Insecurity

The ABC-project has been plagued with insecurity, but we are going to finish it with success!

The ABC-project goes through a turbulent time. Just before the summer in 2019, we heard that the link between our school partners and the initial partners was not correct and we had to make a request for an amendment on the project proposal.

The exchange in Brussels had to be postponed because of this from November 2019 to May 2020 Then, the Corona-virus started to spread. When we made the first draft of this newsletter, Italy started to lock-down, but by now all meetings in Brussels and in the other partner countries have been banned as well. But we intend to not let us being put down by these challenges. In this newsletter we let you know how we intend to finish the project successfully.

The amendment

In January 2019, we submitted the first interim report of the project. Although the progress of the project was evaluated positively, the Dutch Erasmus+ Agency considered the link between the schools and the partners "not proven", so Erasmus+ could not reimburse the travel costs. Since the travels are 40% of this project, this was a big problem.

The project submitted its interim report in January 2019. The Erasmus+ Agency was quite positive about the progress of the project, but said we could not adequately prove the link between the partners and the schools. After the feedback of the Agency, we provided additional documentation that the partners really had a longstanding relationship with the participating schools. But after some months, the Agency let us know this was not enough. The only way to claim the travel costs was if the schools became formal partners.

Delays in the approval of the amendment

The discussions to solve these issues took a long time, By the time the solution became clear, it was too late to organize the meetings in Brussels as planned in November.

In January, the Agency agreed with the content of the amendment. Because some schools were not yet formally registered in the Erasmus+ portal, the official approval of the amendment was delayed until this was done. As of 25 March, we are still waiting for the approval of the formal registration of one school.
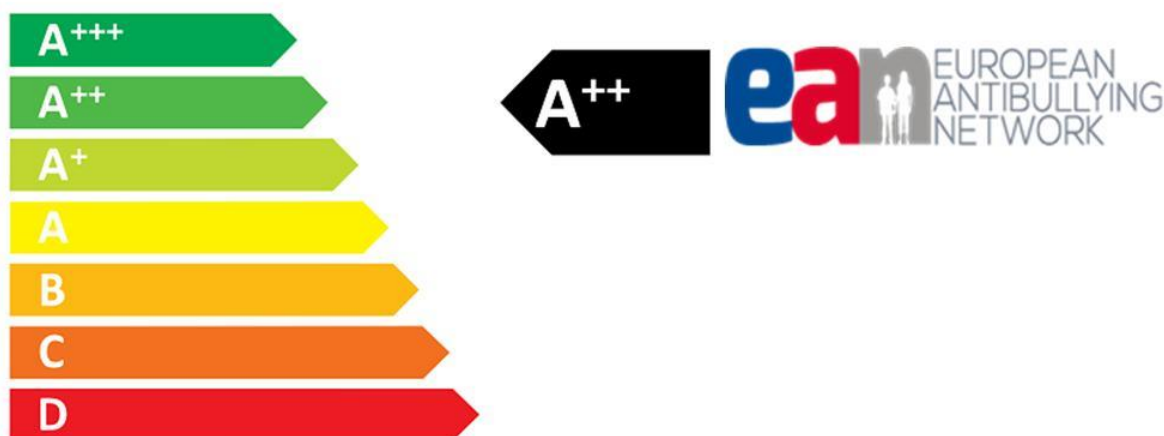
To score or not to score

In the ABC-project we intended to help schools to get insight in the quality of their antibullying school policy. But how do you set quality standards? This article is about the dilemmas we experienced with assessing schools.

The ABC-project aimed to develop a way to "certify" schools for their antibullying policy. During the project, we discovered we could not develop a formal ISO-certification, because none of the partners is an institute that is certified to grant ISO-certificates to others. We decided that the focus of the project should be to offer schools a way to self-assess their own policy and to make up their minds about how to improve it. This is not a full certification, but it provides a good kick-off for a formal certification - if a school wants to proceed to that formal level.

However, even for a more informal self-assessment, you need to have some quality standards the school can compare itself to. We had a continuing discussion in the partnership if our guidelines for self-assessment should contain criteria to distinguish between a bad, average, good or best antibullying policy. We considered making an antibullying "energy" level with four levels (A-D), like apartments or washing machines have in Europe. The question was how to decide whether a school was on level A or D. In 2019, the partnership reviewed research literature on this and at the project meeting in Liverpool, we adopted 6 general guidelines for an effective antibullying policy in a school based on this research:

1. Group formation and norming ground rules: start the school year with setting prosocial rules and create safe groups by doing group cohesion activities.

2. Understanding how bullying works and how to act against it: explain to students and discuss what bullying is and how group processes work and can be handled; embed this in a longer-term spiral curriculum.

3. **Broad commitment**: involve gradually but systematically more staff, students and parents in the development and maintenance of safe school policy.

4. **Support positive behavior, avoid putdowns and punishment**: complimenting, rewarding and no-blame methods are more effective than negative methods, like blaming bullies, a lot of attention for bullies and punishment.

5. **Focus on school culture and prevention**: a good school policy focuses on prevention creating a positive school climate and not only on preventing negative behavior or on handling incidents.

6. **Clear and consistent school rules**: school rules and procedures are necessary, and should be concise, clear, widely shared with all concerned and equally and consistently applied by all teachers and staff.

We agreed in principle on those elements but we could not agree on how to use them as measurable standards to diagnose school policy. This was more complicated than we thought.

Our discussion was not only on the *type* of quality criteria we could offer. Some of the partners thought we should not "score" at all and leave it up to the school, while others wanted to give at least some advice on do's and don'ts. Partners who did *not* want to "judge" schools said that the key to school change is commitment of the management to improvement of the policy, and that external advice with a possibly critical judgment would jeopardize that commitment. Partners who were *for* developing a scoring system with levels, like an energy label, said it would be better not to use it as a judgment, but as a diagnostic tool and formulated in such a way that it encourages schools to reflect and improve themselves.

Some schools were also not very happy with the idea of being "scored". Although school score students all the time, being scored themselves for organizational policy could be scary. Schools were worried that this would potentially give them a negative image. This was certainly not the case for all the schools: one Italian school resolved to publish their survey results to be completely transparent to parents and to the community about their school safety.
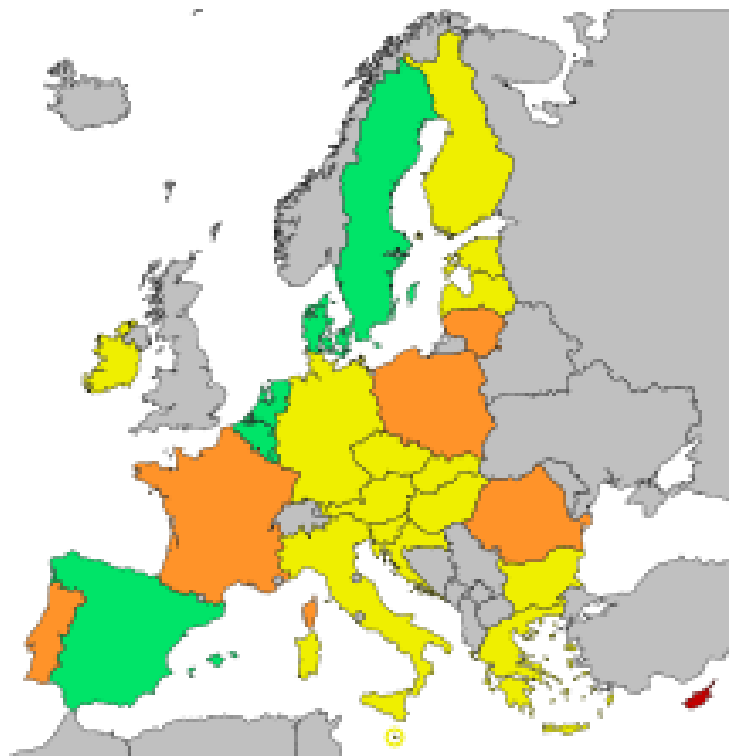
European policy

All European Erasmus+ (KA2) projects develop new tools for schools, but they also must give attention on how these tools can be used and integrated on the long-term. This means they have to consider how to make the adoption of the tool sustainable by encouraging authorities to use the tools or to improve their policies. This article is about how the ABC-project wants to make some form of assessment or certification a sustainable strategy in the participating countries and in Europe.

The project aimed to create discussion about "quality criteria" for national and European policy. But if not all the partners did quite agree on criteria on the school level, how could we agree on recommendations for the national and European levels?

In some countries, there is hardly any antibullying policy at all, while other countries consider their own national policy adequate or even outstanding – and both situations are not an ideal context to have a discussion about improvement. In addition, in some countries populist politicians are not eager to improve antibullying policies in the way we want, because our view of a good antibullying policy includes social inclusion and respect for diversity.

EUROPEAN UNION

The partnership made a review of European policy. This reveals that the European Union (27 States) and the Council of Europe (47 States) both are in favor of combating violence and conflict and intend to promote inclusion. But they don't have a specific antibullying policy and don't consider "education" to be part of their mandate. The ABC-partnership thought about how we could encourage European politicians and institutions to be more sensitive to bullying and to – somehow – to better include in in their policies. In late 2019,

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the project proposed six recommendations for further European policy.

1. The European Union could do a review of already funded projects on antibullying. This could help focus future antibullying projects and develop a more focused European program.

2. The European Union could consider if European level guidelines for social safety and inclusion in schools would be possible.

3. The European Union could consider making it a priority to open a tender for an ongoing European antibullying campaign.

4. Part of such a campaign could be the development of a clearing house of projects and methods.

5. Another part of such a campaign could be the development of a European "map" of national antibullying policies and related best practices.

EXAMPLE OF A EUROPEAN MAP ON COUNTRY POLICIES: THE GALE MAP ON LGBT SUPPORTIVE EDUCATION (WWW.GALE.INFO)

6. The international trend to legitimize ideological and political hate speech as "freedom of speech" should be recognized as a serious threat to antibullying and to democracy. The EU should consider developing a coherent view hate-speech, antibullying and democracy.

The full ABC-review of the European policy is 47 pages and can be downloaded here. All the partners in the project and all interested people in quality standards for education are asked to fill in a survey to give their opinion on the ABC-recommendations. The recommendations will be discussed in the next two months during the final phase of the project. Based on the conclusions of this research and discussions, the European report will be updated and republished.

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Corona: no travel

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, it has become impossible to travel or to meet with a large group of people. On 11 March, the partnership decided to cancel all the meetings that were planned in Brussels in April. We intend to replace the meetings as far as we can with online activities.
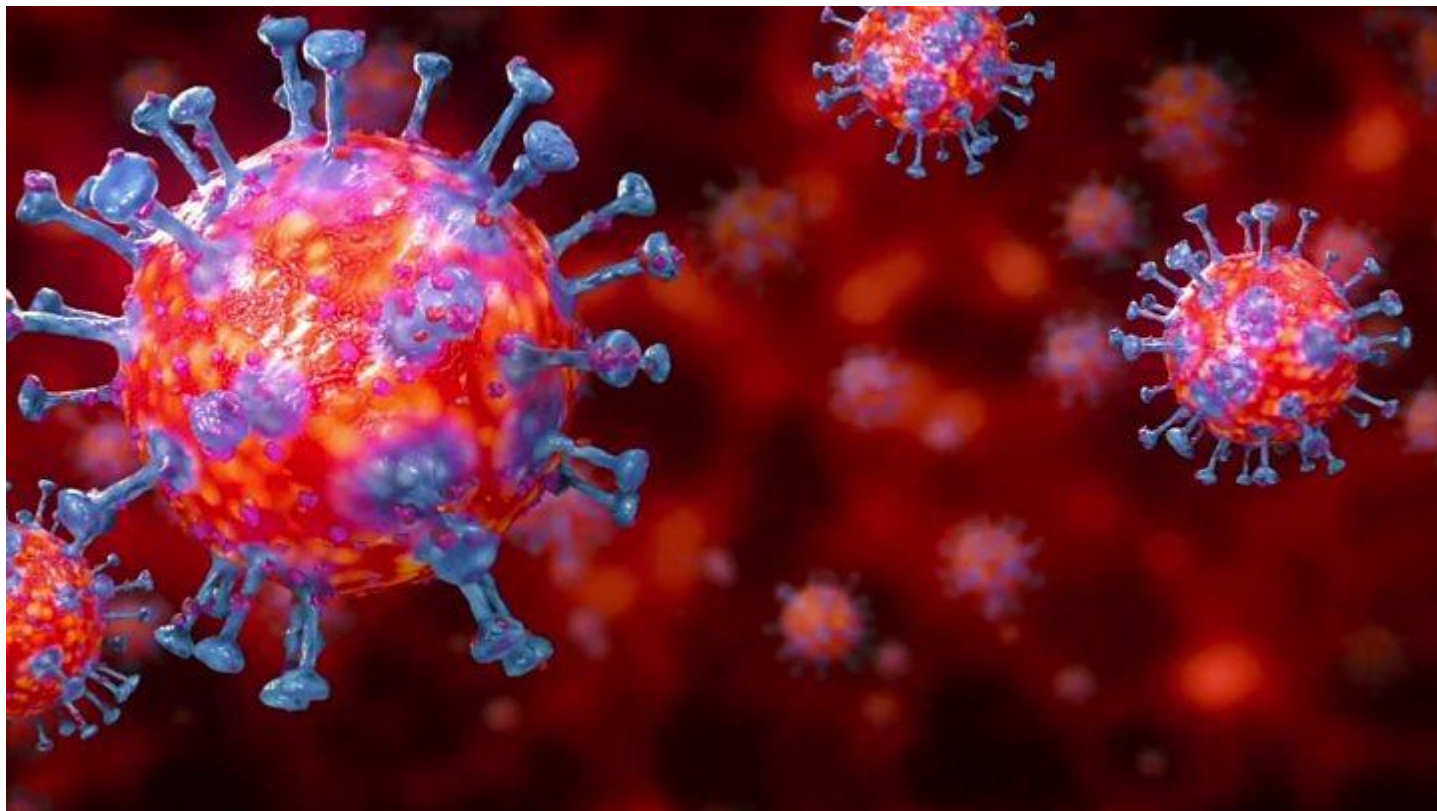
When we planned the exchange meetings in Brussels, the intention was to get the students and teachers together to think about the follow-up of the project. The main reason to do this in Brussels - which is not one of the partner countries - is because one of the aims of the project is to start a dialogue on the European level about the need for international guidelines to combat bullying. Part of the exchange would be an European Antibullying Network (EAN) international conference where we could have a discussion with European politicians and NGOs. As a preparation, the students would explore the workings of the European Union and develop a document on how to integrate student voices in school safety and inclusion. The teachers would write a reflection document on the relevance of certification and quality criteria for antibullying policy, and it would consider how to promote better quality bullying policy in schools and in their countries.

Corona ban on travel and meetings

On March 11, the project partners had an online project meeting to discuss the consequences of the Corona virus. It was already clear that Italian, Dutch and

English schools were not able to come: the Italian

schools not because of the Corona lockdown, and the Dutch and English schools because of other reasons. At the meeting it became clear that also Spanish and Greek schools would probably be prevented to travel in late April. So we had to decide to cancel the exchange and the conference in Brussels. We submitted a plan to replace these meetings with online activities to the Erasmus+ Agency. Because the end of the project is already in two months, we have already started to prepare this in the expectation that Erasmus+ Agency will understand the situation and accept our proposal.

Alternative plans

The alternative proposal is to do a combination of interactive online activities in the next two months. In the first place we want to have everyone's opinion on the products of the project, on some of the dilemmas about scoring schools, and on the policy recommendations. We made separate short surveys (20 questions) for this for students, teachers, national and international stakeholders, and for other interested people. We hope that everyone who participated in the project or is interested in it will fill in these surveys. In the end of April, the project coordinator will make a report of the results.

The results will be discussed on the project's social media channels and on a forum dedicated to the discussion about these issues.

At the same time, we will provide the participating schools with short online lessons for students to think about antibullying in schools, school policy, national policy and European policy. The schools can encourage the students and teachers to discuss this in a digital way on the school level, and encourage them to take part in the discussion on the projects social media and on the forum.

The ABC-discussion forum:

**https://www.gale.info/en/
how-to-combat-bullying**

Other online media for the discussion

It would be good if you take part in the discussion by "liking" the (public) Facebook page "How schools combat bullying":

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Teachers and partners who want their comments in a less public setting, can share them in a closed Facebook group: https://www.facebook.com/groups/250853035553368/. If you have not yet registered for this, you can apply to become a member of this group. Please mention from which ABC-participating school you are, because there are lots of outside people asking to be part of this group, but we don't allow them in during the project lifetime.

Students can (also) follow and post on the Instagram page: https://www.instagram.com/studentsjoinagainstbullying/.

The final discussion

After working on this project for over two years, we would like to have an impression of what people think about our products, their views on the dilemmas we experienced and if people have suggestions to improve policy.

The project is nearing its end, and of course we want to know how people think about its impact. How do people assess the quality of our self-assessment procedure and tools? Do they think we should have quality criteria for schools, and if yes, what type of

quality criteria? Do they think that the national and European policies are adequate, or should they be improved?

The partnership developed a short questionnaire about this. There are separate versions for students, teachers, national stakeholders, European stakeholders and "other interested people". The questions are more or less the same, but tailored to what we specifically want to know of each group. Under this article you will find the links to all the questionnaires. We hope that all the participants in the project and all other interested people can answer these questions before April 15. Then we can make a report and present it at the end of April and discuss the results.

Surveys for students
Survey for Dutch students

Survey for Greek students

Survey for Italian students

Survey for Spanish students

Surveys for teachers
Survey for Dutch teachers

Survey for Greek teachers

Survey for Italian teachers

Survey for Spanish teachers

Surveys for national influencers (stakeholders)
Survey for Dutch national influencers

Survey for Greek influencers

Survey for Italian influencers

Survey for Spanish influencers

Survey for European influencers (stakeholders)
Survey for European influencers

Survey for other interested people
Survey for other interested people

International responses to antibullying policy in European schools

We conduct this short survey as partners in the European ABC project (Anti-Bullying Certification). In this project, we have developed a way for high schools to research and improve their anti-bullying policies. The project integrates diversity and the fight against discrimination.

Complete the survey before April 15, 2020. A report will be available at https://www.gale.info/en/projects/abc-project in April 2020. We have made a summary of the project: https://www.gale.info/doc/project-abc/Summary%20of%20the%20ABC-project.pdf, but it is not necessary to read it before answering this survey.

The survey has 20 questions and takes 15-20 minutes to complete. Most questions must be answered with a number. This makes it possible to compare those answers with respondents in other languages.
This survey is anonymous. Your answers and comments cannot be traced back to you.

Any comments about this survey or questions about the project can be directed to the project coordinator Peter Dankmeijer (p.dankmeijer@gale.info).

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