“NOT ONLY ACADEMICALLY ORIENTED, BUT SUPPORTIVE AND FRIENDLY”: A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON STUDENTS’ IDEA OF A GOOD SCHOOL IN THREE EUROPEAN COUNTRIES.

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Among the main policy objectives recently re-affirmed by the European Community’s Horizon 2020 and Erasmus+ are the renewed European cooperation in the youth field and the emphasis on developing social capital and citizenship and participation.

Indeed, the need to give young people a more significant role in decision-making processes, in particular in school contexts, has been acknowledged by authors although ‘in many aspects of education and social provision, the child’s voice remains absent’ (Sargeant, 2012: 1). Therefore, we need ‘more productive approaches to assessment and accountability’ (Stobart 2008, p. 89) which afford a more significant role to stakeholders inside school communities (Grion and Cook-Sather, 2013). In this context, the aim of this paper is to build a new concept of school quality, drawing from how pupils in England, Italy France answered the question ‘what does make a good school?’.

Qualitative data was collected by direct consultation with pupils through an open ended questionnaire. Pupils aged 11-15 (France (n= 130), England (n= 146), and Italy (n= 145)) took part in the study. Data was analysed by researchers in each of the three countries using a bottom-up approach, consisting of individual researcher’s initial coding, collaborative discussions on the main themes arising from the content analysis. The main finding show pupils have a shared idea of what “a good school” is despite their different national school contexts and systems. Two main dimensions were identified as representing the core of students’ views about the features of a ‘good’ school. The first is that pupils share similar views about the features of a good teacher. The second is that a ‘good’ school is one where teaching and learning is appropriate and more practice-focused; where the climate is friendly, supportive and safe; and, where the physical environment is aesthetically pleasing.

This paper discusses the findings by drawing from diverse models of understanding the features of a good school. Clearly, for young people academic features are important but not sufficient to define the complexity of their experience and expectations.

