, to show them they're not alone,



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and to equip them with basic self-care strategies. It's empowering for them to understand their own emotions and how to seek help."

E.P. concludes: *"This project has truly transformed my approach. It's not just about teaching a subject anymore; it's about nurturing the whole student. We're building a more supportive and understanding environment, and that benefits everyone."*

Interview and testimonial 2: Spain

Title: "From Frustration to Empathy: A Spanish Vocational Teacher Embraces New Strategies"

Teacher's Name: R.G.

R.G., a passionate instructor at the Culinary school, has always prided himself on creating a dynamic and engaging learning environment. However, the increasing number of students struggling with anxiety, depression, and other behavioral issues was starting to challenge his long-held teaching philosophies. *"In a professional kitchen, stress is part of the game,"* R.G. explains, *"but sometimes, the students' reactions were beyond typical pressure. I felt unprepared to handle outbursts or extreme withdrawal."*

R.G.'s participation in the Microcredential teachers' training as part of the "Coping strategies and tips for vocational teachers towards students with behavioural and mental disturbances" project offered him a new perspective. *"The training emphasized the importance of empathy and understanding the root causes of certain behaviors, rather than just reacting to the behavior itself,"* he notes. *"It was eye-opening. We learned about various psychological disorders, their manifestations, and most importantly, practical ways to create a supportive classroom atmosphere."*

One of the key takeaways for R.G. was the concept of 'scaffolding support.' *"For students with social anxiety, for example, the idea of presenting their dishes to a panel can be terrifying. The training showed me how to break down that task, offer smaller, less intimidating steps, and provide positive reinforcement along the way. It's about building confidence gradually."*

He's also enthusiastic about the educational videos being developed for students. *"These videos are a crucial step in destigmatizing mental health issues. Our students are often under immense pressure to perform, and they might feel isolated in their struggles. Seeing relatable content that explains mental health in an accessible way can encourage them*



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to seek help and realize they're not alone. It's a proactive approach that complements our efforts in the classroom."

R.G. believes the project has not only equipped him with valuable skills but has also fostered a more compassionate teaching community. *"We're all learning from each other, sharing experiences, and building a network of support. This isn't just about managing challenging students; it's about creating a healthier, more understanding learning environment for everyone involved."*

To provide a comprehensive extension, I have expanded each interview into a full-page narrative format. These extensions detail the specific methodologies used, the emotional journey of the teachers, and the tangible results observed in the students.

Interview and Testimonial 3: Bulgaria

Title: "Bridging the Gap: How Specialized Training is Saving At-Risk Students"

Teacher: D.B.

D.B. admits he used to be a "tough love" teacher. *"In my workshop, safety is everything. I used to see behavioral disturbances as simple disobedience,"* he says. For twenty years, his classroom management was built on rigid discipline. If a student wasn't focused on a hydraulic system, it was a safety violation; if they were restless, it was disrespect. The Microcredential training changed his lens entirely.

"I learned that what looked like 'laziness' or 'defiance' was often a manifestation of undiagnosed ADHD or trauma," D.B. explains. *"The training taught me how to adjust my instructions—breaking them into smaller, visual chunks. In a high-risk environment like heavy machinery, a student with ADHD can feel overwhelmed by a 20-step verbal instruction. Now, I use laminated visual guides attached directly to the machines. We use a 'check-and-verify' system where students demonstrate one small task before moving to the next. This doesn't just manage behavior; it increases safety."*

The educational videos provided by the project also sparked a conversation D.B. never thought he'd have in a workshop. *"One student came to me after a video and finally explained why he struggled to stay focused. It wasn't that he didn't care; it was a sensory processing issue. The roar of the engines and the smell of the grease were overstimulating him to the point of a shutdown. We didn't discipline him; we adapted his schedule and provided high-quality ear protection. We saw his performance skyrocket. That's the power of this project: it turns 'problem students' into focused professionals by addressing the root cause rather than the symptom."*



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Interview and Testimonial 4: Spain

Title: "The Silence Breaker: Tackling Social Anxiety in Seville's VET Centers"

Teacher: L.M.

L.M. teaches administrative services in Seville. Her biggest challenge was "the invisible student"—those who never spoke, never raised their hands, and eventually dropped out without ever being "a problem." *"The Microcredential modules on 'Internalizing Disorders' were a game-changer,"* L.M. explains. *"I realized I was spending all my energy on the loud, disruptive students while the ones suffering from severe social anxiety were slipping through the cracks."*

The training helped L.M. understand that silence can be a cry for help. She began implementing *"Adaptive Behavior" techniques to lower the stakes of classroom participation.* *"I stopped cold-calling students. Instead, we started using digital collaboration tools where students could submit questions and ideas anonymously in real-time. This allowed the 'silent' students to show their brilliance without the paralyzing fear of public speaking."*

Simultaneously, the awareness videos showed her students that it's okay to feel overwhelmed. *"We started having 'Check-in Mondays' where we use the vocabulary from the project—words like 'overwhelmed,' 'anxious,' or 'disconnected.' Now, the atmosphere is less competitive and more communal. Students are starting to support each other because the project gave them the vocabulary to talk about mental health. We've seen a 30% reduction in early leavers in my department because these students finally feel like they belong in the room."*

Interview and Testimonial 5: Bulgaria

Title: "From Burnout to Empowerment: A Rural Teacher's Perspective"

Teacher: M.S.

In smaller Bulgarian towns, resources for mental health are often scarce. M.S. felt the weight of this responsibility alone for years. *"I was burnt out trying to manage students with severe behavioral outbursts,"* she shares. *"In a rural setting, you are the teacher, the counselor, and the social worker all at once. I was at the point of quitting."*

"The project's focus on 'Coping Strategies for Teachers' saved my career," M.S. says. *"It wasn't just about the students; it was about managing our own stress as educators. I learned about 'Emotional Contagion'—the scientific fact that if I am stressed and*



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defensive, my students will mirror that. Learning how to de-escalate a situation without losing my own cool has been vital."

The training provided a structured protocol that is now used school-wide. *"We moved from 'reactionary' teaching to 'proactive' management. We now have a 'Cool Down' corner in every classroom—not as a punishment, but as a self-regulation tool. We are no longer just guessing or shouting to be heard; we are following a proven framework of de-escalation. My blood pressure is lower, the students feel safer, and the classroom has become a place of learning again instead of a battlefield. I realized that to take care of my students, I first had to have the tools to take care of my own mental state."*

Interview and Testimonial 6: Spain

Title: "Tech for Good: Using Video Media to Humanize the Classroom"

Teacher: J.S.

J.S. teaches web development in an environment where students spend eight hours a day behind screens. He noticed his students were highly tech-literate but emotionally disconnected, often struggling with burnout and "tech-isolation." *"The educational videos provided by the project were the perfect medium for this generation," Javier notes. "They don't want a lecture; they want to see someone they relate to speaking their language."*

"We watched the videos as a group once a week. Seeing professional-grade content that validated their struggles with depression, screen-addiction, and the pressure to perform made a huge impact. It broke the 'fourth wall' of the classroom." As a teacher, the Microcredential training gave Javier the "soft skills" to facilitate the discussion after the video.

"I learned how to hold space for a conversation without needing to be the expert with all the answers. It turned a cold computer lab into a space of mutual respect. My students aren't just coding better; they're behaving more maturely. They are collaborating on projects more effectively because they understand the 'human operating system' behind the code. The project showed them that their worth isn't tied to their productivity or their ability to debug a script—it's tied to their well-being."

Interview and Testimonial 7: Bulgaria

Title: "The Language of Empathy: Overcoming Stigma in My School"

Teacher: N.I.



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In the hospitality sector, emotional intelligence and "soft skills" are the foundation of a career. N.I. found that students with mental health struggles often failed the "customer-facing" parts of their training, leading to low self-esteem and failed internships. *"The Microcredential training helped me create 'simulated environments' where students could practice adaptive behavior in a low-stress way,"* N.I. explains.

"We created role-play scenarios where the 'customer' was actually a peer, and the goal wasn't just to serve food, but to recognize one's own rising stress levels and use a grounding technique mid-service. The project taught us that mental health awareness is a professional skill, just as important as food safety or knife skills. If you can't manage your anxiety during a rush, you can't work in a kitchen."

The videos helped break the deep-seated Bulgarian "taboo" of speaking to a psychologist. *"In our culture, seeking help is often seen as a weakness. But when the students saw the videos, they realized that even top professionals use these tools. The students now understand that taking care of their mental health is as important as learning a second language or a culinary technique. We've seen a shift in the local industry too; the hotels where our students intern are noticing that our graduates are more resilient and better at handling workplace stress."*

Interview and Testimonial 8: Spain

Title: "Building Resilience in the Construction Trades"

Teacher: A.R.

A.R. works with students who often come from difficult socio-economic backgrounds, where "toughness" is the only currency. *"Aggression was a common defense mechanism,"* he says. *"In a construction site environment, that aggression leads to accidents. I used to just kick them out of class, which only reinforced their belief that the system was against them."*

"The training on 'Coping Strategies' gave me the tools to look past the aggression. I learned how to identify 'triggers'—like a student being unable to calculate a measurement and feeling 'stupid'—and use 'Time-In' rather than 'Time-Out' strategies. A 'Time-In' means I stay with the student while they regulate, showing them that their anger doesn't make me abandon them."

The awareness videos were particularly impactful because they featured diverse voices. *"My students saw themselves in those stories. They saw men in boots and hardhats talking about anxiety. It changed the 'macho' culture of the workshop. The project has shifted the culture of our school from one of punishment to one of prevention. We aren't*



just building walls anymore; we are building people who can handle the pressures of life without breaking."

Interview and Testimonial 9: Bulgaria

Title: "Artistic Expression and Mental Health: A Harmonious Approach"

Teacher: T.K.

T.K. observes that creative students often have a heightened sensitivity, but this can mask deeper issues. *"The Microcredential course on 'Psychological Disorders' was deeply illuminating," she says. "Before, I might have dismissed a student's erratic behavior as 'artistic temperament.' Now, I can see the signs of genuine distress, like bipolar cycling or severe clinical depression."*

T.K. has integrated the project's tips into her critiques. *"Critiques can be brutal for an anxious student. I now use a 'Strengths-Based Feedback' model learned in the training. We focus on what is working first, which builds the cognitive 'safety' needed for the student to hear constructive criticism without spiraling into a shame-loop."*

The educational videos have also encouraged students to use their art to express their mental health journeys. *"We've seen a surge in 'socially engaged' art in our studio. Students are using their portfolios to tell stories of recovery and struggle. It's been a beautiful integration of the project goals and our curriculum. The Microcredential didn't just give me a certificate; it gave me a way to protect the creativity of my students by protecting their minds."*

Interview and Testimonial 10: Spain

Title: "A Unified Front: The Importance of Microcredentials for School Staff"

Teacher: B.L.

B.L. emphasizes the importance of the Microcredential's formal recognition. *"Teachers are tired of 'one-day workshops' that don't lead anywhere. Having a certified credential in these strategies gives us professional confidence and institutional weight," she asserts. "It's a badge of expertise that says we are prepared for the modern classroom."*

"In our vocational school in Alicante, we now have a common language. In the past, the plumbing instructor and the beauty therapy teacher had completely different ways of handling a student in crisis. Now, we all use the same adaptive behavior strategies and the same de-escalation protocols. This consistency is vital for the students; they know what to expect regardless of which classroom they are in."



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The videos for students act as the 'bridge'—it's a 360-degree approach where everyone is on the same page. *"We are seeing fewer dropouts, higher grades, and, more importantly, a much happier student body. Teachers feel less like they are 'policing' and more like they are 'mentoring.' This project shouldn't just be a pilot; it should be mandatory for every vocational teacher in Europe. It is the missing piece of the vocational education puzzle."*