More Trust and Cohesion for Secondary School Classes – Experiences of the Implementation of the Express Yourself! Programme in Four EU Countries

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Aim: The article describes and evaluates the implementation and impact of an inclusive grouping programme in the secondary school context, and how best practices can be established in different contextual and cultural conditions in Ireland, Germany, Lithuania, and Spain. The article is part of the Express Yourself! project and the European Union's Erasmus+ Programme.
Methodology: The theoretical framework of this study is based on the self-determination theory. Following the PDCA Cycle, the project team developed a programme scheme (fitting for the broader European context) based on an experienced Finnish model as well as a research perspective. The participating school types ranged from secondary public schools in cities to vocational schools in inclusive settings and gymnasiums with students (approx. 12-20 years) from mainly rural areas. The Express Yourself! sessions include five meetings of 60 to 120 minutes over several weeks. Each session focuses on a different topic, but building up on each other. The training was held in the facilities of the schools and mainly carried out by external pedagogical staff. A 3X10D questionnaire, mainly gathering data on the well-being of the participants (N=677), and a trainer questionnaire, focusing on the content on perception of the session content, were used for the analysis.

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Results: The article provides evidence that the Express Yourself! programme is a practical way of stimulating social inclusion in schools in different cultures and contexts. The research indicates a positive impact on students' experienced overall well-being, especially in life-as-a-whole, managing daily activities, friends, and self-esteem. Deeper analysis of the results indicates that there were differences between the success of the project in cooperation countries. The main influencing factors were gender and age.

Conclusion: The Express Yourself! programme was experienced as a low threshold and effective way to positively influence students' well-being and inclusion. Promising results were promoted by the motivation and cooperation between the trainers and teachers, which was indirectly reflected in the atmosphere in the class. Based on cooperation, sessions were tailored to the needs of each class.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

A recent trend has seen a shift from remedial action to more preventive actions when supporting the development and well-being of children and young people [1]. The European Commission education policy aims to promote citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance, and non-discrimination through education by fostering the education of disadvantaged children and young people. "Most of the reported national education policies aim to ensure that children and young people acquire social, civic and intercultural competences", issues should be identified and addressed when developing school materials and teaching methods alongside training and support for teachers and other school staff [2]. *So* there is a need to create more or less commensurate and cost-effective concepts and models to prevent students' exclusion and foster active citizenship through education. The method should also be suitable for different countries, contexts, and cultures.

In promoting the citizenship and inclusion of young people, the role of education is crucial. The Express Yourself! – Inclusive grouping in schools project offers a framework for inclusive grouping and ways to support young people's well-being via self-expression. The framework enhances formal and informal learning. A change of normal school routines and informal activities helps students discover new sides of themselves. In addition, informal activities can increase trust between students and teachers.

Free time activities do not reach everyone equally. The school context is an environment, which is an easy and cost-effective way of reaching almost all children and young people. Encouraging and fostering students' well-being and inclusion in a school environment helps to decrease problems and will increase future social inclusion [3]. According to [4], major factors among vocational students for considering dropout and factors that slow down studies are a lack of study friends and relationships in school. Informal activities during formal teaching enhance students' grouping and increase inclusion in a peer group and being a member of a group, as well as improving the working and learning environment. Offering a self-expression programme in school can prevent social gaps between students. Supporting students' self-expression is a good way to encourage and enhance self-esteem.

Good self-esteem prevents exclusion. Self-expression can be difficult for a person with low self-esteem who feels insecure with other people [5,6]. A peer group consists of a status hierarchy that is peer-rated and self-perceived. It seems that members of the group have a higher self-esteem in relation to outsiders [7]. The meaning of peer groups for children and young people in development and well-being is crucial. Supporting peer grouping is therefore a good way to enhance self-esteem.

Self-expression exercises help students get to know each other. They can be described as the "way to tell other people about ourselves" [5]. Furthermore, they encompass speech, tone, and verbal and non-verbal body language used to express personal opinions, emotions and creative acts [8]. Some people may learn self-expression and grouping skills in their early life, which helps create a connection with other people. Later, it can be fostered by creating self-expression learning opportunities in social groups [5]. The development of personal self-

expression can enhance a person's status as a group member and improve participation in a group [5]. If someone is too scared to express themselves as they want, the connection with other people may be shallow and one-sided. However, self-expression and grouping skills can be practised at any stage of life [5]. Additionally, self-expression skills are teamwork skills. Inclusive grouping activities can support motivation for learning and have a positive impact on students' well-being. Peer group and school community integration improves learning results and prevents school dropout. Supporting and motivating students to stay in school promotes the transition to working life. Additionally, self-expression and social skills engage in active citizenship and can increase societal inclusion [9].

Well-being is a broad concept that tells us how a person manages in his or her life. Briefly, well-being summarises good things and bad things [10]. Such a definition may be useful in philosophy but almost useless in empirical social sciences. For theoretical and empirical reasons, there are many perspectives on well-being [11]. It is possible to define well-being by issues outside the person (the objective, standard of living, etc.) or more things that are of psychological nature (the subjective, happiness etc.). Concepts also exist that have both objective and subjective perspectives on well-being. In well-being/quality of life studies of populations or subpopulations, subjective measurements are used most often. Measures may have several questions covering different aspects or domains of life, or only one question focusing on life satisfaction or happiness, for example. In our programme, well-being is a synonym for satisfaction with different aspects of life.

The first section of the article describes different approaches to and theories of intervention. The second section illustrates the context in which the Express Yourself! programme was implemented and provides the scheme used in schools. The third section focuses on the impact of the programme.

1.2 Approaches Supporting the Aims of the Inclusive Grouping and Theoretical Background

In the Express Yourself! programme, young people are supported in expressing themselves. "Accepted as they [students] are" [12], students are encouraged to build trust, share experiences and opinions, and develop competences to deal

with and express their emotions. These voluntarily inclusive grouping activities are expected to improve self-expression, group and self-esteem, and help students discover new sides of themselves. Motivation for learning is assumed to be supported, social emotional learning and resilience improved, and students' general well being increased. These positive impacts will decrease problems, and social inclusion will be promoted in the future.

The promotion of social inclusion in groups of children and/or juveniles is regarded as preventive work [13,14]. Social inclusion is connected with engagement in groups, communities, or society and can be described as "a combination of hearing and being heard, doing things together" [13]. Social pedagogical youth work (SPY) emphasises preventive work, because it can avoid the exclusion of young people and create a more equal and humane society. SPY emphasises that human growth and well-being happen in communities and communally, that education is a crucial element, and that it ties individuals to society [15].

Internationally, there are different kinds of social group work method, e.g. action-oriented methods that are implemented in groups of children and juveniles to create mutual awareness. Furthermore, another focus of these methods is on the discovery of resources or competences (= new sides). Other preventive programmes, e.g. Fit and strong for life [16] and IPSY [17] focus on social skills and training, the prevention of addiction, violence, or mobbing, and well-being in general, mostly with a longer duration (up to a school year or even longer).

Other programmes are developed with the aim of enhancing young people's resilience [18]. In public health, education, and learning research, protective factors are a current issue, especially the ability to cope positively with challenges and development tasks at a personal level. With a shift of the paradigm, the deficit-oriented approach was replaced by a resource-oriented focus [e.g. 19,20,21]; with the idea of pointing out the crucial components of a successful development (the Kauai longitudinal study, [22, 23,21] or the Mannheimer child risk study, cf. e.g. [24]).

One key protective factor is resilience – "the ability to manage crises, difficult situations and developmental tasks" [18,25]. Resilience, as a flexible and dynamic factor, develops during the lifespan, with childhood experiences considered

a primary factor during this development. Several factors have been identified which reinforce children's and juvenile' resources, and promote their capability to cope successfully with internal and external problems, and to adapt their developed knowledge in future crises (e.g. [19, 26,21,18,13]. The relevant factors in this case are social embedding outside the family, social responsibility, opportunities to build self-esteem, and a sense of self-efficacy. Perceived self-efficacy concerns the conviction of one's own skills that are needed to organise and execute certain actions to achieve specific aims [18, 27].

The approach of resilience is compatible with the concept of life skills [28,29,cf.18]. This universally implemented life skill approach supports the development and strengthening of the general psycho-social competences of children and juveniles to confidently handle problems and challenges, for example, emotional and social skills, self-awareness, communication skills, and empathy. This concept is a successful, resource-oriented strategy in preventive work [28,29,18]. Specific prevention issues like health or addiction may include psycho-educative issues and focus on body perception, stress coping, or norm orientation.

Social and emotional learning (SEL) - "a multidimensional construct that is critical to success in school and life for all children" [30]. It focuses on teaching "skills for life", which will be utilised later in life, and students' social skills rather than academic or cognitive learning in the school context. SEL can be described as "the process through which social-emotional competence develops" [30]. Internationally there is empirical evidence that SEL is crucial for healthy development and prevention at primary level. SEL interventions show positive effects and feasibility, and are very cost-effective [30]. The five core competences of SEL are self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making [31]. Intrapersonal, e.g. emotion regulation, and interpersonal skills, e.g. social problem solving, should be enhanced. Universal SEL interventions are regarded as equally effective in middle and high school [30].

According to the self-determination theory [32, 33] of human behaviour and motivation, motivation affecting behaviour can be either intrinsic or extrinsic, and it relates to mental and physical well-being, depending on the quality of motivation. "Motivation refers to the power that causes an individual to initiate, direct, and

perform an activity with a certain intensity and perseverance" [34].The theory is based on the assumption that humans have universal underlying basic needs: autonomy; competence; and relatedness. Competence varies greatly. One usually feels competent when something is mastered OR when people are expressing themselves. However, relatedness is a group phenomenon. The school context emphasises the meaning of relatedness with study friends. When all three basic needs are fulfilled, it brings satisfaction and is the basis of motivation.

According to previous research, fostering intrinsic motivation, defined in self-determination theory, is found essential for students' well-being, motivation for school, and producing better learning results [35]. For example, [4] states that the major factor for slowing down studies or considering dropping out is attitude and motivation (42%), before health issues (25.1%). Factors related to study motivation and attitude are a lack of study friends, relationships in school, inadequate study skills, study workload, and employment prospects. Presumably, attitude and motivation can also affect younger students' well-being in school.

1.3 Life Skill Programmes are Effective

Somewhat similar programmes to Express Yourself! have been implemented and evaluated in informal, and some in formal, settings [33]. For example, the internationally known and well-established American LCI (Lions Club International, 1992), which takes place in school contexts [36]. It belongs to the daily workload and is therefore implemented in classroom lessons for enhancing life skill competences. Specifically trained teachers implement this programme effectively in their specific classes at secondary level I, and with another "more adult" concept at secondary level II. These **lions quest** programmes were study-based improved and evaluated from 1984 [37,38,14]. Unlike these life skill programmes, the Express Yourself! programme is short-term (five sessions) and is provided by external trainers. It is critically discussed that "importing and adapting US models" may often not suit particular cultural needs, e.g. in EU countries [39].

Moreover, some programmes use peer leaders in supportive roles to improve interaction and communication with the group. Such life skill programmes have been evaluated in the United States and Europe. Research demonstrates the effectiveness and sustainability of long-term

programmes. Short-term programmes also show effects [33,14,38]. In addition, there is evidence that Social and emotional learning (SEL) can have positive outcomes for students. According to recent evidence reviews [31,40], studies have linked positive behaviour and self-perception, reductions in emotional distress and conduct problems, and school engagement with SEL programmes. Positive long-term outcomes in adulthood have also been reported. However, the review states that there are few high-quality studies. In effect, there is a paucity of robust evidence and debate that suggests positive outcomes are created by the SEL programmes. There is also a discussion about what factors need to be in place for SEL to produce outcomes. For example, in England, questions have been raised about the approaches and practices of SEL, how they fit the context and individuals, and whether the models and practices are culturally transferable.

Nevertheless, four core practices to be moderators for more successful SEL programmes have been identified by [41]. The more successful programmes are: 1) sequenced: a set of connected learning activities that teaches social-emotional skills through a coordinated step-by-step approach; 2) active: learning methods such as role-play or behavioural rehearsal with feedback; 3) focused: the inclusion of at least one programme component that focuses specifically on the development of social-emotional skills by regularly devoting sufficient instructional time to it; and 4) explicit: teaching of clearly identified skills with clear and specific learning objectives, as opposed to a programme goal on general skill enhancement [31].

2. IMPLEMENTATION AND FRAME-WORK FOR INCLUSIVE GROUPING

2.1 Description of the Process

Our process was simultaneously a developing process and a research process. These phases were intertwined during the project period. We followed the Plan, Do, Check, Act (PDCA) cycle in our process (Table 1). Our aim was to transfer a previously developed intensive model from one country (culture) to another. During the transfer process, we had several project meetings at which we planned the next steps in transferring and evaluated the results from the previous period. Our way of working was a cyclical process of change, as in Action Research. Action Research is used in school and other contexts

[42]. Our project work started in January 2019, and we have followed the scheme of Action Research, combining planning, action, and result phases. First, we shared the idea of the Express Yourself! programme and planned how to reach relevant schools, as well as how we would study the impact of the intensive programmes. At the next meeting, the first draft of activities within the sessions was developed. Members of the project groups evaluated the relevance of the general content (of the Finnish model), and at the following meeting, groups presented their ideas on intensive courses in their schools. In the action phase, schools were recruited and the first classes were taught. After the first meetings with students, experiences were exchanged at a project meeting to share which activities were experienced effectively with which kinds of classes and circumstances. In the action phase new exercises and games were added and used. In the middle of the action phase, preliminary results on students' well-being at the beginning of the intensive course were presented. At the end of the action phase, the experiences of the trainers and the preliminary results of students' well-being at the end of the intensive course were shared among the members of the project team. In the last part of the project, the best activities were chosen and combined as a toolkit for other trainers.

2.2 Inclusive Grouping in the School Context – A Selective Environment

The educational systems of the four countries show an important similarity: the main stages are divided into primary education, secondary education, and higher education (for young adults). With the focus of secondary education, in which setting the programme is implemented, the striking difference is the enrolment age. In Ireland and Spain, students move into secondary education at the age of 12; in Germany and Lithuania this happens at 10 or 11. The secondary education system differs in all four countries. In Germany, primary education is followed by five different types of secondary school; in Lithuania, there are seven. In these two countries, the students decide in grade five which graduation they want to complete; Spain and Ireland divide their secondary school system into two stages, which allows students to decide about their graduation/aims at the age of 16. They continue with two to three years of further education. The diversity of education systems in this project helps to identify whether there are similarities among students in Europe despite the differences in the culture of achievement, school

climate, and school environment [43] . For detailed information see Eurydice, national educational systems [https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/d7885072-f3ac-11e9-8c1f-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-107292535].

Developing a sense of group togetherness is a long process. This process can be supported by well-chosen activities, the creation of new opportunities and challenges, and an open and unbiased mindset. Attempting this in a school setting, where strict teaching schedules and stiff structure are pervasive, is challenging. Although schools have the educational aim of encouraging and promoting every individual regarding their needs, it is not guaranteed that this will happen due to several conditions. It may be the high number of students in a class, the heterogeneity of learner types, the variety, or the lack of support outside the school, but it may also be the main purpose of school: selection through degrees and certificates. Especially the last premise, comparison and competition, seems to interfere with the aim of inclusive and fair social interaction. At the same time, this setting offers the opportunity to reach almost all children, because school visits are mandatory.

Using the school system to gain access to the target group carries another set of difficulties due to the reliance on the school's structures and processes. As the programme aimed not to be an extracurricular activity but to be implemented in the students' timetable, it depended on the schools' flexibility and willingness. Schools had to guarantee that the time devoted to the Express Yourself! project would not negatively affect teaching and students' preparation for final exams. Teachers were willing to condense their lessons for this project in order to work around the tight teaching schedule.

2.3 The Programme Scheme

The Express Yourself! project is a continuation of the Participatory Sporty Theatre project, which was implemented in Finland between 2016 and 2019, combining culture and sports in an informal setting and offering activities to young people in school and in their free time [44]. In the Participatory Sporty Theatre project, the number of meetings of the organised groups varied between 1 and 59. When creating a scalable concept for Express Yourself! sessions, this was too broad and ambiguous for dissemination to different countries and cultures. The project team

therefore decided to standardise the classes to a five times two hour set over a course of a maximum of two months.

A framework for the content of Express Yourself! sessions complemented the common timeframe. To achieve the set aims of this project, we drew on the previous experiences of the Participatory Sporty Theatre Project in Finland, and included ideas and experiences from professionals of the four participating countries. We focused on the development of skills and the creation of opportunities for self-expression. As we believe this will promote social inclusion by creating a common group sensibility, showing acceptance and respect, as well as caring, for each other. We thus focused on approaches and exercise types that would foster self-understanding and group dynamics, as well as getting to know one another in an appreciative way. The concept needed to hold certain tools of reflection and professional mechanisms to ensure a safe environment and suitable analysis of processes during the Express Yourself! sessions.

The training module consists of five single units, building on each other. Each session has a different focus.

Session 1. "Grouping": the students become more aware of their classmates, their self-expression skills, and learn how to express themselves. Icebreaker games support this process and help in getting to know the trainer team and its organisational background. Reducing fear and tension helps engagement with classmates and getting to know each other better. The creation of a safe environment is crucial at this point.

Session 2. "Trust building": the idea is to learn how all members of the group affect the group atmosphere through their self-expression. Students learn to create a safer and more comfortable atmosphere for everyone by reflecting on their behaviour and expression. Group activities foster teambuilding and active listening skills.

Session 3. "Roles and interaction": the students use action-based and creative methods, e.g. roleplaying or acting. The idea is to support the encounter between students and help to lose the (possibly) rigid roles of the school group to ensure the students have the opportunity to participate in a freely chosen way (taking on new roles). Social competences are trained in a playful setting, and the communication pattern is addressed.

Session 4. "Emotional skills": the exercises in this session develop and support teamwork skills and help students learn about soft skills. This happens mostly through dialogue; students are given space to share their personal experiences. They also become aware of what emotions are and how they are linked to needs, and get ideas for how they can be expressed.

Session 5. "The Power of self-expression": the previous sessions have helped to create a respectful atmosphere, and students have experienced how to express appreciation and communicate respectfully. In this last session, students have the opportunity to share a talent or a skill by presenting it to the class or by teaching it to others. A reflective phase at the end helps them process the group and personal changes.

However, classes are tailored based on the needs of the school and interests of the project workers. An essential part of the process planning is an orientation meeting with the teacher of the class. During the required meeting, desired goal(s) for the participation of the group are discussed, and the teacher can give information about the class's special needs. Self-expression classes are carried out in close contact with the teacher: it is up to the teacher whether they take on an active agent or observer role.

Although each country tailors the programme to the local environment, all share a common structure for the sessions. Each session is framed by opening and closing activities. At the beginning of the session, we activate students' energy and focus their attention. The opening activities are also needed to mentally and physically prepare the students for the session. Towards the end of the session, we help them calm down, have fun together, or reflect on what has happened in the session. The closing activities support the digestion of the events during the session and ease the transition to the next lesson. Mostly short games with some material and very few instructions are played, including very joyful exercises that lighten the atmosphere and promote a positive mood.

Optimally, the chosen games for the beginning of the session already include skills or the energy levels required for the main part of the session. Small exercises lead to the main activity. The main exercise may take up to fifty per cent of the time available. This exercise is intended to allow students to engage intensively with the group and themselves. This intensive work phase is followed by an opportunity to present the results of the main exercise or to share how the work in the previous phase went. A set of reflective questions can also follow to gain an understanding of the process.

The exercises and games are taken from several approaches: theatre pedagogy, outdoor education, a sports-pedagogical background, and a mindfulness-based approach. These pedagogical approaches share common characteristics: they all offer tasks which help students leave their comfort zone in a way that they do not have to fear social bullying or embarrassment. These approaches work differently, because they ask for actions/behaviour from students that differ from those usually sought in the classroom. Such exercises are constructed so that they create an opportunity for interpersonal and personal experience. They also bring a high demand to experience direct self-efficacy, as an individual and as a collective. Thus, success is often achieved when everyone participates and is fully engaged.

Depending on the group's needs and development level, some approaches are more suitable than others. For example, a quiet group may have to "find their voice". An exercise from a theatrical background which asks students to literally play with their voice and the volume may therefore be the right choice to allow them to hear themselves and others, and experience the power of speaking up. In contrast, a group that has been sitting on their chairs all day long may need an energiser that loosens them up physically to let go of some energy or even shake off the events of the day. Games, exercises, and tips have been tried, and experiences shared. The best have been collected and made into a training module. This module is available online and provides a selection of ideas for each topic: https://expressyourself.diak.fi/training-module/.
Although Express Yourself! sessions take place during school time, it is made clear that participation is voluntary. This aligns with the project's aims, because self-expression and inclusion are acts of voluntariness. Allowing the students to decide whether to participate or not creates interest and very active involvement. Students welcome being decision makers and offer ideas. No one is forced; everyone is encouraged to try and is supported individually.

Table 1. PDCA action research cycle

Date	Topics of the discussions of project meetings	Phase of PDCA-cycle	Activities in the schools
February 2019	Sharing the aim of the project: social inclusion in the school communities / Recruiting trainers / Mapping the best practices in countries and previous projects and studies / Planning the draft of models	Plan	
March 2019	Planning the cooperation with schools, website and communication plan	Plan	
April 2019	Starting to sketch the structure of modules and planning evaluations	Plan	
May 2019	Planning the training modules and structure (5 times X 2 hours, during 2 months, tailored for every class) / Training for evaluation of project and sessions, and how to motivate schools	Plan	
June 2019	Finalising the parent letter & name lists & data collection forms / finalising training modules	Do	2 classes started in Germany (25.6.2019-17.12.2019)
September 2019	Discussion of experiences on evaluation forms / Tailoring students' name lists and parent letters (based on national legislation)	Check	8 classes started in Lithuania (17.9.2019 - 10.3.2020)
October 2019		Do	3 classes started in Lithuania (10.10.2019 - 18.2.2020) and 4 classes in Ireland (14.10.2019 - 11.11.2019)
November 2019	Discussion of experiences on 3X10D Surveys	Check	2 classes started in Germany (20.11.2019 - 18.12.2019)
December 2019		Do	6 classes started in Spain (4.12.2019 - 21.1.2020)
January 2020	Naming the five sessions of the training modules / Finalising the qualitative feedback forms for trainers (new formula was established)	Check / Act	3 classes started in Germany (15.1.2020 - 29.1.2020) and 1 class in Lithuania (16.1.2020 - 19.2.2020) and 3 classes started in Spain (12.1.2020 - 4.2.2020)
March 2020	Constructing the content of training module based on experiences from sessions	Check / Act	3 classes started in Germany (4.3.2020 -)
September 2020		Act	1 class started in Spain (18.9.2020 - 16.10.2020)
October 2020	Dissemination plan	Dissemination	2 classes started in Spain (6.10.2020 - 12.11.2020)
November 2020	Planning the feedback to schools, animated video for dissemination, two new categories to modules: trust exercise and games during pandemics (finalising the module)	Dissemination	
December 2020	Feedback reports to schools	Dissemination	

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Aim of the Research

The article pursues to describe what kind of impact the implementation of a short term programme in varying cultural contexts has and how this has been performed. The project captured more than 1,300 students' self-evaluations in the four countries involved. A self-evaluation survey was completed in the first and last sessions. Complemented by a survey method reviewing each session. The participants were student groups from junior high school and the upper secondary level in Lithuania (L), Germany (G), Ireland (I), and Spain (S). The age group targeted was approximately 12–20 years. The method to assess the impact of the self-expression classes were both quantitative and qualitative. Whereas the quantitative research gathered mainly data to answer how inclusive grouping influences students' experienced well-being, the qualitative evaluation tool captured data in order to make statements on if inclusive grouping is a possible way to promote students' inclusion and how best practice can be established in different contexts in Europe.

3.2 Data Collection and Methods

Data was collected in the same way in every school: students were given a short questionnaire at the first and last meetings. All the students completed the questionnaire in the class. No names of students were collected to guarantee the anonymity of answers. Students were asked to think about their satisfaction in different spheres of their life at the moment they were completing the questionnaire.

The Express Yourself! project was implemented in four countries: Germany; Ireland; Lithuania; and Spain. The project captured 1,347 students' self-evaluations in the involved countries. Some schools collected the self-assessment also from the students older than 18 years and some students did not tell their age. 1252 self-assessments were included into the analysis from the students aged from 12 to 18 year. The self-evaluation survey was completed by 677 students during the first session, and 575 students after the last session (Fig. 1). Gender distributions were quite even, but there were major differences between the target countries, because some schools were only for boys or girls. About one tenth of pupils did not reveal their gender or chose the option "other".

In this evaluation, we have asked for students' subjective opinion of their satisfaction with different spheres of life. These spheres are combined in one 3X10D-life situation" measure. In the 3X10D Survey, there are psychological aspects (self-esteem etc.), material and objective aspects (housing etc.), and social aspects (friends etc.). All these aspects are asked to assist a subjective evaluation. The 3X10D Survey has the following ten questions: *Thinking of the present time, how satisfied are you with…* (from 0, dissatisfied, to 10, satisfied).

…your self-esteem
…your state of health
…your ability to overcome life's challenges
…the number of trusted friends you have
…your family
…your ability to carry out daily activities (e.g. studying, working)
…your financial situation
…your housing situation
…your life as a whole
…your ability to develop your strengths (e.g. through an interesting hobby).

The 3X10D Survey was validated for young people (16–29 years) in one study in Finland [45] and was used to assess changes in intervention in the "Arki haltuun" programme of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health during 2018–19. The programme implemented projects to strengthen life skills for young people in six locations. The young people involved in the projects were outside education and employment (NEETs). All "Arki haltuun" projects succeeded in building local action models to strengthen the daily lives, functional capacity, and participation of young people at risk of exclusion. The activity was based on helping the young person holistically and in the long term. The work approach reached young people who were excluded from services in particular. The 3X10D Survey revealed positive desired changes in young people's satisfaction with their health, ability to overcome difficulties, daily coping, developing their own strengths, self-esteem, and life as a whole [46].

Data was analysed with the SPSS Statistics program version 27. Collected material was limited to 12-18 year old students. Number of responses was different in different countries and varied also strongly between two waves of data collection. In Germany data consisted of 262 responses (First 169 and Last 93). Reason for the lack of responses in the last session was the lockdown of schools because of COVID. In other countries pandemic challenges were also met,

but data collections were done before the lockdown or when the schools were open. We collected 180 responses from Ireland (91 and 89), 402 from Lithuania (213, 189) and 406 from Spain (204, 202). We know that the school classes are not stable during the time. For example, some students are sick in one day but not in the other. Therefore, we do not know if the student population was the same in the first and last evaluations. But from the statistics above, we can see that our results are telling enough certainly about the changes within the classes. Because the number of students varied widely between countries, this was taken into account in the analysis. Country effect was removed from the analysis by including country variable into every analysis. Analysis were performed to compare different groups of students using means and testing for differences between groups using the F-test of General Linear Model. Predictors of the spheres of life were timing of the surveys (wave) and the country in the first analysis (Fig. 1). Age group and gender were added to models when comparing changes within age and gender groups. Between the age groups and gender there were no statistically significant differences in single sphere of life. For this reason, the results are not presented with figures, but differences in group profiles are described and compared literally. Statistically significant results are shown in figures.

A second step in this evaluation was to focus qualitatively on the trainer perspective. The project team devised a short evaluative assessment questionnaire for the trainers. After each session, each country provided a short group information sheet, which was completed by the trainers (L, I, G) or the teacher (S) ex-post. At the outset, this group information sheet provided short general information like the grade of the class, the name of the participating school and the names of the trainer team, the age group (12–20), orientation, and the planning meeting with the representative of the school and the teacher. Brief information concerning why a specific class was selected was given. Each session was described, with its main activities, highlights, and challenges. In the last section, trainers gave their subjective assessment of the quality of the cooperation with the school, as well as with the teacher, the setting, the quality of the cooperation with the project, the teacher's role, and the outcomes for the students and participating teacher. Additionally, each trainer team provided a short open structured questionnaire at the end of the programme.

The Table 2 below shows the differences in the implementation of the programme and in the use of the group information sheet.

The quality of answers varied greatly. Furthermore, due to Covid-19, some classes could not be finalised, revealing the limitations of this evaluation. Nevertheless, some information can be shared here, particularly about highlights and challenges concerning the programme's practical ability to stimulate change for the promotion of inclusive grouping.
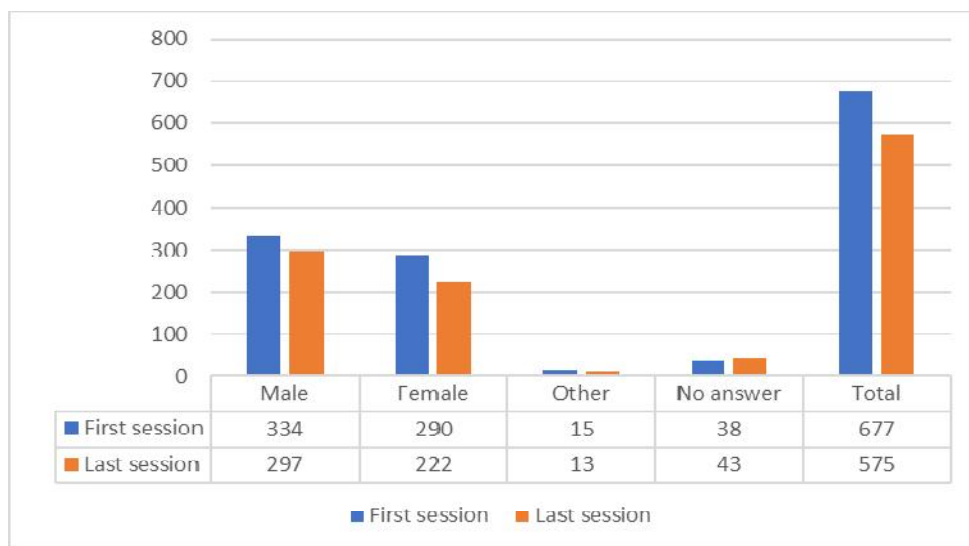

	Male	Female	Other	No answer	Total
First session	334	290	15	38	677
Last session	297	222	13	43	575

Fig. 1. Respondents by gender and round

Table 2. Implementation of the programme

	Spain	Ireland	Lithuania	Germany
Classes* finalized which were filled in group information sheets	**12**	**4**	**12**	**7**
Time	5 x 2 hours	4 x 1 hour (one double session)	5 x 2 hours 4 classes terminated with 5 sessions	5 x 1.5 hours
Age	12–13 6x 13–14 1x 14–15 2x	12–13y	12–13 14–15 17–18	All ages from 12 –21

4. RESULTS

4.1 Changes in Students' Well-Being

The results of the 3x10D self-evaluation survey show that Express Yourself! intensive sessions increased overall well-being. The profiles of the first and last sessions were quite homologous, which indicates that the different questions were understood in the same way. The greatest change in satisfaction in spheres were as follows: trusted friends; life as a whole; managing daily activities; health; and self-esteem (Fig. 2). This highlights the success of the Express Yourself! programme and the positive influence of inclusive grouping on students' overall well-being. Inclusive courses seem to be a pragmatic and effective way to promote students' inclusion. The ability to win the challenges and satisfaction with family were the only spheres where the course's influence was not experienced positively, but the differences were relatively small and may be the result of the smaller numbers of participants in the last sessions (mostly because of quarantine due to Covid-19). It is also understandable that good feelings were not strongly related to an evaluation of structural (family) and personal (resilience) issues. No statistical difference was seen in the spheres of finance, family and resilience (overcome challenges) but in the other spheres the differences were statistically significant.

When the results are analysed by age, the biggest positive effect of the Express Yourself! programme was among the younger students, in the 12–13 age group. Students in this group experienced their life more positively after the course than before it. This experience diminished in the older age groups. The overall change during the course in the 16–18 age group was even slightly negative. This might imply that the exercises used during the sessions were more focused and pleasant for younger students. Older students may need a different approach and exercise structure. Study might play different roles in different phases of our lives. Younger students are developing their social relationships, including in the classroom, while older students already have their friendships, and their aim is to focus on studying more than on social connections.

The 14–15 age group was the most contradictory and labile. The changes in experiences among different spheres varied from peak to peak. Changes in some spheres were positive, and at the same time, some were negative. However, the profile of changes was generally between younger and older students' profiles. This may be explained by ongoing puberty. Puberty influences teenagers' overall life, because physical changes cause anxiety to youngsters when they compare themselves to others. This may lead to situations in school where teenagers are uncomfortable being "on the stage" or acting foolishly in front of others. This target group may be the most vulnerable, with special "transitional" needs accompanying the passage from childhood to young adulthood. In the storm of puberty, youngsters are also often filled with an attitude of hubris towards everything and see situations or things in a very black and white way, as either good or bad.

Some negative influences of the Express Yourself! programme among the older students in the 16–18 age group may indicate that everyday life is different for them than for the younger groups, and that the roles of the school and classmates also differ.

To draw more specific conclusions, the data was also analysed by gender. As previously mentioned, because of the small number of students in the "other/won't say" and "blank" options, only male and female genders were considered. The results show the profiles of changes in different spheres of life are similar within boys and girls. Small differences were not statistically significant.

In the last Express Yourself! session, the survey included three extra questions. The purpose of these questions was to obtain information about the Express Yourself! programme from the perspective of students. The additional questions covered the following questions: Did the students know their classmates better after the course? Did they gain more confidence from the course? How did the course influence school motivation? The additional questions were answered as in the 3x10D Survey on a scale of 0 to 10. The response rate for these additional questions was 100%.

The general result of these additional questions followed the same trend as the general results and differences between countries measured with the 3X10D Survey: the results were more positive in Ireland, Lithuania, and Spain than in Germany. All interactions (country * age group and country * gender) shown in following figures are statistically significant.

In general, the results concerning confidence followed the trend of the general questions, where the lowest rate was among students in Germany, and the highest in Spain and Lithuania.

The third question concerned school motivation. Overall, the project had a positive influence on school motivation in Ireland, Lithuania, and Spain. The results followed the profile of the general results.

In Germany, the highest positive rate in the additional questions was among students of the oldest age group (Fig. 3), while this group obtained the lowest rate according to the 3x10D results. The same phenomenon was also present in the comparison of the Lithuanian results. The comparison results of Ireland and Spain followed the profile of the self-evaluation. The difference in Germany and Lithuania may resemble the general comparison results, where it was suggested that the improvement in satisfaction with friends might be experienced among others than classmates, and the concept of confidence was not linked to self-esteem or the survey's other spheres. It should be kept in mind, while differences in 3X10D self-evaluations between gender were not statistically significant, the comparison with additional questions is unclear.

4.2 Trainers' Observations of Highlights and Challenges in the Sessions

Quantitative analysis proves that inclusive grouping is a pragmatic and effective way to promote students' inclusion. Qualitative evaluation provides an additional more detailed examination of the programmes' practicability for stimulating change to promote inclusive grouping. The main focus of the qualitative evaluation is to demonstrate how best practice can be established in different contextual and cultural conditions in Germany (G), Ireland (I), Lithuania (L), and Spain (S).

With its focus on trainers' feedback, the qualitative evaluation complements the quantitative analysis and underlines that the Express Yourself! programme is a practical and pragmatic way to stimulate change to promote inclusive grouping. A group information form was completed after each session which described, from trainers' subjective perspective, the activities, methods, goals, highlights, and challenges during the implementation process in each class (ages 12–20).

In three out of four countries (S/L/G), social inclusion, trust building, and team building are described as highlights. Taking care of each other and the involvement of everybody (G), especially students with special needs (L), took place. Diversity issues such as gender, ethnic belonging, language, disability, and talents (S, G, L) emerged and were discussed. The programme allows adaptation to a variety of settings and groups suitable for different ages or genders, as well as other diversity issues.

The evaluation of the trainer questionnaire and the "highlights" and "challenges" from the group evaluation sheet clearly demonstrate that the concept is feasible within the school context. In its applicability to the group and individual, the project's approach stimulates change and enables the development of social skills, as well as the discovery of potential. To promote sustainable and satisfactory implementation, the creation of a setting which is pleasant and trusting is crucial. Yet it still needs to be flexible for individual needs to be able to adequately react to context-related needs/conditions. The implementation of this programme demonstrates that our concept is inherent in an openness which allows changes and adaptation to appropriately meet the challenges of the practice.

In the different countries and contexts, similarities (highlights and challenges) showed up in the use of methods and approaches that are indicators of best practice in different cultural contexts. The following Table 3 provides an overview which is explained in more detail below.

The following Table 4 demonstrates the highlights identified in these countries which may show the "common" spirit and the programme's implementation potential:

As the table demonstrates, creative tasks that allow young people opportunities to showcase (L, S, I, G) and play games (S, L, I, G) appear a fitting medium to reach the target group. It seems that across cultures, these activities build a stable basis for the programmes' implementation.

The programme provides opportunities for self-expression. In all four countries, students opened up, overcame shyness, and experienced the support of the trainers and/or the group, and/or sometimes the teachers. This helped them overcome hesitation. The way the sessions were set up helped to create a trusting and safe atmosphere for exploration and development.

Each country followed a resource-oriented approach, focusing on "good qualities" (L, G, S) and talents (L, G, S, I). In particular, students enjoyed inventing role play scenes and developing their own radio interviews, as well as the group work presentations (G), making music and singing together (I), and demonstrating individual strengths in talent shows (L, S, I, G). Action-oriented games like the Marshmallow challenge provided an excellent basis for group involvement and team building (L, G). Resource and action-oriented activities appear a key factor in experiencing self-efficacy.

The use of a variety of icebreaker games, creative tasks, and action-based methods created a positive environment for self-expression in all four countries. Students shared more personal experiences and presented themselves differently from how they usually did during lessons. They were completely and genuinely committed, and developed a better understanding of each other. This developed an attitude and an open atmosphere that encouraged trust building, new perspectives, and different perceptions of each other – a prerequisite for appreciation.

The encouragement of personal commitment and the focused promotion of team spirit during the session increased motivation (G), made students more active (L), and led to deeper discussions and reflections on processes (L, S, G). Even school-related issues, e.g. competition and pressure (S, G, L), were reflected on and linked to acceptance of failure and the learning of coping strategies (L). Moreover, improved contact with teachers promoted team building and group activities (L). Personal reflective diaries were used (G). Genuine commitment, teacher-student relationships, and group cohesion played an important role in shaping beneficial learning conditions.

The choice of trainers should be oriented towards the composition of the target group, because we experienced that "peer" trainers (I) and gender-diverse trainer teams (G) positively promoted students' engagement. Students appeared more likely to share and participate when they felt they were being understood (e.g. sharing a common experience, language, role model, and reduced hesitation).

The challenges identified in these countries (may) indicate gaps which (may) complicate social inclusion and show a need for the programme's future adaptation (Table 5).
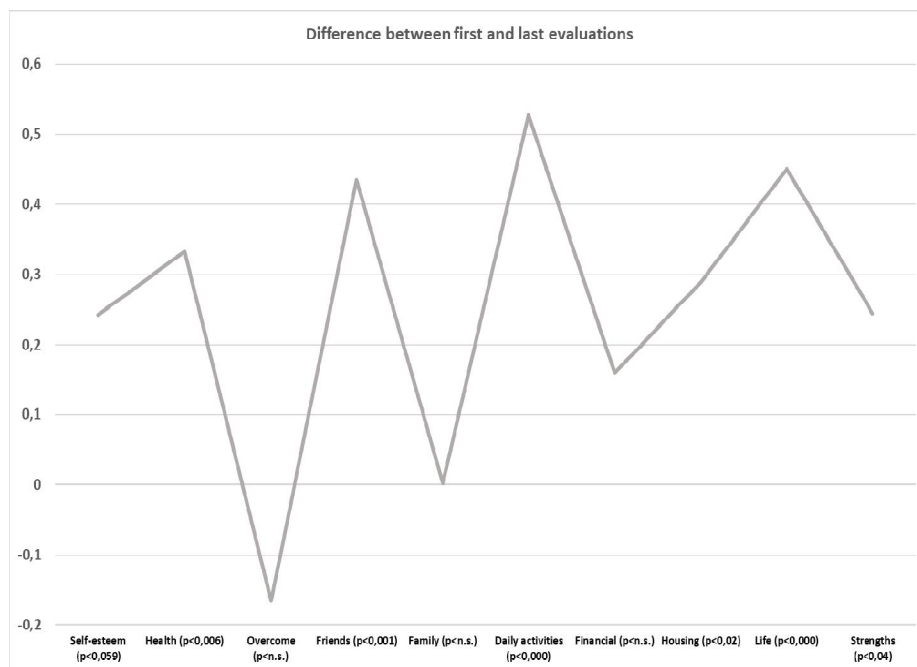

Fig. 2. Changes in students' spheres of life. General linear models, predictors: Wave, country, wave*country
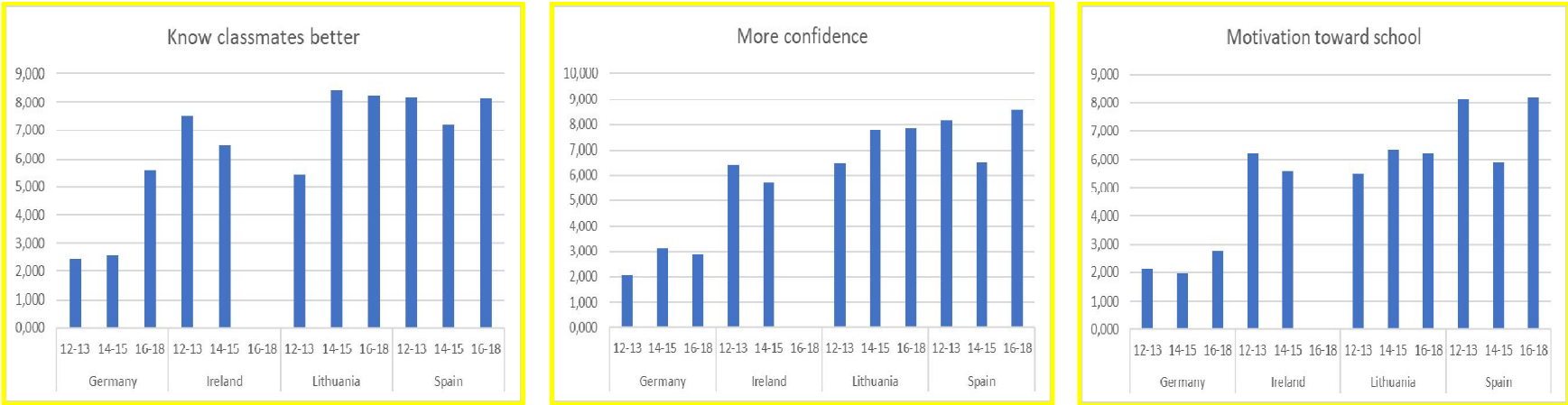
Fig. 3. Evaluations on the effects of inclusive sessions by country and age group. Scale of 0 to 10. General Linear Model (age group*country) (Know classmates better, More confidence *P* < .001; Motivation toward school *P* = .013)
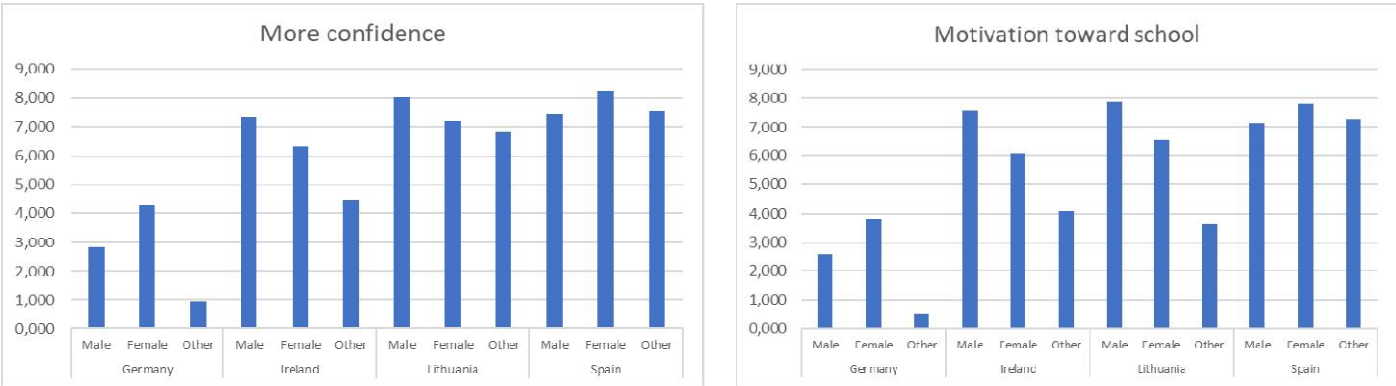

Fig. 4. Evaluations of the effects of inclusive course by country and gender. Scale of 0 to 10. General Linear Model (gender * country) (*P* < .001)

Table 3. Similarities in the use of methods and approaches

	Spain	Ireland	Lithuania	Germany
Curriculum /framework	Fixed framework	Fixed framework	Fixed and flexible framework	Fixed and flexible framework, with a variety of games and mix in sessions
	Adaptation	Changes according to the level of engagement	Adaptation for different age groups	Adaptation for different age groups /time table /exams
	Level of understanding /needs	Talent show	Discussion	Talents, resources
	Discussion		Talent show	
	Talent show			
Methods (must be adopted)	Games	Playing music	Energisers	Variety of action-oriented methods/games
	Role play	Professional (peer/young) musician as icebreaker	Action-oriented games	Energisers
	Talent show	Games	Creative methods	Games
	Discussion	Creative methods	Games	Creative methods
				Role play
				Participation
Teacher's role	Facilitator & moderator	Very little involvement, except one teacher	Passive	Participation in actions
	Implementation of the training of the Spanish project group		Participation in all actions	Presence of a social worker (no teacher present)
				Passive role (1)

Table 4. Highlights

Highlights	
Intervention/method	**Effect/outcome**
Icebreaker & other games	Positive & safe environment for self-expression
Creative tasks	Self-expression opportunities
	Good qualities, resources, & talents are empowered
Action-oriented games	Encouragement of personal commitment & team spirit
	Improvement of learning atmosphere
Discussions	Reflection on personal & school-related issues
Improved contact and relations with teachers (through team building)	Improvement of learning atmosphere & learning
Use of personal reflective diaries	
Peer trainers/gender diverse trainers	Promotion of students' engagement
Choice of trainers oriented towards the composition of the target group	Students are more likely to share and participate when they feel they are being understood (sharing a common experience realm, language, role model, and reduced hesitation).

Table 5. Challenges

Challenges	
Challenge	**Effect**
Strong negative group dynamics	Reluctance
	Lack of a positive communication culture
Diversity and heterogenic learning levels	Need for methods that are accessible for all students (inclusive);
	Need to provide more appropriate possibilities for assistance during the task and encouragement (low-threshold)
	Further adaptation of programme & methods
School context partly influenced the successful implementation	Need to disconnect from competitive school context
	Thinking of implementation in informal settings
	New game categories could be developed that, for instance, target the students' concentration, and relaxation or mindfulness

The table demonstrates that strongly negative group dynamics and anti-social attitudes in the class increased the reluctance to get involved, connect with others, and overcome shyness. When a group lacked a basic positive communication culture or a trusting teacher-student relationship, the effort required to implement the programme was greater in practice. There may be a need for extra time within the programme: more than five sessions per group (S, G) and/or an extension of the session itself (e.g. 2 hours instead of 1.5 hours). The time for implementation should also be considered, meaning that a carefully chosen moment regarding the group's disposition and development could avoid disruptive factors and increase the benefit for students.

It was experienced that large differences in the level of development (I), cognitive, social or communicative skills, and religious and ethnic background (S) – heterogeneous learning levels – increased the need for methods that were accessible to all students (inclusive). Further consideration of more suitable arrangements for assistance during the task and for encouragement (low-threshold) (S, L, G) is therefore essential to meet the groups' needs.

Practice showed that the school context partly influenced the success of the implementation (L, G). For example, the role of the teacher was supportive (I, G) or obstructive (G), or the group felt they were under performance pressure (G). Especially in Spain, where the teachers executed the programme themselves and took over the moderation and structuring role, the influence of the teachers on students' engagement improved. A careful assessment of the teacher-student relationship in the preparation/planning process before the implementation and influencing factors, as well as obstacles, should be reflected on carefully to adapt these factors to the implementation of the programme.

Students with a low level of self-esteem experienced support, and students who were less participatory got involved. It also seemed a challenge to disconnect from the school context, which is usually dominated by competition and the desire for academic achievement (S, L). Distraction at the beginning of or during the programme was a challenge in all four countries, including noise, small room size, tiredness, exams, and last hours/earliest hours of the day. Energisers were used to cope with this. An avoidance of these disruptive elements might be achieved by the development of further adaptation (tools) for games and methods, and the addition of new game categories that target the students' concentration, and relaxation or mindfulness. Finally, a thorough consideration of the setting is a key factor either at the planning stage and before, during, and after each session.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The Express Yourself! inclusive grouping in school programme was experienced as a possible way to positively influence students' well-being and social inclusion. The good results were based on the motivation of trainers and teachers, as well as their fruitful collaboration. The project positively influenced school motivation, giving more confidence to student participants and helping them establish, maintain, and improve relationships with classmates. Quantitative results showed that in all the countries involved the students had most positive changes in managing daily activities, friends, health and life as-a-whole. This result was in line with observations of trainers. According to them social inclusion, trust building, and team building activities were the highlights of the sessions.

In schoolwork, there is a great need of grouping activities as study is mostly cognitive work, and relationships and emotions are less addressed during classes. Based on the trainer's impression, students enjoyed and needed a judgement-free atmosphere and a platform where it was possible to listen to each other. Students were able to place their own interests at the centre of the activities. It is important to emphasise the students' perspective. Students are capable of evaluating their life and their role in the class. Inclusive group activities give them an opportunity to see other students from different angles. They can relax and explore their role not only as students but also as peers or even friends. This may decrease young people's loneliness. These unofficial results in the school context also support the official schoolwork.

The Express Yourself! programme is easy to use. It can be an extra part of the curriculum, or it can be included in it. Ready-to-use exercises and a handbook are available online and fit courses for different schools. Express Yourself! Programmes therefore do not need extra resources and are a cost-effective way to increase cohesion within the class.

It seems it is possible to disseminate a general model to different countries, but that cultural differences should be taken into account. The way the programme is set up allows it to be a resource-effective way to improve well-being and act in terms of preventive work. The project's methodological approach allows the use of a great variety of activity types which can easily be adapted to any needs and circumstances.

A key factor for the enhancement of an inclusive and understanding school climate appears to be the physical and emotional experience of the (changing) atmosphere within the group. Through the activities, new/unfamiliar situations within the classroom are created and break up dominant social structures. This brings students together who usually have little contact, or who even reject each other, asking them to cooperate by focusing on achieving a common goal in a relaxed and playful atmosphere.

To build an inclusive grouping process and provide methods and especially games at all heterogenic learning levels, there is a need identified in all countries to further adopt methods which are accessible for all students. A future development of the programme could be illustrated by the provision of more appropriate assistance during tasks and encouragement of single participants during the group processes or sessions.

A variety of methods were adapted for different cultural contexts. An important outcome was the learning from and with each other in an international, multi-professional team with different skills and competences, and should be highlighted here. The methods were thus further modified, refined, and multiplied. This adaptation process strongly influenced the development of a highly flexible programme that was applicable in different cultural settings. Although the schools systems are similar, there is great diversity among students, expectations, and relationships within classes. Diversity was encountered by applying a general framework which provided a methodological and theoretical foundation, but offered sufficient flexibility to be modified as required. Being able to work on the basis of this framework justifies the statement that all students in Europe have some common needs – to be heard and seen. Unfortunately, the opportunities to be truly heard and seen seem to find very little space in everyday school life.

Implementing this programme in a European context allowed an exchange of valuable insights, making this approach unique. Key factor in Erasmus+ programmes is European networking and intercultural exchange and understanding in the area of education, youth and sport. Our additional action oriented research interest can be regarded as a "small cherry on top of the cake" (far from pure research projects with research funding, e.g. in the framework of horizon 2020 or horizon Europe - the research programme of the European Union). Nevertheless, Erasmus+ provided a smooth access to our research target group, as well as it made inter-European research easily realizable in a tight timeframe, utilizing a small and feasible questionnaire which could be filled in within two minutes.

6. LIMITATIONS AND PROSPECTS OF SCHEME AND RESEARCH DESIGN

In general, the programme may also fit informal learning institutions where school-related issues do not interfere, offering an atmosphere free of judgement and completely voluntary participation. When the programme takes place in school, it is guaranteed to reach a majority of students – even those who might not have access to or interest in such programmes in the first place. However, it must be remembered that the school environment can itself foster or impede the development of the Express Yourself! programme's skills and aims. It also depends on the cooperation of the teacher and the role he or she takes on in the process, and even how the programme is introduced to the students before the start of the sessions – a positive attitude and the openness of all involved to the programme is crucial for success. However, there were some practical difficulties, e.g. finding time slots during the academic year that do not interfere with teaching and exam phases. In many cases, it is the tight teaching schedule that determines how much time can be spent on extracurricular activities. Unfortunately, social learning often falls into this category. We assume that a more intense/long-term programme would make this intervention more sustainable and produce greater benefit for students' life skill development and their school learning process.

Inspired by the experiences of the Finnish education system, a well-structured questionnaire was put in place. We realised there were big differences between students and their capability to complete, or familiarity with, such surveys. This reveals that some students are regularly encouraged to reflect on themselves

and asked to self-evaluate on a meta-level, whereas others are not encouraged to do this at all. This "inability" must therefore be considered an influencing factor. Furthermore, for students school appears to be anything between a duty and a second home. The role of teachers varies incredibly: they are learning guides, examiners, someone students turn towards to discuss private matters, or just another adult telling them what to do. The student-teacher relationship determines students' trust and courage in development and discovery.

The selection of evaluation tools must be reviewed and remodified. After the research process, we found some weaknesses in our methods. We did not know exactly if the students were the same in both surveys. Now we know that there were small differences in those data collections, but we cannot harmonize those groups afterwards. We know the students in classes, but we cannot link the surveys to individuals. Therefore, the research design should be better in the following studies. The tools used also missed to gather the students' view regarding the content and set up of the sessions and the reflection of games and activities. The development of further low threshold evaluation tools applicable after each session (e.g. the German Post-it feedback box at the end of each session) would enable trainers to tailor the programme even better to the target group. This would provide a more process-oriented evaluation and an immediate adaptation of the next session to the needs, or as a response to the feedback loop of the last session.

Post evaluation could be helpful to monitor the durability of the impact of the programme/games and activities. Furthermore, one might be able to discover if other aspects of life, which have not been included in our research, have been positively impacted as well. Tools such as personal learning diaries or (peer) interviews could already be used during the programme and continued afterwards.

By control groups, we could separate the general, societal effects from intervention effects. Control groups are especially important in cases like COVID-19 was. Therefore, control groups should be applied to be able to make more universal statements on the effectiveness of this programme across different cultural contexts. In our research there were no possibilities to recruit extra classes from the schools involved. We tried

to take this weakness into account by limiting the time between first and last evaluations and by stopping the data collection if the lockdown disturbed the process. We found some positive results with both qualitative and quantitative methods, but our tools could not show it properly. Therefore, qualitative and quantitative research tools should be "coordinated" better in the future so that triangulation is possible as well as good control groups should be added into the research design. In addition, a longitudinal study would be interesting focusing as well on the academic performance and development of the group in different stages, for example school entry phase or the leaving of school, as well as on the attitudes towards school climate. A greater long-term objective should be the embedding of social learning in the school syllabus. Despite the limitations of our study design, it is useful to do the Express Yourself! programme and its evaluation in different places with better research design. Apart from the EU countries, the programme could be further implemented, e.g. in Africa, America, or Asia, in order to see if the programme is universally applicable .

The Express Yourself! programme was experienced as a low threshold and effective way to positively influence students' well-being and inclusion. Promising results were promoted by the motivation and cooperation between the trainers and teachers, which indirectly reflected the atmosphere in the class. Based on cooperation, the sessions were tailored to the needs of each class. It is justifiable to argue that European students have some common needs – to be heard and seen, and an atmosphere free of judgement. The question is how the project's outcomes and the project itself can continue in the future. One solution might be to include sessions in elective courses in schools. Another might be to offer workshops to teachers – online or face to face. Useful information would also be obtained from a follow-up to see how long will these promising results last among students.

The current EU education policy stresses the importance of students' social inclusion, and the coronavirus pandemic underlines the need for inclusive grouping. The political and decision-making recommendation is to target resources at grouping, especially when the schools resume post-Covid-19, to prevent the social exclusion of young people. Enduring trust building and cohesion empower the group, and self-expression encourages self-efficacy. The idea of facilitating communication to enable self-

expression – to see and be seen in an appreciative school environment, and to create room for response and feedback – is the core element of this programme, which will continue to contribute to the development and overall well-being of students in these difficult times.

CONSENT AND ETHICAL APPROVAL

All ethical procedures required were followed. Participants were made to indicate their willingness to participate in the study and written consent has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

The informed consent of parents was a prerequisite for the students' participation in the study, as well as in the programme. A proof of consent letter was sent to guardians by the schools before the session. The letter explained the aim of the programme and classes – to prevent school dropout and further improve students' learning, and to integrate classes in the school day to support the curriculum. The letter also explained that the classes included a well-being survey, that the results would be examined at group level, and that individual answers could not be identified.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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