Conference or Workshop Item

Title: Not only academically oriented, but supportive and friendly. A comparative study of students' idea of a good school in three European countries

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Version: Presented version

http://nectar.northampton.ac.uk/7266/
“Not only academically oriented, but supportive and friendly”.

A comparative study of students’ idea of a good school in three European countries.

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Cristina Devecchi – University of Northampton (UK)
Séverine Colinet – Université de Cergy-Pontoise (FR)
The social capital of participation by young people: A European dimension

- Horizon 2020
- Erasmus+

Policy Objectives

values

- renewed European cooperation in the youth field
- emphasis on developing citizenship and participation.
Need to give young people a more significant role in decision making
(Cook-Sather, 2002; Fielding, 2001; 2012; Grion, Cook-Sather, 2013)

Sargeant (2013:1 ‘Despite the mounting evidence of its value, in many aspects of education and social provision, the child’s voice remains absent’.
Transitioning – CD comments

- It is not clear to me how we go from one slide to the other and I wonder whether the audience will get it either.
Evaluating schools and identifying quality: two issues to consider

1. Criticism of passive role of stakeholders
Some authors call for ‘more productive approaches to assessment and accountability: support stakeholders’ expressions of their values and aims

(Broadfoot, 2007; Gardner et al., 2010; Stobart, 2008; 2010).

2. Criticism towards implicit idea of ‘quality’
Educational systems built with no regard to students’ perspectives

(McNess, 2006, p. 517)
“The next step” of the research on quality evaluation

(Greek, 2009)

**Hard QAE forms**
- inspection
- national testing
- league tables
- performance management
- benchmarking
- national targets

**Soft QAE forms**
- self-evaluation
- school plans
- parental consultation
The research: the “good school” pupils’ ideas

Main Aim:
To look at identifying an assessment method which relates more closely to what students think makes a quality school

What do you think makes a good school?
Other more specific aims

1. Identify **commonalities and differences** in the idea of school quality across three distinctive European countries.

1. Gain **insight into fundamental questions** such as: What do students in three different countries expect from their teachers? What do pupils consider is the purpose of schooling? What do students look for in schools?

1. Start to build and share a **new European idea of school quality**, coming from student’s perspectives, overtaking that linked to the adult-driven Measurement paradigm (Broadfoot, 2007).
## Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Researchers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>France: Mid-sized town, in north</td>
<td>Collège 11-15 years</td>
<td>130, f=65, m= 59</td>
<td>Colinet S., Université de Cergy-Pontoise (FR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy: Mid-sized town, in N-E</td>
<td>Scuola Media 11-14 years</td>
<td>145, f= 72, m= 73</td>
<td>Grion V. and Grosso M., Università di Padova (IT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England: Mid-sized town, in East</td>
<td>Low-Secondary 11-16 years</td>
<td>m=146 (Boys’ school)</td>
<td>Devecchi C., University of Northampton (UK), Grion V., Università di Padova (IT)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Methodological framework

• An **open-ended questionnaire** was used in each country, which enabled participants to respond personally and honestly, (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2007, p.330).

• **Bottom-up, Interpretive analysis**: first phase - 3 series of individual data; second phase – comparison of key issue emerging across individual data analyses (by videochat or ftf)

**Data collection**
Ethical issues

Respect for the person:
• All participants were invited to participate
• Participation was voluntary
• All data was anonymous, names were not collected
• All researchers followed their local educational research guidelines

Informed consent
• Parental consent for participants was via the Head Teacher at the school, using an opting out approach
• Participants were briefed by the researchers and any questions answered
• Students’ assent was sought through briefings

Write to withdraw
• Participants chose how much information they included in response to questionnaires
(Initial) findings: commonalities among countries

- "social climate"
- range and type of activities proposed
- physical/architectonic aspects
- school features
- THE GOOD SCHOOL
- teacher quality
- Subjects expert
- Relational (human skills…) and methodological competences
Some commonalities/similarities

The good teacher

• At least one reference to the quality of teachers in nearly all the texts analyzed.
• This reference is frequently the first comment which pupils write in order to express their idea of a good school;
• the number of codes which refer to relational and methodological competencies (managing class and way of teaching, is much higher than those related to subject competencies (i.e. “friendly” “strict and fair”, “compréhensif et attentif à leurs élèves”, professeurs encourageant, “che aiutano e capiscono gli alunni …”)

The good school

• The most important feature are at the social, affective level (friendly and supportive), more cited than strictly cognitives ones
• References at a more “practical school” (learning by doing) less directed by theory, (less “accademically oriented”) • Reference to a school preparing to the children (professional) future • References to importance to physical/architectonic aspects
Social climate of school

A good school for me, this is a school where there is no fighting, no racism, where older students respect us. (French, Y1)

[A good school] is the one where you feel well, where you get along with teachers and school mates, where you are not anxious about tests. (Italian, Y2)

I think that a good school is a place where it is easy to learn without interference (talking or bullying) and a place where there are open opportunities. [Y7]

I believe that a good school should be when a pupil can go to school without fear of other students. [English, Y7]
Some points to reflect (1)

• When pupils speak of about “a good school”, they express an idea that is very close to the “supportive school” model as designed by Gray et al. (2011), rather than to the “academically effective school” model (Gray 2012).

Può la “qualità” del sistema scolastico risultare da una costruzione sociale che esclude le idee degli studenti?

Key factors of the “Supportive School” model (Gray et al., 2011)

- General satisfaction with educational experience
- The feeling of membership of the school as a learning community
- Schools which avoid the pressure of schoolwork
- Relationships with teachers and peers
- Thinking “small” (i.e. attention to size and organization of schools/classes)
Aspetti significativi/limiti della ricerca

- I 2 ricercatori principali conoscono le tre lingue
- Valorizza il punto di vista degli studenti
- Stimola la discussione sull’idea di “qualità” del sistema scolastico

- Campioni non rappresentativi della popolazione scolastica di quell’età nei 3 paesi
- La ricerca non tiene conto degli specifici contesti socio-culturali delle scuole
- Nessun ritorno della ricerca alle scuole e ai ragazzi: uso strumentale degli stessi? Contro l’approccio Student Voice
The good teacher

….there should be kind and helpful teachers who do not make students feel bad if they find it hard to study and they do not understand things, teachers should help them instead. (Y3)
Elementi di riflessione (2)

• I nostri risultati potrebbero anche essere considerati in altra prospettiva, maggiormente critica, ossia quella della reificazione e della riproduzione sociale dei discorsi predominanti da parte dei ragazzi, allora dovremmo mettere in luce il limite del metodo e degli strumenti utilizzati nella ricerca.

• …..si aprono prospettive diverse di discussione…..
«C’è qualcosa di fondamentalmente sbagliato nel costruire e ricostruire un intero sistema senza prestare mai ascolto a coloro per i quali verosimilmente si edifica tale sistema. L’inefficacia di questo approccio sta diventando sempre più evidente […] E’ giunto il tempo di considerare gli studenti fra coloro che hanno il diritto di partecipare sia alla riflessione critica sull’educazione che al rinnovamento della stessa»

Grazie per l’attenzione