

Panel Session Note 1: Making Children's and Students' Voices Heard

Time: November 15, 13:30-15:00

Room: Strangersalen, 1st floor

Moderator:

Olena STYSLAVSKA, teacher trainer, CoE and EWC expert, Poland

Speakers:

Yuliia MINTYANSKA, teacher, and Oksana BUBNOVA, student, Chernivtsi Secondary School, Ukraine

Birgitte Fredriksen, teacher, Ås Secondary School, Norway

Vanessa ALOY, teacher, and Antoni RIBA, student, Escola Andorrana de Segona Ensenyança d'Encamp, Andorra

Input & reflections on topic & school practices by Anders BAKKEN, Oslo Metropolitan University, EWC Board member, Norway

Rapporteur:

Angeliki ARONI, Head of Department of Refugee Education, Ministry of Education, Science and Religious Affairs, EPAN-member, Greece

Language: English

Background:

Making Children's and Students' Voices heard is one of the six themes of the CoE Campaign "Free to Speak, Safe to Learn - Democratic Schools for All":

"In democratic societies, children and young people have the right to be heard and not to feel afraid to express themselves. Schools have a key role in upholding this principle. At the same time, students need to be aware of both their rights and responsibilities. Learning about human rights and democracy is a fundamental first step for becoming an informed and responsible citizen. Students also need to participate in activities such as debating and community work. Skills, knowledge and critical understanding must be coupled with the attitudes and values that form part of a democratic culture. All this should be promoted through a whole school approach." (CoE Campaign leaflet)

Good practices and initiatives by school representatives, as submitted, please find below.

Chernivtsi Secondary School, Ukraine

«Learning how to make democratic choices» «The Youth of Sadhora take action» by Yuliia MINTYANSKA, teacher, and Oksana BUBNOVA, student

We took part in this issue because we wanted to create our «ideal school». An institution where all the members (pupils, parents, teachers, the administration) are equally represented, there is mutual respect among all of them. The pupils are free to speak about their ideas, they are encouraged to be leaders, and they are encouraged to make changes in the school and community in general. In addition, we want to create an environment where all members of the school can take part in planning and creating a better future.

At the beginning school and community members gathered and discussed important issues about our school and how to create solutions in a democratic way. Our first step was to increase transparency at our school. We did this by releasing all main documents on our web page for public use. Our next step was to elect a new student government. Also local students gathered to discuss the problems of different schools in our region. After that we worked on some tasks that we identified: lack of understanding about Democracy, small number of classrooms, stadium quality, environmental problems. Everything that we've planned went well.

While our process has gone well, in general, we've had a few challenges:

- *hired new teachers for different reasons
- *some teachers had entrenched ways of thinking
- *there was a lot of additional work (extra meetings, new lessons, workshops ...)

As for results, the project gave us the opportunity to broaden our horizons. The school welcomed a volunteer from the USA who is helping us better understand English, democratic societies and our future opportunities with technology. Furthermore the new lessons/courses about Democracy in our middle and high schools are included in the curriculum. We also have a new playground, 4 new rooms, a bicycle rack, a composter pile and the most important thing is teachers and pupils who are inspired with new ideas and who can try to make changes in our school.

This is what we would say to a colleague who is about to start the same kind of project:

- you should actively involve all members of school in the process
- don't be afraid of implementing new ideas
- don't forget to take into consideration all interests of the different members of the school and in the community
- all decisions should be made in a democratic way
- if you want to change something you should start with yourselves.

Ås Ungdomsskole, Norway
 “Be the Change” by Birgitte Fredriksen, teacher

Question	Description
What is the title of your project/practice/ initiative (if any exist)?	The title of our Erasmus Plus project is “Be the Change”. This project addresses the environmental challenges we are facing today and the need for united cooperation in order to develop more sustainable life practices (ref UN Goals for sustainable development). The main objective of our project is to develop new cross-curricular teaching and learning practices to develop skills and competences necessary to meet these challenges. Such teaching and learning practices will foster the development of social, civic (democratic) and intercultural competences, science and media literacy, critical thinking, ICT skills, as well as increased environmental awareness and entrepreneurship.
Why did you/ your school choose to work on the issue of “Making children’s and students’ voices heard” ?	In order to face the challenges of Climate change and to promote sustainable living on a global scale enabling students to be active agents for change is seen as a crucial factor. Throughout the projects philosophical dialogue is used to give the students a chance to connect with the issues at stake. Here students can voice their opinion and respond to others in a safe environment. Key concepts have need. It is a great strength to the project that it is carried out on an international scale as it strengthens the students’ sense of being Global Citizens and part of something bigger – if we stand together, we are stronger, and our voices will be heard.
What did you do and what went well? Who took part? Please describe some important steps of the process.	addressed in 5.
What were main challenges you have experienced?	Involving the whole school and finding the time to cooperate as well as agreeing on how to understand key-concepts such as cross-curricular learning and in-depth learning has been challenging from time to time.
Did your project/ practice/ initiative bring some changes? What were the benefits?	It is our school’s shared opinion that the project “Be the Change” has significantly contributed to, and is continuously contributing to, a heightened awareness of the environmental challenges the earth is facing today among teachers, students and parents at Ås ungdomsskole. The project’s focus on entrepreneurial activities and phenomenon-based learning has also resulted in many concrete steps towards more sustainable living practices both inside and outside our school. From small scale student projects called “C-Changes” were students have analyzed their own life-style and decided to make concrete changes in their own and their families’ lives for a week

	(and hopefully more), to the development of a school garden project, improved waste-management at school, the annual Green Friday Fair in November (TRADE instead of SALE) and various Go-green/Go-fair campaigns that students have initiated in our vicinity and online through the use of social media or by letters to responsible companies and authorities.
What would you say to a colleague who is about to start the same kind of project/ practice/ initiative to help them repeat your success?	Make sure to involve the whole school and work on anchoring the projects aims within the teaching staff. Involve the students actively by giving them responsibility, making them take on the role as “agents of change” for their peers and encourage peer-learning.

Escola Andorrana de Segona Ensenyança d'Encamp, Andorra
“Competences for a Democratic Culture Comission” Vanessa ALOY, teacher, and Antoni RIBA, student

Our school decided to create a commission with students (21 students from 1st to 4th grade) to develop differently the Competences for Democratic Culture (CDC).

During the past school year, the students had been trained on CDC using materials of the Council of Europe (Tasks of democracy and Teaching controversial issues). After the training, the students of the commission prepared and performed “The day of democracy”, a school project where all the students had a different approach to CDC. We had the pleasure to present our project at the Council of Europe. The current school year, we opened the commission to new members who had been trained by the students of the previous year using CDC activities.

To develop world citizens in a democratic country is one of the main aims of our educational system, and, promote the CDC is an interesting way to develop it. It is also one of the most interesting ways to make students voices be heard at school and in the society.

The project has allowed us to promote teamwork and cooperative work, essential elements of the today’s society. It also helped the educators that to understand and work on CDC is essential for our students and to put students in the center of their learning process. Therefore, the project had an impact on our school but also on a global level due to formal presentations at the Council of Europe and the “Consell General” (Andorran Parliament).

The project gave us several benefits. First of all, it changed the idea of the students about democracy and the different values related to it. Secondly, this commission assures us the promotion of values and human rights in a different but in a very relevant level for the students.

To conclude, the Competences for Democratic Culture commission is a highly stimulating school project which needs motivation and implication from the teachers, students and the direction team. It will be very interesting to promote it among other schools in order to increase the students’ participation level and also the respect and the human rights.