Liverpool

The second exchange of the ABC-project in Liverpool was a success again!

From 4 till 8 March, the 10 schools participating in the ABC-project met again, this time in Liverpool. The exchange was focussed on discussing some of the key aspects from the products of the certification: the participation of students, the training of teachers and the way we should assess the antibullying policy in schools.

In this newsletter, you will read more about the exchange and we will give you some more background information.

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HOW SCHOOLS COMBAT BULLYING

Newsletter of the Anti-Bullying Certification project

https://www.gale.info/en/projects/abc-project

Student participation

The first activities in Liverpool were about student participation in school policy. We focused on this because the project considers it very important that school policy is developed and carried put will full commitment of the entire school population. And let's be clear: students are the majority.


Merseyside Expanding Horizons led an exercise to explore different levels of student participation and co-production and provide scenarios for students and teachers to identify the level of co-production they feel is most appropriate. The participation ladder (based on a variation of Shelly Arnstein's ladder of Citizenship Participation) was presented and students did an exercise to explore how it works.

Arnstein proposed that "participation" in policy comes in different levels. The ladder is a guide to seeing who has power when important decisions are being made. The lowest level is coercion or forcing students to comply with the policy. A next level would be education, which means to convince students that the existing policy is the best one. Both levels are not really participative. The aim is to achieve student support only through public relations.

The next level is informing, which includes the management asking the opinion of students. This is a first step to legitimate participation. But too frequently the emphasis is on a one-way flow of information; from management to students but not the other way around. You can ask the opinions in class, but if they are not channelled back to the management, this makes little sense for participation. The next step, consultation, assures such a channel is created. The school can do a survey, organize meetings or open suggestion boxes. Still, Arnstein feels "consultations" often remain window dressing rituals. The next level is "engaging". This means not only asking for opinions but really discussing the policy with students. In the original theory, Arnstein still feels hesitant about this because "engaging" can be done by setting up a cooperation committee, and at the same time not taking the committee really serious.
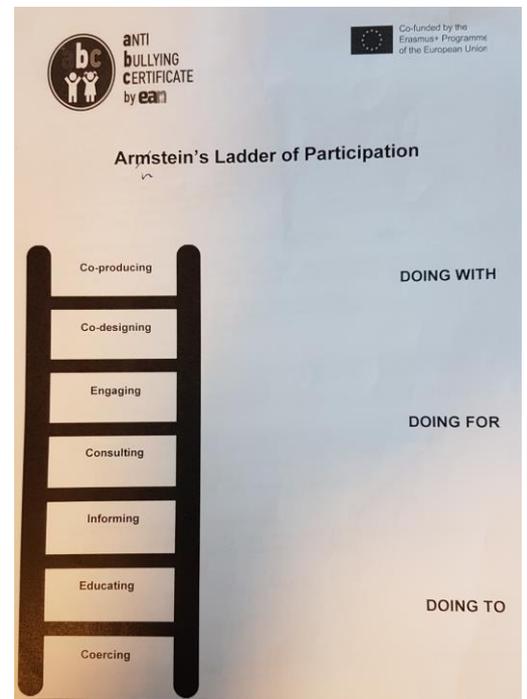
The two highest levels are co-designing and co-producing. Co-designing means the students co-decide about the general policy but are not engaged in detail on how to carry it out. In co-production, the students are fully engaged and co-deciding about the entire policy and its implementation.

After the introduction, Merseyside Expanding Horizons asked the students per country group to pitch an idea to teachers to enhance co-production of antibullying policies within their school. Whilst students were preparing their presentation, teachers could also pitch an idea to the students to enhance co-production within their school in relation to bullying.

In the ABC-project, we develop a school visitation workshop by students, during which they can research and review the school regarding antibullying policy. The workshop ideally ends with recommendations to the management. This level of participation looks like "engaging". However, it is possible the school management can ask students to further engage with the development of the revised policy or to co-produce the implementation.

Reviewing the checklist

One of the products of the ABC-project is a checklist to identify the quality of the school policy. Villa Montesca produced a second version of this checklist shortly before the meeting in Liverpool. This checklist had 20 questions, and schools could rate each question on four levels. In one activity, we cut 10 copies of the checklist up in separate questions and put them in a pile. The participants were asked to walk around, ask the questions to different people, choose one of the four options and then discuss whether it was a clear question. The final question was put the question in one of three boxes: bad question, to be improved question, good question.

The results showed most the questions were scored in a varied way, which means that the participants often differed in their opinion. A general conclusion could be that we need to take another good look at the checklist. We would rather have more consensus on the quality.

The discussions were very animated. Laura La Scala from CESIE made notes on the debriefing discussion that followed. She noted that both teachers and students were quite engaged during the activity and were working together and having fun while doing it. The first impressions of the exercise were that some participants wondered why they must to choose 1 category or level per question.

Sometimes more categories were applicable. It was remarked that some questions were titles, not true statements or questions. It was also said that many answer options were too long and had to be re-read several times to understand them. It was also said that a good question is a question that makes you think about the topic.

Rating schools?

In Palermo, the partnership decided to develop a final school antibullying assessment based on a number of levels, like the European energy label. The idea was that such a "score" would encourage school to reflect where they come from, where they want to go and how to improve of

maintain their level of quality. Despite the decision in Palermo, the ABC-partnership remains still engaged in a discussion on this. Some partners have come back on the decision and do not want to score at all. They think that a score will discourage schools, or that a score would create a "top-down" control feeling that would threaten the autonomy of the school to make own decisions. Others think a scoring on a few levels will encourage critical self-reflection, and that you could take the "fear" out of it by allowing schools to not publish a result. Then, there is also some doubt if we actually reliably can score or school.

In June, we did a research among the participants of the ABC-project how they feel about this. We asked the respondents' opinion on this. These were the results:

answer	number	percentage
Don't score at all	9	28%
Suggest a score but negotiate the final level with the school	4	13%
Give a score but allow the school not to publish it	8	25%
Ideally, all schools should be scored and show their level of safety publicly	11	34%

There is a small majority for general scoring of all schools, but the difference with other options in not great. There was no consistent pattern in how different respondent groups respond to this.

The partnership also had discussion on what to score on. If we want to develop a "label" with different levels, the criterion to score a school on should be consistent across the levels, otherwise the comparison is not possible. We asked: "We have considered several ways of defining levels. Which criterium do you think is the MOST ESSENTIAL to base a score on?" Respondents could only choose one. These are the results:

The level of commitment, the internal consistency of the procedure and the level of information about the policy scores highest. Level of commitment

| answer	number	percentage
Level of commitment to the policy in the school community	7	22%
Level of restorative/no-blame approach	2	6%
The extent to which the policy is likely to be effective based on research findings about effect	4	13%
Number of antibullying interventions implemented	4	13%
The internal consistency of the antibullying procedures	7	22%
The level of information in the school community about the antibullying policy	6	19%
The competence of the teachers	0	0%
The leadership of the school management	2	6%

was also recommended as a criterion by students during am discussion session about scoring criteria in Liverpool (March 2019).
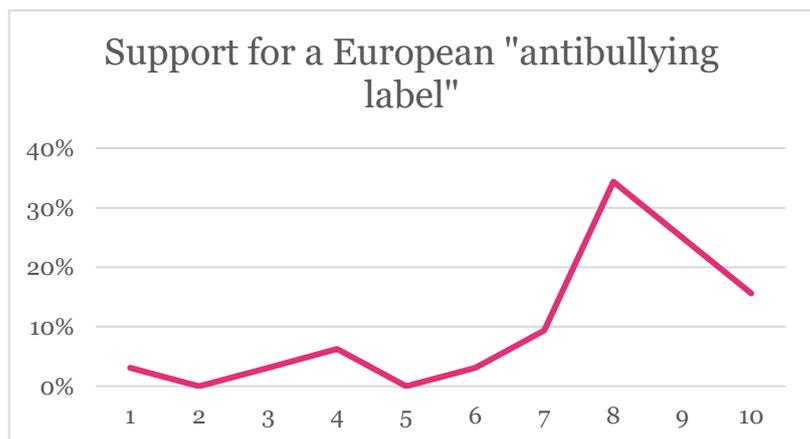
"Internal consistency" links to the perspective of ISO-standardization and is a more indirect measure of expected impact.

It is surprising that scientifically expected effect does not score high (13% only) and that restorative methods (proven by science to be more effective than punishment) score only 6%.

The evaluated version of the procedure included a draft tool to score the school on commitment. This tool was based on the "GEEC" (goals, environment, education, counselling) model which one of the partners used in the Netherlands to offer school manager insight in how to innovate in their school by gradually expanding the commitment among the school population. The presentation of the model in a project exchange in Palermo (September 2018) was well received by the school participants. We asked the respondents how they evaluate this scoring instrument on a scale 1-10. 88% scored it as 7, 8, 9 or 10, but 41% scored 7. Joint scores for 8-9-10 were 47%.

Scoring on "committment"
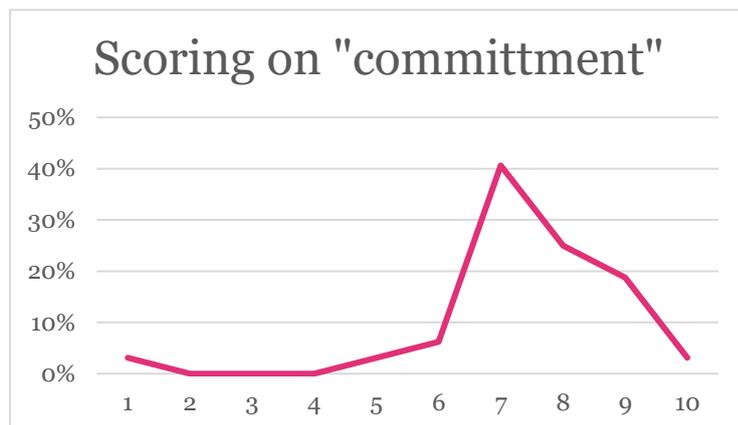
One of the thoughts in the project team is to suggest the creation of a European antibullying label for schools. Such a label could look like the energy label which is now a mandatory label for apartments and energy-using apparatuses in Europe. The idea is that anti-violence is a European priority and an antibullying label could set a standard and stimulate schools to increase their level of attention and impact in this area. However, even within the partnership there are different views on this. Some think the autonomy of schools should be paramount, while other believe in the stimulating force of a label. We asked the respondents whether it would be a good idea to create a national or European label.

Support for a European "antibullying label"

The support for a national or European label resembles the previous diagram, which suggests the question about commitment may have been taken as a question about scoring in general.

Still, the scores on this question are higher, 75% scores 8-9-10 and when we add 7, it is 84%.

We also asked comments on this idea. A summary of the comments:

- In Italy it would be impossible
- I don't like labels as a solution, it is about intrinsic motivation
- I wonder if schools will be able to do a self-assessment, especially difficult for smaller schools
- It will be difficult to agree on a label because people (partners) don't agree on whether to score or on criteria, and even a discussion on it is difficult
- I like the comparison with the energy label
- It is new and would be well accepted
- It is a good idea, but it needs to take into account motivation, and national differences
- It would be a good tool to modernize schools and to make students, teachers and managers true companions as full participants in the school

Students on rating schools

In Liverpool, we did a workshop with the students on what they were thinking on how to rate schools. We used a statement game for this. Students got four statements and had to choose if they agreed or not with the statement. They could also take a neutral position. After taking positions, students could justify their choice and try to convince students to take another position.

Statement 1: Do you agree that the effectiveness of antibullying policies depends on the *number and frequency of ongoing activities*? Or, do you think it could be due to other factors/causes? Most students disagreed. The students who agreed said it would depend on the number of activities (school activities organised by teachers and peer-to-peer activities, but informal activities as well). It was also said there is a need to improve the policies all the time. Students found a focus on informal activities very useful. The students who disagreed stated it doesn't depend on the number of activities. In the UK for instance we have formal lessons on antibullying or specific events (antibullying day once a year in UK) but this does not influence the level of impact.

Statement 2: Do you agree that the effectiveness of antibullying policies depends on the *number of people that are agreeing with them*? Do we need to get the most people or not? Most students agreed, only few people were in the middle of the room and two students were disagreeing. The students who disagreed argued that the majority is not always right and might decide on a policy that is unjust to minorities. Peter Dankmeijer, the facilitator, explained that true

democracy is not only the rule of the majority but also that the needs of minorities need to be considered and always have a chance to be heard. But still, any community must make decisions and a minority must adapt to some extent. So, in a democratic school, you can have few people disagreeing, but it doesn't mean necessary that the school is more unsafe as long as the minority is not repressed or discriminated.

Statement 3: We should assess the success of a school's antibullying policy based on *"innovation commitment".* Peter explained that in any organization, you will have innovators, early adopters, late adopters and laggards. Innovators are the first to try new things, but laggards never want to change anything. A real change only occurs when the majority adopts the change. So, this statement is like the "to have a majority", but it is not exactly the same. It is not so much about how many people agree exactly, but about how much an improvement is supported in the school.
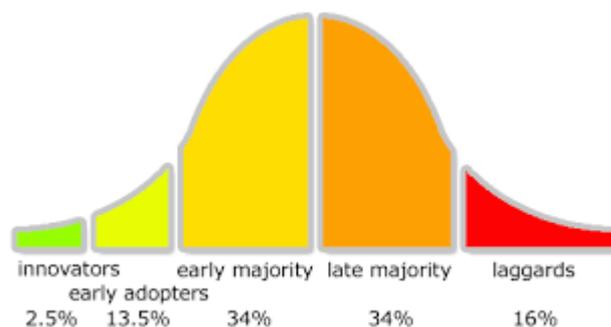
All students agreed. The arguments were that innovation is useful because it could help us to find the right solution, but we must reach most people to be effective.

Some students were neutral because the *level of interest* of the students is essential to make an antibullying policy working.

Statement 4: Do you agree that diversity should be *in all the items* **or do we need separate questions in this?** If you must deal with social inclusion and diversity, and we try to deal with all the linked issues: women, discrimination, gay and lesbians etc...do we need to integrate all these issues in each question and in each part of the policy, or does it then get lost should and do we need separate attention and separate scoring questions to get a right view of diversity aspects of antibullying? Most students agree with integration rather than with separate attention. The main argument was that we must consider all areas, diversity in all its forms. The students who were neutral on this said it depends on the situation. If we focus just on antibullying we must deal with all the types of diversity. But sometimes we must focus more on one aspect more than another to solve specific problems that are unique to a specific form of diversity. Maybe some exclusion mechanisms are similar, but you cannot assume that – for example - measures focussed on disabled students will also work for LGBT students or refugees. Students who disagreed said we *must* separate the issues because we can't face with all kinds of diversity at the same time. Different types of discrimination need different interventions.

The interventions toolkit

The Smile of the Child developed an activity for teachers to work with the draft toolkit and to comment on it. The teachers were confronted with a few bullying case studies and were asked to select an intervention to deal with the situation. In each case, there was a discussion on how and why the interventions were chosen and if the format of the toolkit was supportive to make such choices.

Overall, the teachers thought the proposed format was useful. Although the teachers liked the idea of the information being gathered in a single file, they found it difficult to work with it in the current format (it was a "long file" in "tiny font"), however they thought that it would be practical when transferred into a web format with a database.

There was a series of suggested improvements. Based on the discussion, The Smile of the Child decided to add categories based on topics such as: Bullying, Cyber bullying, Gender Bullying, Physical Violence, to specify age groups, to specify if the intervention is long term or short term, and to add a short description of the method and concise steps about how to implement the intervention.