

CASE STORY

Pupil participation: Example from the European Network of Health Promoting Schools

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“We learned that it is possible for young people to express their voices so people can see that we have the right to say what we think and be responsible just like adults. We can make decisions and participate in solutions to alcohol problems.”

Pupil, interview extract, young-minds.net/lessons-learned, 2003.

The Young Minds - exploring links between youth, culture and alcohol initiative represented part of the ENHPS activities aimed at involving young people in the WHO Ministerial Conference on Young People and Alcohol, which took place in Stockholm from 19-21 February, 2001. The project attempted to create preconditions for providing young people (aged 12-16) with the opportunity to have a voice at the Stockholm conference through editing an e-forum with young people throughout Europe, as well as by presenting the Young Minds findings and conclusions to the conference participants. An important feature of the project was its presentation by pupil representatives from all four classes at the WHO Ministerial Conference in Stockholm.



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This presentation was construed as **real-life** pupil action, contributing to the project's main aims. Prepared by their work in the project, Young Minds pupils had the role of facilitating and editing the web forum and thereby acted as a dynamic link between young people throughout Europe and the conference participants.



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The pupils also presented and discussed with the conference participants their investigation results, ideas and opinions in connection with the area of alcohol and young people, using the project website (www.young-minds.net) as a starting point for the discussion.

Through their action at the conference, Young Minds pupils, supported by their teachers and the project consultants, participated actively in voicing young people's opinions about alcohol consumption and problems related to it, with a view to influencing the ideas of the conference participants and alcohol policies concerning young people.

There are a number of challenges that need to be addressed when thinking about involving children and young people as serious partners in learning processes at school as well as introducing action orientation in teaching. The following is a reflection of one of the teachers, which highlights one of the dilemmas, namely, finding the right balance between stepping back to provide more space for pupil participation and guiding the learning process:

“It has been a challenge to let the pupils decide how to approach and investigate alcohol, since the outcome does not reveal itself until the work is finished. Most of the pupils were not only engaged and curious, but also very open-minded. That made a good climate and reminded me that I have to face them with the same open mind, whilst not forgetting to be an authority.”

Teacher, www.young-minds.net



However, research findings related to the project and particularly the accounts of pupils as well as teachers involved in Young Minds univocally indicate that genuine participation and taking action in the processes of learning are invaluable issues worth exploring further if (health) education is to enable young people to competently participate in the fluid social realities of the increasingly globalised world.

CASE STORY

Children as citizens*

The Children as Citizens Project in Denmark was established by the government to increase children's influence on issues relevant to them. In one initiative, 13- to 14-year-olds undertook research in kindergartens to find out how much say the children had in their lives. They concluded that staff trampled on the children's rights in a number of ways, including:

- It was unreasonable to assume that the children were all hungry, and should therefore have to eat, at the same time.
- It might be healthy to go out to play, but only if children wanted to, and it was not fair to insist that they all go out at the same time.
- It was not reasonable that the children could drink water only between meals when the staff could drink tea and coffee whenever they wanted.

The staff took these criticisms seriously and decided that the joint lunch would be dropped, the playground would be staffed all day so children could play out when they wanted, and a jug of squash would be placed on the table for children to help themselves when they were thirsty.

* HARE, in LANSDOWN, 2005.

CASE STORY

Children influencing architectural design**

When a children's discovery centre was set up in London, a forum of children between the ages of 2 and 13 years was established to contribute to its design and development. Through child-friendly, creative workshops with sculptors, poets, artists and story-tellers, their input provided ideas for the logo, exhibits, garden design, accessibility, opening times, age limits, crèche facilities and costs and, in so doing, ensured the attraction of the centre for other children.

** *Children's Discovery Centre/Save the Children*, in LANSDOWN, 2005.