



*INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL ON SCHOOL CLIMATE
AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION,
3, MARCH 2019, 44-63*

***USING EMPATHY AND SOCIAL MEDIATION TO
IMPROVE SCHOOL CLIMATE
INSIGHTS FROM THREE FRENCH EXPERIMENTAL
DESIGNS***

***L'EMPATHIE ET LA MEDIATION SOCIALE AU SERVICE
DE L'AMELIORATION DU CLIMAT SCOLAIRE
ENSEIGNEMENTS DE TROIS EXPERIMENTATIONS
FRANÇAISES***

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RÉSUMÉ

Cet article confronte les résultats de trois expérimentations françaises visant à améliorer le climat scolaire. La première consiste en la restitution des résultats d'une enquête de victimation aux équipes éducatives. Elle a permis aux adultes de prendre conscience du problème du harcèlement à l'école mais n'a pas entraîné d'amélioration du climat scolaire. Les deux autres visent à améliorer le climat scolaire par l'éducation à l'empathie pour l'une et la médiation sociale pour l'autre. Ces expérimentations ont entraîné une diminution des situations de violence et l'amélioration de plusieurs aspects du climat scolaire. Mais au-delà de ces concepts, il semble que le sentiment d'appartenance que génère le travail d'appropriation des équipes constitue un pilier pour un climat scolaire positif.

MOTS-CLÉS : Climat scolaire, empathie, expérimentation, évaluation, harcèlement, médiation sociale, prévention.

ABSTRACT

This article contrasts the results of three French experimental designs on school climate. The first one is a restitution of a victimisation survey's results to school staffs. It succeeded in raising adults' awareness on school bullying but has not allowed to ameliorate school climate. The second and third experimentations aim at improving school climate through education to empathy and social mediation in schools respectively. These experimentations have decreasing violence and improving several school climate parameters. But beyond these concepts, it seems that the sense of community belonging generated by the work of team, essential for positive school climate.

KEY WORDS: Bullying, empathy, experimentation, evaluation, prevention school climate, social mediation.

1. PRESENTATION OF THE EXPERIMENTAL DESIGNS

1.1 CONTEXT

In 2011 around fifty health education and psychology specialists published an opened letter advocating for putting the issue of school bullying on top of the political agenda and for fostering actions to prevent and fight this kind of violence¹. The Ministry of Education reacted by commanding a report on school bullying to Éric Debarbieux, head of the International Observatory of School Violence (OIVE). This document gave a synopsis of definition and data and listed several recommendations for future public policies. In particular, É. Debarbieux advised to get inspiration from the numerous tools and designs that already existed in France and abroad provided they proved useful in local context before diffusing them (Debarbieux, 2011). In other words this report doubled the idea that there was a need for evaluating new policies before launching them. Hence a call for projects was published in October 2012 by the Fonds d'Expérimentation pour la Jeunesse (Experimental Fund for Youth thereafter abbreviate FEJ) about bullying².

The FEJ is a public-lead policy lab that associates research, field experience and policy making to help the renewal of public policies towards youth through the use of experimentation. The term « experimentation » is used by the FEJ in a broader sense than the scientific definition based on controlled experience and causal relation measurement. Indeed the FEJ uses a definition closer to politic field. An experimentation is defined as the small-scale implementation of a public policy project and the opportunity to evaluate it. The objective is to measure the effects and the conditions of implementation of the policy in order to consider generalizing it as a whole or in part. (Kerivel, James, 2018). In order to do this, different methods from several scientific disciplines (economy, sociology) are mobilized.

It is dedicated to fostering social and professional integration, academic success and equality of opportunity for young people aged up to 25-30 years old. The FEJ launches regular calls for project that are addressed to any public or private structure that wishes to develop an innovative policy so as to tackle unaddressed issues or to improve existing measures. The selected projects are financed on an experimental basis meaning that they are funded for a limited time period on a delimited territory. These projects are systematically evaluated to produce proofs of the effectiveness and relevance of experimented designs. This evaluation aims at helping shaping public policies and

¹ Collectif contre le harcèlement à l'école. (2011). *Lettre ouverte contre le harcèlement à l'école*, adressée au ministère de l'Éducation nationale, au ministère de la Santé, au ministère de la cohésion sociale, au président de la HALDE, à la Défenseure des enfants.

² Fonds d'Expérimentation pour la Jeunesse, « Prévention et lutte contre le harcèlement à l'école » – APSCO4. Documents are available on <http://www.experimentation.jeunes.gouv.fr/950-prevention-et-lutte-contre-le-harcelement-a-l-ecole-apsco4.html>

eventually leading to these designs' perpetuation and generalisation. Call for project's topics are most often chosen on the basis of political programmes or new reports about growing problems and the need for new knowledge.

A pupil is being bullied or victimized "when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other pupils (...)". Negative action is "when someone intentionally inflicts, or attempts to inflict, injury or discomfort upon another (aggressive behaviour)" (Olweus, 1993, p.9). This negative action can be physical, verbal or symbolical intentional violence (Bellarbre, Kerivel, Khieu, 2018, p. 6).

In order to address the issue of school bullying in its entirety the October 2012 call for project was two-dimensional. Selected projects would have to aim at improving school bullying spotting and measure and at enhancing new actions to reduce violence. Furthermore the requirement specifications mentioned the interest of addressing not only bullying but also school climate as a whole. School climate is a multidimensional concept that does not admit one univocal definition. The National School Climate Center came to a consensual broad definition: "School climate is based on patterns of people's experiences of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures" (Thapa et al. 2012, p. 2)

Enlarging the policy goal from school bullying to school climate makes sense for several reasons. First and foremost, the two concepts are closely linked (Debarbieux, 2015) so working on bullying only would make no sense at some point and a systemic approach is to be privileged. The literature review written by Hoareau, Bagès et Guerrien from eleven experimentations against bullying shows that an overall response is more efficient than a partial one which is a critical result for pupils but also teachers, parents targeting. (Hoareau et al. 2017, p. 390)

Research documented the fact that the more school climate worsens, the more bullying cases there are (Poulin et al., 2015) or vice-versa a positive school climate is associated with less aggressions, violence, bullying and sexual harassment (Debarbieux et al., 2012, p. 8). Therefore the call for project was also directed towards designs targeting school climate following the hypothesis that improving school climate would lead to reducing school bullying in the longer run. On a more general basis, focusing on the broader issue of school climate in itself (not only so as to target school bullying) makes sense as its wide impacts on academic results but also on personal development and well-being have been well established by a number of works (Debarbieux et al., 2012, p. 6). All in all focusing on the insights the experimented designs give on school climate appears legitimate. This is what we chose to do in this article with focusing on the interesting features of three experimentations. The first one focused on prevention to tackle school bullying while the two others built upon the idea of indirectly addressing school bullying through school climate improvement. We will of course talk about the

effect of those experimented designs on school bullying but we believe that our main contribution lies in the analysis of the impact that such designs may have on school climate.

1.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE THREE DESIGNS OF INTEREST

The first experimented design was implemented by the LIEPP-Sciences Po laboratory and consisted in the administration of the victimisation survey created by E. Debarbieux and in the restitution of its results to the schools' faculty. It aimed at reducing school bullying through raising awareness and sparking a dynamic of actions from the educative community to prevent and fight against peer violence among pupils.

The second experimented design³ was animated by France Médiation, a French independent organism that fosters the practice of social mediation through formations and interventions in different contexts. Social mediation in school is defined as “a process that aims at creating and fixing social connexions and at settling school life conflicts through the intervention of an independent and impartial third party. This person would arrange meetings between persons or institutions and help them improving their relationship or ending a conflict between them⁴”. The project consisted in the formation of 40 social mediators who would be affected to 40 territories comprising of one secondary school and two or three primary schools. These mediators would be in charge of prevention of violence and risky behaviours, of conflict management, of the transmission of social values and of individual supervision of some pupils. They would transmit knowledge and practice on social mediation to teachers and especially to interested pupils through dedicated formation sessions (peer-mediation). They would also help connecting the school to its environment with school-family mediation and social mediation in the school's surroundings. More generally, they could implement projects they deemed relevant and participated in all school life events.

These two experimentations are jointly implemented. This design's unfolding and its impacts on school bullying and school climate have been evaluated by the LIEPP-Sciences Po laboratory in particular through a randomised controlled trial evaluation frame (Algan, Guyon, Huillery, 2015b). The choice of the group of pupils benefiting from the program and of the control population (pupils not benefiting) was carried out by a draw "in two stages within each territory: first one of the two school sites was chosen to benefit from the device" -social mediation in schools- "then the other was chosen to constitute a control group". The random drawing of groups makes it possible to ensure the comparability of the two groups. In fact, the differences observed at the end of the investigation can only be caused by the programme put in place. The hypothesis is that in the absence of the programme, the two groups since comparable in

³ The first and the second experimented designs we focus on were conducted under the same name (APSCO4_20) because the LIEPP-Sciences Po laboratory evaluated them both. But in practice they were independently implemented and we choose to dissociate them here for easier understanding.

⁴ European seminar « Médiation sociale et nouveaux modes de résolution des conflits de la vie quotidienne », September the 22th of 2000, Créteil. Translated

all respects would have evolved in the same way. 12,650 primary school pupils and 18,400 middle school students from all levels were interviewed.

The third experimental designed was imagined by the Maine University and the Sarthe Academic Inspection office. It targeted primary school pupils and aimed at reducing school bullying and improving school climate through educating pupils to empathy with games involving the body. University researchers would familiarize teachers with the notion of empathy and professionals would help them create games based on dance, sport, forum theatre, for the children to develop an empathic behaviour that they could replicate in daily interactions. Empathy can be understood as “a disposition to acknowledge the other as a possible self” (Zanna, 2015b), which relies on three abilities: “acknowledging the other’s feelings, understanding her feelings through echoing with one’s own experience and developing a sensitive behaviour” (Zanna, 2015a, translated). This project’s unfolding and results have been studied by the LERFAS laboratory with the use of questionnaires⁵, interviews and observation sessions in a before/after and an *in itinere* approach. The evaluation consisted in administering a questionnaire to the pupils of CM1, then CM2 (the following year), *i.e.* before and after they had benefited from the empathy education programme. Note that a "playful" questionnaire based on comic strips was developed following the exploratory interviews conducted with pupils to resolve the methodological problems identified at the time, namely the non-use of the notion of bullying in favour of other words to describe it, the difficulties related to the mastery of writing and finally the bias related to the presence of the adult. The recoding of all the questionnaires was carried out retrospectively, in order to produce statistical data and to note the evolution between the before and after passes. There had been 433 respondents to the first pass and 308 respondents to the second. The questionnaire returns from the control population were not sufficient to make a comparison. Interviews were also conducted with the 32 teachers, and questionnaires were sent to the pupils’ parents (144 respondents) in parallel with observation times of the programme.

We will investigate further the hypotheses on which these experimental projects where built and the results they obtained. But it can already be noted that the two last projects share a rather common approach to school climate and school bullying. They both consist in the implementation of a positive action (not a sanction) that builds upon a concept (mediation, empathy) and fosters social skills. Yet these two experimental designs also differ on a number of features: type of public, evaluation frame, number of pupils, territories... In particular they do not interact with the education community the same way. In the first case a third exterior party brings the concept of mediation inside the school – the quality of mediation depends partly on the ability of the mediator to maintain her independent and impartial position. On the contrary, the empathy-oriented

⁵ Some pupils did not have a good command of French, plus collective interviews showed that the usual words to talk about school violence (bullying, harassment, fights...) were not the same as the words the children use. Then some of the questionnaires relied on drawings that authorised a great freedom of answers. More details are available in Kerivel (2015) and Bellarbre, Kerivel, Khieu (2018).

games are co-constructed by specialists and teachers after a first transmission of the concept by researchers to teachers. The victimisation survey offers a third approach to school bullying and school climate by the restitution of the survey's results to the teachers and other members of the school staff without going further in helping them to tackle those issues. Even if the designs' evaluations are different these designs generate interesting results and allow answering to the call for project's original question: how can school climate be improved and school bullying be turned down?

2. RESULTS ON SCHOOL BULLYING AND SCHOOL CLIMATE

2.1. INFORMATION AND PREVENTION SHOW NO SIGNIFICANT RESULTS ON SCHOOL BULLYING

We first focus on the limits of prevention action through the study of the experimentation led by the LIEPP-Sciences Po laboratory. Researchers conducted a victimisation survey in primary schools and transmitted its results to the school's teachers and other education professionals. The idea of spreading knowledge on school bullying and school violence to raise awareness among school staffs and foster their actions against violence lies at the core of many designs including this one. Indeed, several research works showed that teachers encounter difficulties in spotting bullying (Hazler, Miller, Carney and Green, 2001; Debarbieux and Fotinos, 2011), so they are even less likely to treat or prevent violent situations. In addition, the LIEPP design would not provide knowledge through broad figures about the national population, but rather figures taken straight from the field through a survey which can be expected to be even more efficient on teachers. Finally the work hypothesis behind this design also displays another key feature: the design was explicitly meant to raise awareness only and not to provide the teachers with a set of precast actions to address school bullying – only an advice guide was given. It was assumed that letting the teachers and school staff appropriating the results would lead them to create their own answers to the issues underlined. This would be more efficient to reduce school violence among pupils as adults would endeavour actions that fit the local context more through the use of local resources (Algan, Guyon, Huillery, 2015b, p. 16).

The evaluation results do not validate this hypothesis. The victimisation survey displays the same figures on average on the percentage of bullied and bullying children at school as other national surveys such as the one conducted by the OIVE for UNICEF-France (Debarbieux, Fotinos (coord.), 2011): 8 to 9% of pupils are subject to school bullying in the experimental design (for 12.6% of pupils being subject to severe or less severe bullying in the first Debarbieux's victimisation survey). So the teachers have indeed been made aware of the existence of bullying and violence in their own school. But on the whole there is no systematic increase in the number of actions against school violence endeavoured in the 40 schools of the test group compared to the control group (Algan, Guyon, Huillery, 2015b, p. 18). There is also no systematic impact on the

feelings expressed by children about being bullying or facing violence at school (Algan, Guyon, Huillery, 2015b, p. 35) – there are only minor non-significant differences depending on the gender and level of the children⁶. More generally, the experimented design has no impact on “psychological well-being”, “life satisfaction” or “pro-sociality” indices (Algan, Guyon, Huillery, 2015b, p. 36). However the design sometimes appears to have a small significant but counterintuitive impact on observed violence and bullying. On average parents of children attending schools belonging to the test group more often report that their child does not want to go to school because of problems with other pupils (Algan, Guyon, Huillery, 2015b, p. 35). The level of violence reported by the “other adults” in classes and schools as well as the probability of declaring thefts and degradations is also higher after the experimentation in treated schools compared to control group schools (Algan, Guyon, Huillery, 2015b, p. 36). All these results do not vary on average depending on the results being transmitted to the whole educative staff or to the school’s headmaster only (Algan, Guyon, Huillery, 2015a, p. 117).

After the experimentation pupils declare the same level of violence as in the controlled group whereas adults report significantly more violence on average. Contrasting the change in violence and bullying reported by the former and the latter helps understanding the effects of the experimented design. It can be said that this design fulfilled its aim to raise adults’ awareness of school bullying and violence issues but failed to help translating this new knowledge into efficient actions targeting those issues. Indeed the apparent paradox between children and adults declarations can be understood if violent behaviours and bullying did not increase because of the experimented design, but if adults did notice them more thanks to the design. These results are similar to those of other prevention experiences such as a recent prevention and intervention effort of which evaluation shows that prevention against bullying is not enough to reduce it (Gage et al., 2018). Furthermore, this is consistent with the results of other experimentations financed by the FEJ. It often appears that prevention-only designs lead to no change or even a worsening of individuals’ well-being, in the present case of pupils’ well-being at school. It can undergo no change because if adults become more aware of school violence they do not know how to react as we see in this case. It can also get worse because children can be targeted by prevention actions too and develop awareness about school violence. They may reconsider some actions they would already know as school bullying and realise that something has to be done, but without knowing what and without finding support from the adults. The interpretation of those data has been enhanced through the result of other evaluations. Another experimental design from the same FEJ-led call for project as our designs of interest and called “Prevention Versailles” that is the same kind of prevention measures, showed that more pupils found punishments “unfair” (Bodin, Darnal, Debarbieux, Jarthon, Javerlhaic, 2015) after a prevention session addressed to teachers only. This can be

⁶ More details about the differentiated results of the experimented designs depending on gender or school grade are available in experimentation reports, in Bellarbre, Kerivel, Khieu (2018) and in Kerivel (2017).

explained as more aware teachers may increase punishment and also as the pupils lack this very awareness to understand the rationale behind the punishment. Overall, prevention seems efficient in raising awareness but it does not translate into a diminution of school bullying and violence in the short run – let alone an improvement in school climate and well-being at school.

This situation can be due to the adults lacking key tools and concepts to build a positive answer to these issues and to the children not being the target of prevention. (Bellarbre, Kerivel, Khieu, 2018, p. 21) Sometimes the individuals' well-being may even worsen due to non-adapted actions or to actors' frustration concerning a situation they know is wrong but they do not see how to improve. One can also imagine two logics colliding: on the one hand, an increased awareness leads in a decrease of well-being ; on the other hand, some actions are conducted in a non-systematic way and allow for the overall well-being feeling not to change. All in all, the results of such designs call in for a deeper, positive action that would empower actors to fight against school bullying.

2.2. SOFT-SKILLS BASED PROGRAMMES SEEM TO HAVE A DEEP IMPACT ON SCHOOL CLIMATE

We will show that this action can lie in a design built on a concept that targets school climate as a whole instead of school bullying alone. This is the case for the two other experimental designs of interest. Let's briefly remind their original features. Although they foster knowledge spreading and prevention approaches too, they mainly develop a full-fledged action to tackle school bullying. Moreover these designs promote a positive approach to this issue. They do not implement a sanction-like action but something that gives actors new skills – which interestingly are soft skills (empathy, mediation). They also address the issue in an indirect way through an encompassing approach of multiple dimensions of school climate. Finally they share a specific concern for including all school actors into the action with an emphasis on the transmission of values, knowledge and concepts.

First and contrary to the sole prevention scheme evaluations results of the mediation project and the empathy project both indicate that these designs have a positive effect in reducing school bullying and violence⁷. Implementing social mediation in secondary schools leads the feeling of being bullied to drop by 11% on average and especially by 15% in the case of verbal bullying (Algan, Guyon, Huillery, 2015b, p. 24). This evolution varies widely depending on the age and school grade. On the whole this programme seems to have benefited the youngest the more: the probability of feeling bullied dropped by 46% for young boys in *sixième* grade (11 year-old boys) (Algan, Guyon, Huillery, 2015b, p. 25). The design based on education to empathy also resulted in a decrease in violence. The proportion of pupils reporting that they had been excluded by others dropped from 47.8% to 29.9% at the end of the *CM2* class (Kerivel,

⁷ The mediation design has different effects depending on the mediator being « experimented » or not. We will investigate further below these differences.

2015, p. 55) and the proportion of pupils reporting feeling bullied has been halved from 24% to 12.3% (Kerivel, 2015, p. 55). The number of reported fights is the only one to remain constant (Kerivel, 2015, p. 55). These results support those spotted in Hoareau's literature review: the most successful programmes are the ones that are developing one or two social competences as empathy, self-efficacy or proactive behaviour in a playful and long-term based manner, yet still targeting school bullying (Hoareau et al. 2017, p. 379, p. 386)

It is worth mentioning that the social mediation design generates positive effects in secondary schools only and not in primary school where there have been negative effects on average. For instance the headmasters of schools which have welcomed a social mediator tend to report a significant 2.14 more cases of bullied child. The probability of them reporting thefts and degradations also increases by 10.6 percentage points (Algan, Guyon, Huillery, 2015b, p. 30). Since it is not likely that the mediator's intervention would trigger a spur in violence and negative behaviours in primary school these figures can be understood as the consequence of an increased awareness of teachers and headmasters of school violence. One key thing to have in mind is that mediators intervened 2.7 days per week on average in secondary schools but only 0.64 days per week on average in primary schools (Algan, Guyon, Huillery, 2015b, p. 12). Mediators thus spend a proportional amount of time in each place relatively to the number of pupils but as some of their actions impact the group as a whole they are likely to have had a greater impact on secondary school pupils. Therefore they could not implement as many actions in primary schools as in secondary school. The hypothesis can be made that when such a programme is implemented in a too light way its effects are limited to those of prevention – in other words to raising awareness. This translates into an overall negative effect as actors are made more aware of issues but do not have the tools to tackle them. Then the design still amounted to the start of a positive dynamic. The same reasoning can be applied to understand why some pupils report more bullying cases in secondary school when there is a mediator, as it is the case for boys in *cinquième* grade. The teachers do not report an increase in violent behaviours for this group: it is then possible that the mediator's action triggered a rise in awareness for these children, which is not yet compensated by actions reducing the number of bullying situations.

What makes these designs the more interesting is the fact that they also have a positive effect on several dimensions of school climate – not only on school bullying. Feelings of safety and well-being at school are key elements of a good school climate. They are often mentioned in the broad definitions of school climate (cf. Debarbieux et al., 2012, p.3). They translate into many different aspects – the absence of violence and bullying being one of them. In particular we can dissociate the overall well-being of children and the well-being directly linked to school life and spaces. It appears that the experimented designs improved both kinds of well-beings. On general well-being, social mediation resulted in an increase in self-esteem for young pupils who usually are more often victims of bullying. For instance, the proportion of boys in *sixième* grade and girls in *cinquième* grade that declare that the sentence “my friends like me” was

“totally true” increases by almost 10 percentage points (Algan, Guyon et Huillery, 2015b, p. 32). The synthetic well-being index used in this evaluation increased by 13% for the youngest secondary school pupils, in particular thanks to a statistically significant rise in the probability of never or seldom “waking up at night”, “feeling bored in life” or “having fears in life” (Algan, Guyon, Huillery, 2015a, p. 93). As for school bullying the mediation programme did not have any significant positive effect on well-being in primary schools and sometimes resulted in a significant decrease of well-being. Well-being in school spaces and situations has been put in the forefront of the evaluation of the experimental design revolving around empathy. This choice builds upon the works of Carra who studied the school geography and listed the “places to avoid” (Carra, 2008, p. 324). The evaluation asked pupils about their feelings (well-being, sadness, anger, fear) in some places of school such as the canteen, the sport ground, the classroom, the playground, the way to school, the school gate, the corridors and the toilets. They also had to express their feeling when they are interrogated alone or in group on the board or while staying at their place. The results showed that the feeling of happiness in school places is more often quoted (from 57% to 66%) and fear decreases in interrogation situations (from 40.9% to 25% when the pupil is alone at the board) (Kerivel, 2015, p. 59-60).

We stressed the fact that these designs give adults keys to create answers to violent situations. The actions implemented can therefore foster the pupils’ feeling of being treated fairly, of rational punishments and of transparency of rules. It can also increase pupils’ trust in school as an institution and in its adults to protect them and help them. Results from the empathy design show that schools have implemented more actions to fight school violence and bullying after the unfolding of the design. Critically, when 11% of the pupils mentioned asking help from an adult when bullied, they were 24% to declare doing it after being educated to empathy, which is a much greater figure although it still concerns a minority of pupils. Such results are to be put in relation with numerous research works assessing the importance of transparency of rules (Debarbieux, 2015, p. 17) and institutional trust in a positive school climate (cf. Debarbieux et al., 2012, p. 4).

Another key aspect of school climate lies in the strengthening of an educative community of involved and interacting actors (Debarbieux et al., 2012, p. 2)⁸. One feature of this educative community is its continuity all over and outside the school borders, connecting all actors and especially the children’s families. This school-family link would help preventing, fixing and reducing issues in the short run, and help children’s development in the long run (cf. Debarbieux et al., 2012, p. 16). Working with parents has not been possible every time in both designs but when it has, some positive effects have been observed. In the social mediation programme mediators sometimes performed school-family mediation in some cases, which seems to have helped strengthening this link. For instance, families are 17% less to declare not having

⁸ NT

contact with the secondary school after the experimentation when confronted to an experimented mediator (Algan, Guyon, Huillery, 2015b, p. 34). Parents are also more involved in their child's school life as less parents declare not knowing if their child had friends or not, and more declared that their child had several "good" friends (Algan, Guyon, Huillery, 2015b, p. 32). Project bearers of the empathy design organised meetings with parents to inform them about the programme and its results. They paid careful attention to meet with parents in "neutral" places chosen by the children and their families (gymnasium, stadium, social office). 12% of the parents who answered the questionnaire saying they came less than once a month to the school attended one of these meetings (Kerivel, 2015, p. 8). The aim was also to invite parents communicating with the school staff on bullying cases they may have heard off from their child.

Teachers are a category of actors that has to be taken into account too for improving school climate. Feeling safe at school, being part of an active community, benefiting from a good leadership are critical elements that translate in a greater well-being of adults but also smaller turnover of individuals and a lower rate of absenteeism – all parameters amounting to a better school climate. For instance, Debarbieux quoted the stabilisation of school staffs as a key condition to an efficient action on school climate (Debarbieux et al., 2012, p. 17). Indeed, Gottfredson et al. proved that staff stability was one of the best ways to protect pupils from violence (Gottfredson and Gottfredson, 1985). The proportion of secondary schools that benefited from an experimented mediator that declare having at least one missing teacher every day dropped from 50% to around 20% (Algan, Guyon, Huillery, 2015b, p. 34).

A third category of actors that should not be forgotten is the pupils themselves. Debarbieux and his co-authors advocated for the need of promoting a school community "in an ecological meaning" (Debarbieux et al., 2012, p. 17), that is to say that school climate has to be understood and tackled as a subjective experience lived by the school as a group and not as a collection of individuals. This idea is buttressed by the fact that out of the experimentations led by the FEJ on school bullying, only the ones directly addressing all actors without forgetting pupils resulted in positive significant effects on school climate.

3. HYPOTHESES TO UNDERSTAND THE RESULTS: WORKING ON CONCEPTS MAY BE A GOOD WAY TO ADDRESS SCHOOL CLIMATE

3.1. SHARING VALUES AND WORKING TOGETHER MAY BE LEADING TO THE OBSERVED POSITIVE EFFECTS

How can these results be related to the experimented designs' features? We believe that the empathy and the mediation designs have had significant positive effects on

school climate because they induce the appropriation and adaptation of a basis concept. First, both mediation and empathy concepts have a direct application in the present case that is interesting in itself. Spreading the knowledge and the practice of these concepts is likely to help developing social skills and values that help improving the school climate. In fact the experimented designs' results buttress this hypothesis. Both evaluations highlight different forms of appropriation of these concepts by pupils. For the empathy-based design it appears that the programme seems to have helped children developing an empathic approach to others. This is visible in particular through the differentiated effect the programme has on children depending on their gender. This is a result that differs from those of the 11 programmes identified in Hoareau's literature review, that find similar impacts for girls and boys. (Hoareau et al. 2017, p. 381). Indeed, before the experimentation girls are more numerous than boys to refer to emotion when describing their experiences of bullying or violence (48% of girls mention three emotions or more while only 34% of boys do so); whereas after the experimentation 56% of both girls and boys express three or more emotions to talk about violent situations (Kerivel, 2018, p. 46). It appears that the gap between girls and boys disappears, in other words that the programme has a greater positive impact on boys compared to girls. The evaluator makes the hypothesis that since girls are more often socialised to empathy compared to boys (Duru-Bellat, 2004) the experimentation benefits boys more because they acquire a skill they had not developed yet. Following this hypothesis the experimentation's results can therefore be read as the sign that empathic values and behaviours have been adopted by pupils. Confronting the data gathered by questionnaires, observations and interviews highlights the rise in empathic behaviours from pupils towards bullied children (when they are mocked) and also isolated children (the data shows that isolation is more often associated with being bullied because friends protect from bullying) (Bellarbre, Kerivel, Khieu, 2018, p. 24).

The same kind of interpretation can be made for the mediation design's results too. Mediators were not meant to be only a third independent party that would somehow keep the mediation practice as an exterior tool to solve conflicts. One of their big parts was also to help teachers, parents and children changing their representations and appropriating the mediation approach. Spreading the use and knowledge of social mediation was made on a formal basis with formations offered to motivated pupils but all pupils of test schools would also be sensitized through the mediator's own actions. This is visible in the shifts that occur in several indices. For instance in the group of boys in *troisième* grade reticence to help bullied victims dropped by 46%, the probability of everybody making fun of a pupil trying to stop a fight dropped by 54% and the probability of everybody finding defending one's friends abnormal dropped by 46% when an experimented mediator intervenes in the secondary school (Algan, Guyon, Huillery, 2015a, p. 89). It is interesting to see that the appropriation of the mediation approach mainly occurred for the eldest pupils who developed the will and confidence to intervene and defend bullied pupils (Algan, Guyon, Huillery, 2015a, p. 90).

Remarkably it seems necessary for children to appropriate concepts that adults appropriated them before. In the mediation case, evaluators observe that only experimented mediators generate positive effects on school climate and bullying (Algan, Guyon, Huillery, 2015b, p. 27). The experimented mediators are defined as 25-years-old or more evaluators. These individuals more often have a previous experience in mediation and / or education. They also implement more actions in the schools where they intervene and especially new actions that are likely to be tailored to the school's needs. The "non-experimented" mediators stick more to the basic mediation actions. For instance experimented mediators perform a much more intense conflict management activity and individual pupil's follow-ups than non-experimented mediators; they are also the only ones to perform school-family mediation (cf. Algan, Guyon, Huillery, 2015a p. 47 and p. 51; Algan, Guyon, Huillery, 2015b, p. 13). Overall the experimented mediators seem to have a more efficient action than the non-experimented ones. The same idea has been underlined in the empathy-based design as the evaluator reported the interest teachers took in adopting an empathic relation to each other which they considered useful for "a better application of the school project between adults" (Bellarbre, Kerivel, Khieu, 2018, p. 20). This can be linked to Debarbieux's statement about the fact that good relationships between professionals help improving their perception of the school climate and eventually reducing high turnover rates (Debarbieux, 2015).

The results presented here show that educating to empathy and mediation can translate into positive behaviours and school climate improvements. But this kind of designs also echoes with more general calls for an education to emotions for themselves, which is still not deemed as important as it should in national education curriculum (Zanna, 2015b, p. 5). Cohen considers social, emotional and ethical education (SEEA) or psychosocial skills to be one of the pillars of a good school climate (Debarbieux et al., 2012, p. 11, Hoareau et al., 2017, p. 393) and that it should be viewed as a human right every pupils shall have (Cohen, 2006). A general education to social and civic values through practice and responsibilities is also often taken as more useful than didactic and sometimes infantilising lessons to develop social skills and citizen morals for children (Debarbieux et al., 2012, p. 17).

It can be argued that what matter the most for school climate is not the values in themselves but rather the fact that they are shared by all school actors. Granted it is valuable to acquire soft skills for personal and social well-being, but such acquisition is very unlikely to occur if nobody else shares and values these skills. Moreover several research works hold shared positive values and in particular the valorisation of individuals' actions towards others as one of the main keys to a positive school climate – somehow whatever those values precisely are. School justice and transparent norms are indispensable but school climate also benefits from common shared values and community feeling on a more general basis (Debarbieux et al., 2012, p. 3)). This is likely to increase the feeling of belonging for both children and adults which is deemed very important for children's development and results (Hoy, Hannum, 1997).

The spreading of empathic or mediation behaviours amongst actors in the two experimented designs has already been described. It reflects the increasing sharing of some values. This sharing is likely to have been fostered by the fact that actors were invited to work and reflect upon those values, for several reasons. In the mediation case the (experimented) mediators benefited from some leeway to implement tailored actions to their field of action depending on the needs and they trained pupils in social mediation. In the empathy design games were created and animated in coordination by a teacher and a professional after a researcher's intervention on the concept of empathy. First, a co-construction process eases the actors' acceptance of the new design: appropriation is stronger when actors have a power on the tools they are offered (Debarbieux et al., 2012, p. 12). Co-construction means the involvement of a plurality of actors in the development and implementation of a project or action, it means used to highlight the involvement of a plurality of actors in the development and implementation of a project or action. For example, empathy education sessions were built by holders, teachers, school director, sports teachers, artists, researchers from university. Co-construction also allows the programme to fit better with the local context features and fosters a proactive attitude from the actors which benefits the efficiency of the design. But more importantly it triggers a dynamic of cooperation and teamwork between actors who acknowledge the other's actions and feel belonging to a group. Co-construction thus benefits school climate even before allowing actors to reflect on their practice and to adapt the concept to their practices. Again it is worth mentioning that gathering the school community around shared values should apply to all actors, children and adult alike, to have a greater potential effect on school climate.

There is a case for hypothesizing that designs based on concepts (like empathy and mediation) are even more likely to have strong effects on school climate because they induce a deep appropriation and co-construction process by all actors. The projects were not imposed from above. Indeed in the mediation design but even more in the empathy design actors (mediators, teachers) were provided with the raw concept to reflect upon and had to perform a series of appropriation steps from concept understanding to practical actions designing. Our hypothesis relies on the idea that the longer and the more important this co-creation step is, the better the adaptation to local context features and the stronger the feeling of belonging for individuals should be. This in turn would foster the spreading of social skills and of community belonging feeling, which translates into a better school climate and all the associated consequences (lower rates of bullying, improved grades and well-being). However this hypothesis cannot be validated through the experimented designs since it is not possible to disentangle the effects on school climate that come from the empathic or mediation behaviours in themselves, and the effects that come from the fact that actors felt more involved in the school community and shared similar values.

3.2. LIMITS AND OPENINGS

The experimented designs encountered some limitations that pave the way for improvement in both policies and evaluations. First the designs' unfolding posed some

difficulties to field actors that have to be underlined in order to replicate or generalise such programmes. One main obstacle to the implementation of new projects lies in the difficulty to mobilise actors. Indeed implementing new activities is equated with additional tasks for teachers or school staff at first, which they often do not have time to do. Therefore there has to be some support from the school's authorities which has been the case in the experimentations. The empathy design's evaluator stressed the key role played by academic hierarchies into the programme. They engaged in a strong partnership at all levels to allow replacing the teachers while they were attending training sessions for instance (6 full days per year). The material conditions also played a key role in allowing for the programme to be implemented: the mediator's presence in the school had to be organised so that he or she could deal with conflicts right when they appear and become a landmark in school landscape for children. Likewise the formation sessions directed towards children needed to have the time schedule, the rooms, the supports compatible, etc. Those practical issues are a true prerequisite to an efficient programme and should not be forgotten.

Another recurring issue that actors often mention is time. Temporality has to be taken into consideration especially when dealing with school climate and school bullying. Indeed those issues can be dealt with through in-deep shifts in individuals' behaviours and beliefs which take time to change. The endeavoured actions are expected to have long-lasting effects that grow greater in the long run. Therefore support to the programme has to be consistent, continuous and long-lasting in order for it to be preserved over the years to finally rip its effects. The experimental time of the FEJ frame also deserves some thoughts: an experimented design takes time to be drafted, to be implemented and accepted by field actors especially when using co-construction approaches and of course to be evaluated. All evaluators highlighted the fact that their evaluation focused mainly on short-term effects due to the experimentation being implementing during a couple of years only and the evaluation on an even shorter time period (seven months for the victimisation survey, two years for the mediation design and for the empathy design). They warn about the fact that they could not assess expected long-term effects while these effects are of key importance for shaping public policies. For instance research showed that social skills acquisition could lead to an increase in school grades and a decrease in school violence within 3 to 5 years after the programme's implementation (Debarbieux et al., 2012, p. 11). And longer run impacts on health, professional integration or crime for instance require even longer evaluation frames. However Debarbieux and his co-authors also stress the fact that programmes with long-run effects mainly may discourage teachers, pupils and parents into pursuing them when they don't see a positive impact in the short run. Evaluating these programmes in the short run still makes sense in order to shed light on underground progresses (Debarbieux et al., 2012, p. 11-12).

The experimented designs also presented local limitations. The absence of results of the victimisation survey on school bullying and violence should not deter from conducting that kind of action again. In addition to helping starting a dynamic by raising

awareness about these issues this kind of design could have had positive but unnoticed effects. The evaluator offers two hypotheses: the design could have induced teachers into intensifying the actions they already implemented against school violence without creating new actions, or they could have changed behaviours in a way that could not be perceived through evaluation categories (pedagogical changes, increased attention, class space rethinking) (Algan, Guyon, Huillery, 2015b, p. 18-19). In both cases the number of actions endeavoured against school violence – which was the main index to assess the programme results – would not increase. Concerning the mediation programme its absence of results in primary school can be a consequence of mediators being not enough present in these schools. For the empathy design its observed differentiated effects depending on the children's gender are possibly linked to the existing gender-differentiated socialisation to empathy. But the evaluator stresses the fact that this explanation remains a hypothesis that has yet to be assessed. It could also be the case that boys benefit more from the programme because empathy is transmitted through sports activities which boys are usually more interested in than girls in primary school (Kerivel, 2017, p. 26). This experimental design's evaluation also suffers from the lack of a control group so it is not possible to disentangle the programme's effects over two years from other dynamics' effects such as the pupils changing grade (from CM1 to CM2) (Bellarbre, Kerivel, Khieu, 2018, p. 24). More generally all the experimented designs cannot be ranked and compared in terms of efficiency on school climate due to them being very diverse and involving different evaluation methods.

CONCLUSION

These three FEJ-funded experimental designs back the idea that prevention and information about school bullying and violence succeed alone in raising awareness but does not translate into actions that help tackle these issues. On the contrary two programmes based on concepts such as empathy or mediation present positive results both on school bullying and on several school climate dimensions. These positive results can be attributed to the building of a positive action around a soft skill (empathic behaviour, mediation) and the involvement of all actors into this programme. More than this, it can be argued that working on concepts allows actors to deeply appropriate new notions and facilitates the tailoring of actions to fit the local context. This co-construction approach could foster the feeling of belonging which is also at the core of a good school climate. It is not possible to disentangle the effects driven by the empathy and mediation values for themselves from the effects potentially caused by this school-community reinforcing process through working on a concept. Therefore these experimentations call for further investigation and evaluation of concept-based designs with paying attention to temporalities and actors' involvement.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work was supported by a 21st Century School Improvement Grant awarded to the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) for work in New York City schools under the 21st Century Community Learning Centers funding-Round 5.

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