

SCHOOL WELL-BEING IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME (PROMIBE): RESULTS FOLLOWING TWO YEARS INTERVENTION IN EDUCATION CENTRES

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We would like to thank the direction teams for opening the doors of their centres, the students, teachers and families for their collaboration and valuable dedication to the project.

The project would not have been possible without them.

The data presented in this publication belong to the project “Subjective well-being of 9 to 16-year-olds. Longitudinal study (continuation) and evaluation of actions using ICT for the improvement of school well-being (Ref. PSI2013-41512-P)”, developed thanks to finance from Ministry for Economy and Competitiveness (MINECO).



WHAT IS THE STARTING POINT?

Research Team on Children, Adolescents, Children's Rights and their Quality of Life (<http://www.udg.edu/eridiqv>) from the University of Girona has undertaken a 6-year longitudinal study on the evolution of subjective well-being* of children and adolescents born between 1998 and 2006. This study has demonstrated there is a general decrease in subjective well-being, among both boys and girls, during the age from 10 to 18, and that there is also a decrease in different aspects of school life (satisfaction with the teachers, with their marks, with their learning, with the school, with life as a student...).

Conscious of the implications this has for academic functioning, school integration and the dynamics that take place among the different agents of the education community (students, teachers and families), the ERIDIQV carried out actions in education centres within the framework of the School Well-being Improvement Programme (PROMIBE)** during the academic years 2015-2016 and 2016-2017. The aim of these actions was to improve school well-being of children and adolescents, considering this a factor that contributes to overall subjective well-being, and is at the same time influenced by the satisfaction with relationships with other people (both teachers and classmates).

It is well known within the scientific literature that overall subjective well-being and satisfaction with most life domains, including school, constantly tends to decrease throughout adolescence. The tendency for well-being to decrease was expected to interfere in the assessment of the programme, given the difficulty of discriminating to what point its effects may counter a tendency that is “natural” in adolescence. This is something that is hopefully partially achievable, but very difficult to achieve resoundingly or, even less, quickly. For this reason, it could be considered an indicator that the actions had worked due to the fact that the initial scores for subjective well-being do not decrease.

*Subjective well-being includes the perceptions, assessment and aspirations of people regarding their satisfaction with the main aspects of their life, such as student life, interpersonal relationships, the place they live or their family, amongst others.

**PROMIBE from the name in Catalan: Programa de Millora del Benestar Escolar.

The actions developed started from the assumption that, despite digital and socio-emotional abilities forming part of the school curriculum, they are often given less attention than academic abilities, possibly due to the pressure the whole school system is suffering from.

The programme also assumes that in order to improve school well-being in children and adolescents it is necessary to improve the well-being of the rest of the education community (teachers and families) by offering tools and strategies for intervention during these ages.

At the same time, different studies have repeatedly shown the need for more action aimed at easing the transition process from primary to secondary education to reduce the potential negative effects on the integration, academic performance and school well-being of the students.



WHAT IS THE AIM OF PROMIBE?

To introduce actions that promote school well-being in children and adolescents, and the whole education community, during the transition from primary to secondary education (students from the final year of primary and the first year of secondary). These actions develop the digital and socioemotional skills of students and teachers, and include the families in the digital communication. The impact of these actions is assessed continuously.

HOW WAS THIS CARRIED OUT?

The programme of actions was run in education centres in the province of Girona over two consecutive academic years. Part of the actions were training and support for teachers, while the rest were carried out directly with the students.

The implementation of the actions started with a needs analysis, carried out by interviews. During the planning process, the actions to be used were discussed and agreed with the direction team and teachers; the research team adapted not only to their needs, characteristics and educational projects, but also to the organisational structure of each centre along with the actions it had in place for easing the transition for new students. Some of the actions were carried out using the EKA education platform (virtual communication and learning environment), created especially for the project (<http://eka.udg.edu/>). Other actions included the use of different techniques for improving the class climate, better handling of emotions and conflicts, and the introduction of more participative methodologies.

A pre-post design in two phases was used to assess the results, comparing previous levels of school well-being, perception of class climate, school implication and the use of participative methodologies with those observed a year after, at the end of the actions. This information was completed with interviews given by students and teachers-tutors at the end of the process, in order to assess the impact of the project.

WHAT ACTIONS WERE CARRIED OUT?

Interventions revolved around four specific objectives during two academic years (table 1):

1. Enhance social and emotional skills of the students.
2. Increase digital skills of students and teachers.
3. Promote social participation.
4. Enhance family-school communication.

Table 1. Actions carried out corresponding to the different objectives set along the two academic years

SCHOOL YEAR	SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES	ACTIONS UNDERTAKEN
2014-2015	Preparation of the project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews with members of the direction teams, teachers and students • Design of the EKA digital education platform • Design and planning of the lines of action and proposal of actions
2015-2016	Objective 1. Enhance social and emotional skills of the students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formation of a Welcoming Committee • Designation of classmate-guides (mentoring programme) • Sociometric analysis • Detection and guidance of “vulnerable” students • Introduction of emotional skills project (via the platform) • Tutorial advice for teachers (improvement of the social climate of the classroom) • Pre-access actions to secondary school • Collaborative work among students using the platform
	Objective 2. Increase the digital skills of the students and teaching staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction of a personal and social learning environment • Creation of spaces to share material, content and objectives at primary and secondary • Provision of ICT tools to carry out presentations and editing
	Objective 3. Promote social participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreement on decision making and participative tools on the platform • Group Council optimisation • Tutors advice
2016-2017	Objective 1. Enhance social and emotional skills of the students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Renewal of the Welcoming Committee • Designation of classroom monitors • Renewal of classmate-guides (mentoring programme) • Sociometric analysis • Detection and guidance of “vulnerable” students • Continuation of emotional skills project (via the platform) • Tutorial advice for teachers (improve the social climate of the classroom) • Continuation of the pre-access actions • Continuation of cooperative work among students using the platform
	Objective 2. Increase the digital skills of the students and teaching staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction of other personal and social environments for learning • Renewal of spaces for sharing material, content and objectives at primary and secondary • Renewal of ICT tools for carrying out presentations and editing
	Objective 3. Promote social participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Renewal of the decision making and participative tools on the platform • Group Council optimisation
	Objective 4. Enhance family-school communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of a space for families on the platform • Organisation of workshops for families • Tutors advice

HOW WAS THE PROGRAMME ASSESSED?

The impact of the actions was assessed by a questionnaire (quantitative phase) and by group interviews (qualitative phase). The participants, the tools and the results of each phase are described below.

Quantitative phase

Participants

The 470 students that answered the questionnaire were from four primary education centres and two secondary education centres located in the province of Girona. All of the centres were state run.

The fact that the actions used in the centres had a duration of two years (academic years 2015-2016 and 2016-2017), together with the varying amounts of time available within the centres for the questionnaires, means the existence of different comparison groups. Specifically, data were collected at five different moments in time, during three academic years, and with these data five pre- (prior to introducing the actions) and post- (subsequent to introducing the actions) comparisons could be made (table 2).

Table 2. Moment of data collection according to school year

1	2	3	4	5
Pre- 2014-15	Pre- 2015-16	Pre- and Post- 2015-16	Pre- 2016-17	Post- 2016-17

Table 3 shows the number of students that correspond to each of the five comparison groups. For example, the group pre-post 1-3 contains 32 students and the collection of the pre- phase took place during the academic year 2014-2015 and the post- phase the academic year 2015-2016, while the group pre-post 3-5 contains 80 students who answered the pre- questionnaire during the school year 2015-2016 and the post- questionnaire during the school year 2016-2017.

Table 3. Number of participants in the assessment through questionnaires according to the moment of data collection

Pre-post 1-3	Pre-post 2-3	Pre-post 2-5	Pre-post 4-5	Pre-post 3-5
32	113	80	164	80



Instruments

For the quantitative phase of the assessment, items extracted and adapted from the following scales were used:

- Quality of School Life (QLS) (Ainley, Reed, and Miller, 1986): dimensions of general school satisfaction and affect in the school environment.
- Student Engagement Instrument (SEI) (Betts, Appleton, Reschly, Christenson, and Huebner, 2010).
- Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales (PALS) (Midgley *et al.*, 2000): dimension of self-efficacy.
- Democratic School Climate (DSC) (Samdal *et al.*, 1998).
- Students' Sense of Community at the School (SSCS) (Samdal, Wold, and Torsheim, 1998).
- School Engagement (SE) (Fredericks, Blumenfeld, Friedel, and Paris, 2005).
- Statements about oneself (Vittersson, 2003).
- Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI) (Cummins *et al.*, 2005).
- Satisfaction of the participants with different aspects of their life.

Some quantitative results

For all the scales used, the pre- phase mean and the post- phase mean were compared to see if there were important differences. The results of some of the scales used are shown below, all highlighting which groups have not produced a significant change from the pre- phase to the post- phase, with the break in the expected natural process of decrease at this age, and those producing an improvement.

Table 4. Comparison of scores for items from the Quality of School Life (QLS) scale

My school/high school is a place where:	Number of pre-post groups where there was no significant change from the first to the second year
I'm given the opportunity to work on what really interests me	2
Adults take notice of the students	3
I like to learn things	3
I like being there	3
I like to ask things in class	1
I feel safe there	3
I feel that I am taken into account	1
I feel that they listen to me	2
All the adults treat the students well	2

Table 5. Comparison of the scores of the items from the Quality of School Life (QLS) scale

My school/high school is a place where:	Number of pre-post groups where there was no significant change from the first to the second year
I feel happy	3
I like going every day	3
I have a good time	2
I enjoy myself	3
I feel let down	5
I feel alone	5
I feel stressed	2 + 1 group improves
I feel worried	2 + 1 group improves
I feel left out	5

Table 6. Comparison of the scores of the items from classmates dimension from the Student Engagement Instrument (SEI)

My class is a place where:	Number of pre-post groups where there was no significant change from the first to the second year
There are classmates that worry about me	4 + 1 group improves
There are classmates that I can count on when I need them	5
I like to talk with other classmates	4
In general, my classmates respect what I say	4 + 1 group improves
I have good friends	5
In general, the other classmates trust me	3 + 1 group improves
I behave with my classmates	4
My classmates like to collaborate to do work	5
You make friends doing group work	4

Taula 7. Comparació de les puntuacions dels ítems de la dimensió de percepció del professorat del Student Engagement Instrument (SEI)

In general, my school/high school is a place where:	Number of pre-post groups where there was no significant change from the first to the second year
The teachers care about the students	2
The teachers are there for me when I need them	2
The teachers are honest (sincere, fair) with me	3
I like talking with the teachers	3
Most of the teachers show interest in me as a person (not just as a student)	3
The teachers give me the marks I deserve	3
The teachers help to get the best out of me	1
The teachers listen to me when I speak to them	0
If the class wants to talk about something, the teachers find time to do so	2

Qualitative phase

Participants

A total of seven group interviews were carried out with participating teachers-tutors and students, separately.

Instruments

Three different interviews were written for the group interviews with primary students, secondary students and teachers-tutors.

The interview for **primary** students was designed to learn about:

- The worries of the children related to the transition stage, and the impact of the actions carried out.
- The actions that should be developed to prepare the students emotionally during the transition stage and assessment of the actions carried out.
- The use of the EKA platform in the classroom and to what point this platform could be useful for making the transition stage easier.

The interview for **secondary** students was written to learn about:

- How the children had coped with the transition stage and if they considered they had received the necessary tools and support.
- The use they had made of the platform and in which way the platform had helped during the transition.
- Assessment of the dynamics of the classmate-guide.

The interview for **teachers-tutors** was designed to learn about:

- The vision of the teachers of the different actions carried out in the classroom and the assessment of how important they may be for the transition.
- Assessment of the use made of the EKA platform in the classroom.



Some qualitative results

The interviews carried out with some of the students that participated in the quantitative phase, and some of their teachers-tutors, have been transcribed and their content analysed.

12 categories were created, which included more specific sub-categories. The first four categories refer to the blocks worked in the intervention: group dynamics, actions related to emotional management, use of the EKA platform and the mentoring programme (classmate-guide) carried out in the first year of secondary education. Within these categories, the contributions that the interviewees believe that the different actions have had are considered, along with the value they give them and any other aspects that they wanted to add.

Other categories were also defined relating to the transition process: fears and worries, information for the transition and usefulness of the information provided. One final category refers to proposed improvements to the interventions that the participants would introduce in the future.

The following shows an example corresponding to one of the sub-categories within the emotional management category. Specifically, this sub-category refers to what the actions to improve student emotional management have meant for the students from the perspective of the teachers-tutors. Concretely, these consider that thanks to the actions carried out in the final year of primary school, the children did not have so much uncertainty or fear of the transition to secondary. The participating teachers identified changes in behaviour in the students. According to their observations, the children have started to develop certain empathy among them after using the dynamics, and are able to identify the emotions they felt. The effects of dynamics in the classroom made the teachers value the experience in a positive way and they propose to continue using the dynamics worked on in the project.

Interviewer: Do you think that after all these actions you have been doing; the change in September is met with more enthusiasm rather than fear?

Teacher 2: Some of them have a lot of curiosity, instead of fear.

Teacher 1: Some have changed, yes. I really want to see what it is like.

Interviewer: Do you consider that this project that has been developed has helped students to be more motivated and able to cope with this change with more security?

That is, as you said, for example, that they have changed fear for curiosity?

Teacher 2: Yes.

Teacher 1: Yes. Yes, I think so.

Interviewer: In terms of more motivation to make the change.

Teacher 1: Yes.

Interviewer: Maybe less uncertainty...

Teacher 2: Yes.

The second example refers to the use of the EKA platform, and more specifically, how it is rated. The teachers comment that they had difficulties, due to their lack of training in digital skills. However, they agree that the platform is a tool that could help students use digital technologies more efficiently. From the teacher's point of view, the students also had difficulties to use the platform correctly.

Interviewer: And in general, how do you rate the platform?

Teacher 1: I think it has the potential to be very useful.

Teacher 2: It is a useful tool but we didn't know how to use it. That's what I would say. It's for this reason. It's useful, it's good and it gives them the tools to enter places similar to those they will need to move in later, at secondary school.

The EKA platform was also valued positively by the students. Some considered that it helped express themselves better, and even control themselves. They also said it was fun to use because it is different from what they use for other curricular subjects. However, they also think the teachers should insist on the use of the platform, by promoting actions and motivating them to use it frequently in tasks. Like their teachers, they believe they have little training in digital skills because they do few hours of ICT in their education centre.

WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT RESULTS?

Quantitatively, it can be seen that, following the actions carried out by PROMIBE over one year, the results on the subjective well-being psychometric scales are higher in some cases, while others have not changed, or have decreased.

In the interviews, the majority of students expressed that they liked to make intensive use of the EKA platform, and considered the actions undertaken were positive for the group class. The teachers-tutors expressed their satisfaction with the support received and their perception of low self-efficacy when introducing new methodologies to the classroom that have a high digital content.





WHAT CONCLUSIONS HAVE WE REACHED?

The introduction of changes in the schools requires much time and constant assessment and support for the agents involved. This is something that is difficult to fit in with the limited duration of the projects.

The procedure also highlights the important need to advance in the development of assessment indicators that show precisely the impacts of actions of this type. Considering in particular, that through the studied ages there is a general decrease in the levels of subjective well-being (both as a whole and in domains of life), which could give a biased view of the positive impact of the actions.

Therefore, it is necessary to undertake actions in the schools that counter or lessen the decrease in school well-being throughout adolescence, with the implication of teachers, students and their families. It is also necessary to continue research into the indicators that can help understand better the impact of these actions, considering the perspective of those involved.



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