FREE TO SPEAK SAFE TO LEARN

Panel Session Note 6: Improving Well-being at School

Time: November 16, 09:15-10:45
Room: Hoff Pensjonisten Room, 1 st floor

Moderator:
Andriy DONETS, Programme Coordinator, "Schools for Democracy", EWC, Ukraine

Speakers:

Mike KIERNAN, Teacher, Bremore Educated Together Secondary School, Ireland

Nadina Carmen NICOLICI, Teacher, Lorin Salagean Technical College, Romania

Anja KRANICH, Teacher, Netzwerk-Schule, Germany

Input & reflections on topic & school practices by Professor David Kerr, Head of ITT: Partnership and Engagement, University of Reading (UK) and Consultant Director of Education, Young Citizens, UK.

Rapporteur:
Jonas Paustian BORUM, Educational Consultant Danish Ministry of Education, EPAN-member, Denmark

Language: English

Background:

Improving well-being at school is one of the six themes of the CoE Campaign "Free to Speak, Safe to Learn - Democratic Schools for All":

 "Students' well-being and their success in and outside school depend on their ability to use their competences for democratic culture. Since well-being has many facets, improving students' wellbeing in schools requires a whole-school approach, involving both teachers and parents. Schools should provide lessons focused on the responsible use of the Internet, the need to adopt a healthy lifestyle and how to prevent or cope with mental health problems, in collaboration with those involved, including health and social services, local authorities and civil society organisations." (CoE Campaign leaflet)

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

Bremore Educated Together Secondary School, Ireland
"Wellbeing Indicators lead by Students" by Mike Kiernan, teacher

Why did you/ your school choose to work on the issue of "Addressing well-being at school "?	Here are a variety of good practices which we recognize that support wellbeing in the school: -Amber Flag Committee (positive mental health) -Clann/Family System -LGBTI Committee -Development education Committee -Sporting Events - Induction, friendship and belonging initiatives -School Trips -Reflective opportunities -Student relationship keepers These practices are supported by the student council and the committees are largely student lead.
What did you do and what went well? Who took part? Please describe some important steps of the process.	Organization. All students who are interested in the above committees voluntarily joined and developed engaging and meaningful ways to support other students and their wellbeing. Communicating- Staff need to communicate what wellbeing is. We identified what it looked like in our school in order to facilitate student engagement. Student voice =engagement! Student council surveys at the start and throughout the year facilitate what students want. When students are included and feel valued there is excellent uptake.
What were main challenges you have experienced?	Time- we are teachers in a new building which means we have a lot of time needed to be given to setting up departments.
Did your project/ practice/ initiative bring some changes? What were the benefits?	There is definite awareness of the importance of physical activity and positive mental health underpinned by what we as a staff identified as wellbeing outcomes for our students.
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?	Ask for help!- Both staff and students are needed in order to fulfill what we achieved. We have developed leadership skills among our students to develop events, activities and a culture of wellbeing.

Lorin Salagean Technical College, Romania

"We Care About" by Nadina Carmen Nicolici, teacher

Why did you/ your school choose to work on the issue of "Addressing well-being at school "?	We decided to embark on such an initiative as we discovered that too little is known about social exclusion, while it existed in our school, and many of our students were prone to it, which led to poor learning outcomes, absenteeism or early school leaving, low self-esteem and lack of motivation.
What did you do and what went well? Who took part?	We set up the project team (students and teachers), identified the students in the target group, and we set up a club for them. The activities took place every week, and they included

Please describe some important steps of the process.	workshops, debates, a mini-play on tolerance and exclusion, visits to different places in our area, and also helping the others, such as the old people in one local asylums or children in the local orphanage. Once a week, for 120 minutes, the students in the target group were helped by volunteers and teachers with the subjects where their performance tended to be poor.
What were main challenges you have experienced?	One of the biggest challenges we faced during the project, from the very beginning was to keep our students, teachers, and partners interested in the project and motivated. We managed to avoid it, as we involved our direct beneficiaries in the project – we discussed about the activities we want to do and we took our students' opinions into account. We know that sometimes our ideas (as teachers) are not the same as our students', so we let them take the floor from the beginning.
Did your project/ practice/ initiative bring some changes? What were the benefits?	Our students gained knowledge, but not in the formal way, they got involved, expressed their ideas, acted and saw the final results. They became more tolerant, and now they see things from a different perspective.
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?	Take into account the ideas that come from the direct and indirect beneficiaries. Collaborate and communicate with them regularly (have a communication plan for this), and you will be able to avoid the biggest challenge – see your project abandoned.
Anything else you would like to highlight?	Our project was based on cooperation because all the partners really worked together, we discussed, shared ideas, learned from each other, and we worked in the real world, not in the virtual one. Our direct beneficiaries had a mind-changing experience as they became more tolerant and understood that everyone may be prone to exclusion. They learned this concept – what it means, its causes and solutions to fight against it.

Netzwerk-Schule, Germany
"School Assembly of the Netzwerk-Schule" by Leonie Rodrian, Dr. Anja Kranich, teacher

Netzwerk-Schule is a democratic school for students aged 5 to 17 in Berlin, Germany. It is organized through direct democracy. The central governing body of day to day management is the weekly school assembly. Here school members have direct influence on all decision-making, sharing equal powers in all matters (one vote per person). The assembly is based on parliamentary procedure (majority rule) and takes decisions on rules, finances, hiring etc.

The school assembly is chaired by an elected team of three school members, two of whom are students. They are responsible for the smooth functioning of the school assembly and follow some basic parliamentary procedures (speakers list, motion to adjourn, motion to limit the time of the debate, protocol etc.) Attendance of the school assembly is voluntary, and it is possible to attend for single motions only. In this way students' mutual interest in the matter discussed is assured. Proposed motions must be written up for all to see on the motions board situated just outside the assembly room. In order to have the right to vote, one must be present during the entire debate of the motion. The start of each debate is announced publicly outside of the room. The petitioner has the right to speak first, then a debate follows and concludes in a vote by show of hands. Some motions may require an anonymous vote.

The school assembly actively implements that authority does not lie solely in the hands of adults. School members learn how to voice their opinion and how to take decisions collectively. By listening to each other in the assembly they learn about different perspectives. Rules are not fixed but are enacted and reformed by the community. Active participation and transparent decision-making lead to increased understanding and acceptance of rules and widens horizons towards shared responsibility for a functioning coexistence. Furthermore, it results in higher identification with the school and less structural violence.

Challenges we have experienced: One issue the school is facing in regard to its governing practise is the two seemingly conflicting goals of the school assembly: taking complex decisions (that sometimes need long and abstract discussion) and participation. Especially for younger students, complex motions seem to make attending the assembly unattractive.

Advice we can give: It is very important to structure the school assembly with clear procedures that are accessible to students of all ages. These procedures have to be exercised regularly in order for them to become well established. Also, it is important to describe openly (e.g. in a constitution) that there are some limits to the assembly's power to avoid a loss of trust when decisions are made but cannot be applied. The meeting cannot take decisions that break existing state laws, threaten the school's existence or endanger the well-being of students.