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p r e s e n t s

*Meeting Beyond
Borders*

BULLYING AND EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING

EUROPEAN CONFERENCE ABOUT
BULLYING AND EARLY SCHOOL
LEAVING TO SHARE BEST
PRACTICES BETWEEN TEACHERS
AND EDUCATIONAL STAFF ACROSS
EUROPE

Report of the conference led by
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ABOUT BULLYING AND EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING

Early school leaving is an issue affecting most schools, and often putting teachers and educational staff in front of a tough challenge. Despite their efforts in applying prevention and intervention measures, school staff is often unprepared to face the huge variety of real and potential situations of school drop-out.

Among the factors contributing to it, bullying represents one of the major ones, as it hurts the victim by provoking psychological effects at individual and social level. For this reason, it is important to be aware of the possible causes and consequences involved in this complex phenomenon.

CONFERENCE GOALS

During this conference the participants have benefited from hearing other teachers' experiences, received and gave advice on the possible solutions and measures to be applied, with the goal to be better ready to react the next time they will face these issues.

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CELESTE FROM PORTUGAL



Celeste is a biology and nature science teacher from a very isolated school in a small town in north of Portugal. The area is interesting - most of the parents of her students live a busy life dedicated to agriculture or farming, while homes are often spread apart, which increases odds for social isolation for students.

Even though her teaching environment is calm and problems rarely occur, bullying still can take place in many occasions, even though now cases are much fewer than in the previous years. Celeste explained that her observations were suggesting that **emotional state of students affect their levels of aggression, as well as their social distancing and self-isolation.**



The way Celeste and her colleagues brought positive change and prevented the issue is by improving the communication with their students: the educators tried to speak with the students and inquire about their issues, make them feel heard and understood, creating a safe environment for opening up. Celeste noted that the work takes a long time, just because sometimes what is going on is happening in many years and students have a long history of dealing with the problem.

Celeste went on to share some good practices on how teachers in her school combat the issue. First is **good communication** – staff reports to the director, psychologist, parents and seek to involve all of them in an attempt to solve the problem.

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She underlined that it is very important to speak with other colleagues, so that everyone can show support in a systematic manner. Celeste also shared a link to an interesting video, dealing with the issue of bullying: [To This Day Project - Shane Koyczan](#).

Secondly, she underlined the importance of **educating children in overcoming their own issues**. E.g. When a student is suffering bullying for being fat, Celeste took the responsibility to help all students improve their understanding of the issue. In her science class and biology class she involved students in conversation on topics such as nutrition, sport, physical activity and mental health, all of which helped equip students with the necessary tools and knowledge to bring a positive change in their life.

As a final remark, Celeste spoke about the importance of **teaching self-esteem to students on a daily basis**. Very important for them to value themselves high, to accept themselves, like and love each other and be strong. She gave various examples on the methods used in her class, including use of **teamwork** (understanding, creating a bond), **project-based learning** (pride of good work, sense of achievement) and development of **leadership skills in students** (responsibility). In this regard, she shared the good habit to give students responsible roles in group work, which leads to improved self-esteem through practice, the more momentum students gaining managing the group and solving the tasks the more confident they become. She chooses students particularly isolated or shy and assigns them the role of leader in the group.

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Cases were shown to illustrate how students overcome their self-doubt when they can go through the process of practical work, achievement, and gain pride in their work.

Celeste concluded her presentation by saying that **students see teachers as guides or mentors and their role is very important**. She expressed how proud she felt when, as a result of her efforts and hard work, a student came to her and said: “Teacher, I’m so capable of anything, I will go to university to study pharmaceuticals, thank you”!

ANGELICA FROM ROMANIA

Angelica, a teacher of Romanian Language for students from 11 to 14 years old, shared her experience on how to increase self-esteem is very important and is a very common struggles.

At her school the **use of games as a method of learning is common**, as it makes it easier. They gave an example of conducting exercises where students had the opportunity to admire the positive qualities, behaviors in fellow classmates. Students share every day what they like in each other, it becomes a routine of focusing on the positive and acknowledging the good in the others, thus creating better bonds and self-esteem. Activities also focused on the appearance of students, promoting acceptance and self-love.

The teacher expressed also some common difficulties in her school: in some classes there are students who were afraid to stand before the

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class, so teachers needed to adapt their methodology to make students at ease and gain confidence with time.

MEDINA FROM KOSOVO

Medina Jakupi, a volunteer in the Italian NGO Younet, also joined the conversation. She worked as a trainer for an antibullying program led by two professors from Vieno, who specialize in Antibullying. For her, the most important thing was to make the student feel heard. In this way they feel respected, which helps them feel loved and get high self-esteem.

ELA'S CONTRIBUTION

Laura Joanna Łuczak, trainer of ELA - Erasmus Learning Academy gave examples on how her organization also uses games to try influence students in Primary and Secondary school. She presented a tool called "Beware!" to the audience of the conference – a game to address students/teenagers and inform them about the dangers of bullying and cyberbullying. The game aims to increase awareness about the nature and the risks of bullying and how students can counteract it. The tool provides a theoretical guide on what can be dangerous, but also made the experience interactive for better engagement and improve comprehension for students.

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Indeed, the free online game gives the students the opportunity to make decisions and experience the consequences of their actions in order to have a first-hand understanding on the topic. Link and presentation for the tool was provided, because the tool proved to be effective and popular among students. Various gamification techniques were presented which are proven to improve the engagement of students and ensure their effective knowledge gain. Celeste from Portugal expressed a desire to adopt the tool as cyberbullying is a pressing issue and is very relevant, as some of the cases at her school have their basis in online environment.

Laura then gave another example on how educators can attempt prevent bullying or intervene in a situation – a practical example. The activity presented is called the Outsider: Students divide in separate groups based on a freely chosen criteria. There is a an outsider out of the room, who needs to guess what is the basis of separation and join the group where he belongs. If he does not choose right, he gets rejected in an unkind manner. This activity helps bullies understand how rejection feels trough humour, which helps them change their attitudes and behaviour. An alternative activity was also mentioned – bringing people in groups based on various interests, which allows students to learn more about each other and experience how similar are they to others. **Both activities allow students to put themselves in the shoes of others, which creates an environment of understanding and acceptance, which effectively prevents bullying.**

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At that point, another participant mentioned that as a reaction, being bullied can lead to a more violent behaviour in the victim, generating more bullies. This is why it is important to counteract the problem early and do not allow the bad behaviour to spread. It is important for all stakeholders to combine efforts and create an environment of acceptance, cooperation and tolerance that prevents aggression and its spread.

Teachers should make it clear to students that it is ok to ask for help when you are facing issues or conflicts, so that they feel supported and cared for.



Q&A SESSION

OPEN STAGE FOR QUESTIONS AND TOPICS

“Teachers were wondering how to increase [Gipsy and Roma students'] motivation and reduce the drop-out rate.”

A crucial topic of working with Gipsy and Roma students was brought out. Teachers were wondering how to increase their motivation and reduce the drop-out rate. It quickly became apparent that the issue transcends any nation.

Radoslav Bezprizvanniy, a IFOM/ELA volunteer shared his experience in working with NEETs. He brought out that a common solution to the problem is a good communication with the parents and educating them about the importance of education. He brought out interesting research showing that **entrepreneurship is seen as a desired skill for both roman/gypsie families and students alike**. Thus, introducing the topic of entrepreneurship, as well as more practical project based experiences in school can improve the motivation of those students and reduce their rate of dropping out of education or training. Other examples were then given to show that practical activities such as sport, learning a craft or the opportunity to do an apprenticeship can also improve the student's motivation.

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GREETINGS AND CLOSURE

This report has been produced thanks to the precious contribution and help of Radoslav Bezprizvanniy.

This report is the outcome of the third conference of the initiative "Meeting Beyond Borders: 5 Conferences to share best practices between teachers and educational staff across Europe", a series of five conferences organised by ELA - Erasmus Learning Academy, with speakers and participants from all over Europe.

To learn more about the other conferences of the series, [visit our website](#)

