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Awareness Raising about Cyber-Bullying

Report on activities carried out at the European School of Varese, Italy, Spring 2013

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Acknowledgments

Table of Contents

[1]1. CYBER-BULLYING

... is a phenomenon that is rapidly emerging with the pervasiveness and widespread usage of information and communication technologies. Cyber-bullying is a form of bullying. It is a form of aggression (by humiliation, harassment, social exclusion, mockery, unpleasant comments, etc.) involving intentional harmful behaviour. It represents an asymmetric or unbalanced power relationship between the perpetrator and victim, in the context of social interaction.

There are many ways of tackling cyber-bullying. The authors of this report are convinced that raising awareness among the youth is a way forward. Schools are particularly suitable places of social interaction where a good deal of work can be done in order to limit the spread of cyber-bullying. Therefore, the JRC and the European School of Varese have explored ways in which outreach activities on cyber-bullying can be achieved.

The European School of Varese is a particularly notable place as students from all EU (and beyond) geographies and cultures live together, both online and offline.

In collaboration with school management, a group of researchers from the European Commission's Joint Research Centre, Institute for the Protection and Security of the Citizen, met several times with primary and secondary students of the European School of Varese. The students were entrusted with the task of producing materials that would be effective in order to raise awareness and to empower the students themselves, their families and the school to attempt to stop the phenomenon from the onset.

This document describes the outreach activities that took place within classes of the primary and secondary sections of the European School of Varese. It then summarises the observations made by the moderators of the respective activities and finally presents the recommendations that have been made by the students, the teachers and the moderators in the light of the described experiences. The appendices present the main outcomes of the activities.

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[1] See Section 5 for a list of references and further reading on cyber-bullying

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTIVITIES[2]

The targeted age group ranges from 8 to 18 years old, i.e., from the 3rd grade of the primary to the year 6 of the secondary school.

Thanks to the collaboration of the school management and teachers and the Institute's team, an initial plan of activities was set up as follows:

- In the primary school:

  one teaching unit (45 minutes) of the Ethic class of grades 3 to 5 of all five language sections (Italian, English, French, German, Dutch), in groups using the language best mastered by the pupils, chosen among Italian, English, French and German. With this approach 10 groups were created. Each group had from 7 to 20 pupils, for a total of approximately 105 children.

- In the secondary school:

  two teaching units per class (2x 45 minutes) for the following classes:

  o 1st grade of the French section in the ICT class (13 students aged 11-12)

  o 4th grade of the Italian section in Italian and ethic classes (23 students aged 14-15)

  o 4th grade of the French section in the ethic class (13 students aged 14-15)

  o 5th grade of the optional hour of ICT (12 students aged 15-16)

  o 6th grade of the English section in the Ethics class (note that only one teaching unit (45 minutes) was planned for this class as they had already worked on the topic earlier in the year. (15 students aged 16-17)

A total of 76 students participated in the activities.

As previously underlined, the main goal of the outreach activities was to raise awareness among pupils, students and teachers about ethical online behaviour as a way to fight misuses of ICT, as well as and more specifically, raise awareness of cyber-bullying.

In order to reach this goal at its best in the given timeframe, dynamic and participatory methods were chosen. In fact, these methods enabled pupils and students to create their own knowledge, to own it, and, finally, to empower them to develop a more responsible on- and offline behaviour.

The ideas of respect and ethics as well as empowerment were the motto of the work developed by the students with the JRC team and the teachers of the school. The personal experiences of the children and students were chosen as the basis of work.

The set of activities was tailored to the different age groups addressed.

In all the groups of the primary school, dynamic and participatory methods were applied around three specific stages.

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[2] This report is partially drafted based on the deliverable envisaged by the Appointment letter nr. IPSC.C258209 issued to Ms. Stéphane Chaudron in 2013. Ms. Chaudron was an active collaborator of the plan and implementation of the activities carried out at the ESV on cyber-bullying.

- The first stage was an introduction using pictures and images of situations of Internet use. This allowed participants an exchange about the different uses of the Internet they have individually or share with adults.

- The second and core stage of the activity gathered the participants in groups of 4 or 5 around a board game inspired by the "Snakes and Ladder game"[3] combined with quiz questions on the subject. The questions were designed to allow the participants to become familiar with the subject, to discuss and exchange on the topic, and finally (guided by the moderator) to drive them towards a responsible way of using the new ICT.

- The third and conclusive stage used an adaptation of the well known story Little Red Riding Hood, where children could easily recognise some of the risks of a careless use of social media.

Even though more tailored work was necessary to fit the learning and interaction modes of the different age groups of the secondary school within the time frame allocated, all the work shared the same core structure and materials defined around three different albeit complementary activities.

After a short introduction of the subject and of the aim of the activities, the classes were divided into 2 or 3 groups of 4 to 9 students depending on the overall size of the group. Each small group was then asked firstly to map the online life of its members, and secondly, to identify the risks associated with their different usage of the Internet, and to summarise their work clustering it into 'cool' and 'not cool' use of the Internet. This first activity allowed the participants to discuss the different usage of the Internet they individually have or share with peers or adults (or not) and the associated risks they could see.

The following activities were devised to guide the participants more deeply into the subject. In order to reach this objective, part of the discussion game *Digital lives - 'PlayDecide'*[4] was used as a basis. Since the entire game would have taken much more than the time than was available, the game was adapted using its main features, *Story cards* and/or *Issue cards*. The nine *Story cards* personified experiences of the Internet of various people, representing a large spectrum of experiences and points of view on online lives. The *Issue cards* pose the main questions emerging in society with the use of the Internet.

In particular, the second activity started with the *Story cards* being read, shared, and discussed among the participants. Subsequently, participants were asked to individually create their own *Story cards* which were then read, shared and discussed among the group members.

Finally, the third activity led the group into a further step in the debate thanks to the challenging topics presented by the Issue cards. While debating over those issues, using the

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[3] This game had initially been developed in 2010 by Stéphane Chaudron and Annick van de Velde in the framework of the INSAFE network project, coordinated by European Schoolnet and co-financed by the European Commission and Liberty Global. The project aimed to promote to young people a safe and responsible use of the Internet and of mobile devices.

[4] This game was developed in 2012 by The Pan-EU Youth project, coordinated by European Schoolnet, co-financed and the European Commission.

results of the previous parts of the activity, participants were asked to take stock of their common experience on the topic by drafting a common chart with recommendations for the promotion of a healthy and ethical online life. Depending on the age group and time available, this last activity was replaced in some groups by the creation of posters made by 3 to 4 students and focusing on particular recommendations freely chosen by the participants as being of uttermost importance.

3. OBSERVATIONS

Primary school

Our activities started with the groups of the Primary section:

Our animators and moderators were warmly welcomed in the classes by the children and teachers, especially by the groups where their teachers had introduced the activity beforehand.

Our short introduction to the subject showed that most of the more common Internet brands are recognized at once by the children, starting with Youtube, then Skype and MSN. The latter are certainly used in expat families for maintaining contacts with relatives. The Internet is part of their everyday life. Although the experiences of the children with the Internet could vary significantly following age and family usages within a group, even less computer literate children demonstrated deep interest, willingness to know more and showed valuable participation within the debates that sprang out the various steps of the session.

This initial talk also showed that children are aware of problems related with the use of ICT. They already talk about this topic with teachers and parents or, in one case, because he saw a short film on TV focused on these issues. Nevertheless danger and threats were not clearly identified by the children except technical problems like viruses or worms. Regarding the concept of Cyber-bullying in particular, although some have heard about the term they did not seem very familiar with the concept and were not able to provide good examples of cyber-bullying behaviours. It seems something that they are aware of (that they know that exists) but that is far from their experience. This observation underlined the relevance of our action.

The introduction to the Surf Safe board-game and the division of the groups into 4 to 5 players has been welcomed with enthusiasm by all participants. Beyond its attractiveness, this approach offered the advantage of providing the possibility to each player to express

her- or himself thanks to the division into small groups and to the roll of the dice that gives the floor to each player, one at a time.

The questions of the game stimulated the debate among the players (including teachers) regardless of the players own internet experience. All pupils were really enthusiastic in playing, taking this activity, and its questions, very seriously: players were taking their time to answer, discussing and debating the issue set by the question before choosing an agreed answer. They were really involved in understanding the issues presented through the game and showing willingness and high interest in acquiring knowledge on the subject.

The interactivity of the game allowed the pupils and teachers to know themselves better by confronting ideas and usages in talking about their respective behaviour as Internet users.

This gaming activity clearly suffered from lack of time. The game had to be stopped after 15-20 minutes, which was too little time for all participants who were taken by the dynamics created and wanted to play more. The game also showed a need for fine-tuning. The sequence of the board game itself has to be revised to balance the series of questions, 'bad luck' and 'jolly' cards and to give more question opportunities. Regarding the latter, the basis of the old game from 2010 already shows its age: on one hand the game needs less focus on emails and spam as emails are less and less used as way of communication especially at those ages; on the other hand, the game needs more questions on the use of social media as such tool is already used by children from age 10.

The final part used a cartoon animation of 1.42 minutes, which revisited the well-known Little Red Riding Hood story into a Cybertale in its online version[5]. For this third step of the activity, the possibility of having technical problems was foreseen. Therefore, a simple slide show using key images of the video was tailored as a backup. Because of the lack of time, some moderators chose to continue the game and conclude with a short debriefing of the experience with the children, skipping this last part. Five groups watched the Cybertale under its video version. Only one group experienced technical problems, and therefore told the story using the images pretty much like a story telling experience.

In the classes where the Cybertale was watched in its video format, and although the story and its medium were really appreciated by the pupils, some remarks being later discussed by the moderators and teachers. First, the children were passively watching the video, which was far too quick (1 min 42 sec) for such a story. Time was too short as well to discuss it in depth; therefore the usefulness of the video was compromised.

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[5] Little Red Riding Mood, Chapter 1 by Facemoods – Promoting safe internet use - www.youtube.com/watch?v=KGr_KFiCX4s

The experience was completely different in the group where the story was told. This way of presenting the story could adapt its language and pace to the audience, which had the opportunity to participate in the activity either on the invitation of the storyteller or on its own initiative. This way allowed to deconstruct the story more in depth with the participation of the children, to analyse it, discuss it, and to underline the main message and lessons to be taken from it.

At the end of the 45 minutes session, a general feeling experienced by all groups was frustration regarding lack of time to complete tasks, and a demand to do more.

Given the success of this activity, pupils and teachers requested for its continuation, therefore the direction of the school and the JRC's team agreed to pursue the activity with the same classes in a second slot of 45 minutes, the week after.

This session was shaped around two different activities.

In the first activity, children were asked to list Internet activities they knew about or they practiced, into two categories labelled 'cool' and 'not cool'.

This interactive way of recalling the information they could gather during the first session reveals a high level of retention of the information, even from a week's passage of time and even with children less familiar with the usage of the Internet. This more in depth discussion underlines as well that nobody seems to be prepared for loss of rights when disclosing information/images/ video on Internet.
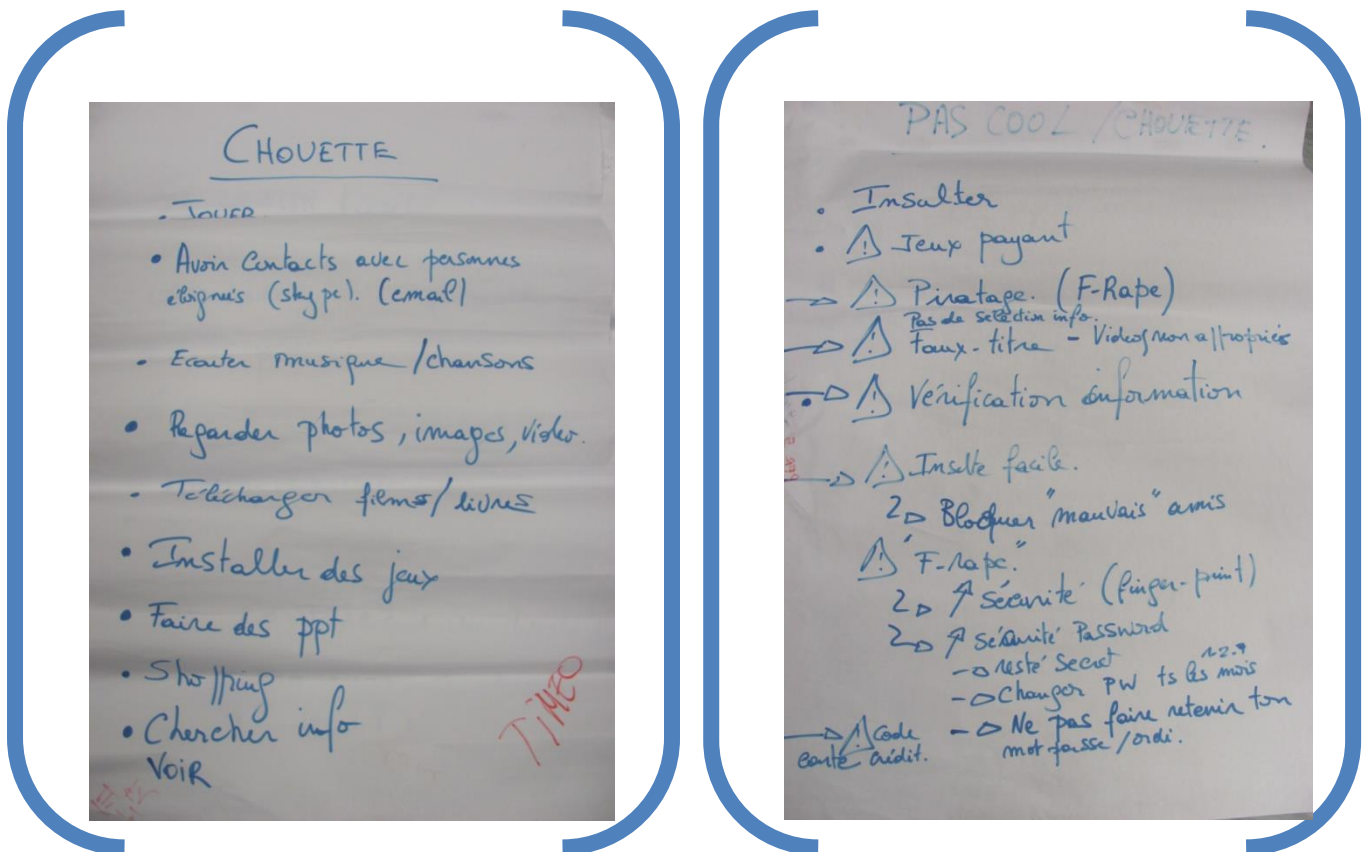
In the second activity, children were asked to choose one key message they would pass onto others and draw a poster around their message or slogan about cyber-bullying. The messages were mixed and concerned different types of technology but they focused mostly on warnings about behavioural aspects to adopt with technology.

This latter activity was pursued in most of the classes on the request of the children who wanted to have more time in order to produce neat and valuable posters. Given the high level of commitment of the children and the high quality of their outcome, a selection of these posters were exhibited during the JRC's 2013 Open Day, at the IPSC stand dedicated to safe use of the Internet and awareness raising against Cyber-bullying.

Key Learning:

→ There is a minimum age for which these activities make sense and from the experience at this school, we reckon that 8 years old should be the lower limit for effective awareness raising activity on the topic.

→ Teachers of the school involved in this activity suggested that such an awareness program in all classes should be organised for the last two primary grades of the school, not only in restricted groups, as it was done for logistic reasons.

→ Teachers also suggested that the presence of an external team is important, as children pay a great deal of attention to external speakers and eagerly engage in activities proposed by people external to the school. Clearly, it is up to the external team to maintain that motivation, proposing activities that are tangible, playful and have novelty elements.
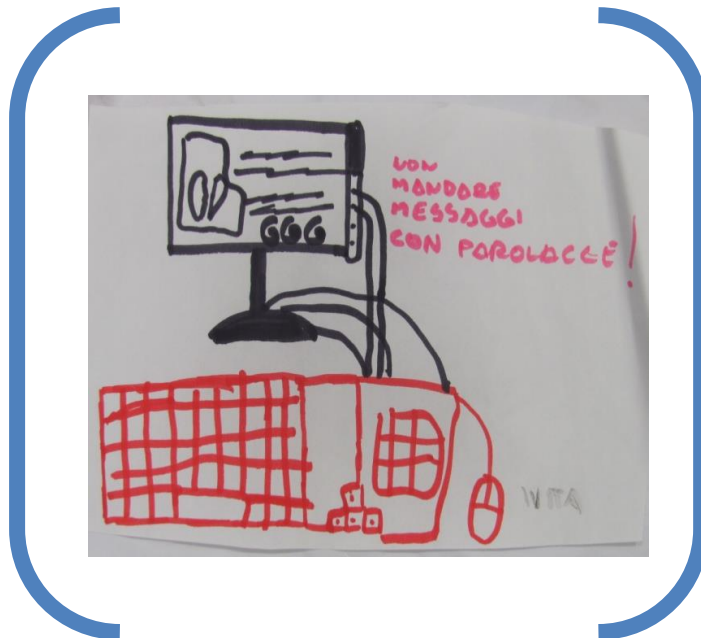
Secondary School

In the secondary school, enthusiasm and involvement about proposed activities were different across the groups targeted. The team felt and the teachers' feedback confirms that the activity offered caught the students' interest and certainly helped to tackle this subject. One group in the Italian section, in particular, requested to continue the work initiated in a first 90 minutes session being the whole encounter extended through a total of three 90 minutes sessions. This group received the visit of the Head Master of the school, Mr. Crine, who underlined the quality and value of the work undertaken by this group of students and to praise the fruitful collaboration between teachers and the JRC's team involved in this activity. The different levels of eagerness to participate in the proposed activities across groups depended greatly on the age group, the class dynamics, the time of the day and the day of the week. The last two sessions of a Friday afternoon will inherently offer different challenges compared to a Monday morning!

Like for the primary school, the students' own experiences in the "online life" can considerably vary according to age and family usages. Nevertheless, using less online tools did not prevent the participants from being involved in the debate. The level of involvement of the participants was rather a matter of individual personality, group dynamics and the way in which the moderator could involve participants in the activity.

As for the primary school, the participatory approach chosen for these activities offered enjoyment and raised the level of interest of participants in the subject. It generated and requested the direct involvement and collaboration of all participants. Each participant had the opportunity to get involved in the lively debates generated during the activities. The division of the class into little groups together with the writing story session facilitated the self-expression of all participants.

It is important to note that the liveliest and balanced interactions took place in groups of 5 to 8 students moderated by one to two adults. Smaller or bigger groups were more difficult to moderate.

The way the activity was presented and structured showed its efficacy in empowering the students to create a basis for an ethical chart for a healthy online life.

The frustration of being stopped by the bell was felt in all groups but one[6]. Interesting to note that the lack of time feeling to go deeper in the issue and produce quality materials was more important amongst groups that *a priori* would meet twice in 45 minutes sessions. Although it was important to have more than one session, the time break (one week at least) being an opportunity for participants to reflect further, search for material and organise ideas for the session after, there are some drawbacks worth taking into consideration. For example, the amount of time in between sessions imposed making the time during the second session, to recreate the dynamics of the first session. At the request of the students and teachers, two extra sessions (hence, 3 teaching units of 90 minutes each) were organised only with one class in the Italian section.

The 'Online part of me' activity was a very participated session in all groups. It highlighted a large spectrum of online actions and behaviours that most students shared, and underlined the increasing importance of social media in today's teenager's life.

It showed as well a high level of awareness among the students of potential risks while using the Internet.

The 'Story cards', 'Issue cards', 'Cool / Not Cool' and 'Chart and Posters' activities showed more contrasting experiences or ideas. For example, what the students defined as cool or not cool Internet behaviours can vary greatly from a group/ an individual to another. Such distinctions in particular highlighted the different ways to use social media and inherent consequences for an individual's school/social life. It revealed sometimes within a group different level of consciousness and maturity in addressing the issues linked to the use of Internet and permitted to confront in-depth the students' view with the adults' views.

The 'Story cards', 'Issue cards', activities generated the exchanges of personal experiences on the subject from which the following were common features:

• The most harmful and common threads come from people that you know.

• Stories reported victims of threats or Internet misbehaviour (F-rape for example) that felt in most cases

▪ Loneliness: while fighting such a situation;

▪ Unpreparedness: they did not know how to react to such threats;

▪ Isolation: where can I call for help?

▪ Helpless adults: Usually the adult world seems helpless in the finding of a solution

▪ Lack of communication: Adults are called when the situation is already quite serious

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[6] For the latter, the activity happened to be located in the last two hours of the week's schedule. This can explain a great deal the lack of reaction of this class compared to the others.

The *'Cool / Not Cool'* and 'Chart and *Posters'* activities generated interesting and lively debates ending with suggestions directed to the individual, the school, the parents and society about acts of prevention or ways to find solutions. The joint outcome gathered in the posters created at the end of the activity constitutes a good basis for an ethical chart for a healthy online life – see picture of the posters below and also Annex 1 for more material.

Upon request of the participants and their teachers and in collaboration with the school and the JRC's team, an exhibition of the posters created during the cyber-bullying sessions took place in the premises of the school, open to all students during ten days.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

These awareness raising activities clearly showed the need, and the demand, of both pupils and students from 8 to 18 and their teachers, for education on the ethical use of media and of emerging information technologies.

The time dedicated to the subject during this particular set of activities has been considered as a good introduction to the subject, raising an interest for more in-depth developments on the subject.

Pupils, students and teachers clearly requested more time to study and debate the subject. Moreover, teachers have specifically requested to extend such experience to all classes from the last two grades of the primary section.

A cyber-bullying activity can be no doubt organised by the school teachers, but the presence of outsiders engages children in more efficient ways, teachers have remarked.

As a way to meet these requests, it was suggested to include such awareness activities in a yearly plan for all classes. For example, a project/festival could involve all pupils and students of the school around the theme of a safer online life during an entire week.

It has been also pointed out that advanced planning is a key factor of success of such enterprise. Thinking the project through at least two months in advance would allow its best logistical and pedagogical preparation.

The variety of materials about cyber-bullying that exist out there is quite impressive; however a lot of care has to be put in the choice, and if necessary editing has to be made to not fall on easy pitfalls of clichés and the obvious; the sessions must remain interesting for all: those that know a great deal about online life and those that by choice do not access it extensively. The most relevant tools are for all ages story telling, multi-media materials and game. Finally the activities that required pupils' own creativity were felt particularly rewarding as they not only reveal that the awareness aspects has worked out but also that the pupils are able to act and make others aware.

The success of the experience clearly showed the importance of setting up a smooth collaboration between the school (Head-Master, Teachers) and the JRC staff.

The use of interactive and participatory methods proved to be an effective approach and should be encouraged for further work on the subject with the pupils and students.

Practically, the experience highlighted the importance of the following:

> • Awareness raising and pedagogical activities should be specifically tailored to fit the different age groups: 8 – 11 / 12-13 / 14-15/ 16-18. Such age division is based upon different:
>
> - online behaviour experienced by each age group;
> - interests and references of individuals in those age groups;
> - level of maturity;
> - need to tailor pedagogical strategies adapted to their academic and maturity stepsteplevel so that the engagement with the activity is efficient.

• Class division into groups of work should gather 5 to 8 participants.

• Mixed (boys and girls) groups are desirable; however, it is not up to the animators to challenge existing gender dynamics, rather collect from existing dynamics the elements to ensure balanced participation.

• Indeed, the pedagogical strategies chosen should take into account as much as possible the specific dynamic of each class. Some groups would benefit in staying together for such an activity, others would benefit from the new dynamics at play when new working groups are formed.

• Having moderators that master the language of the group at mother tong level facilitates the dynamic of the work.

Our action suggested that children - and even more so teenagers - are well ahead of the adults' world in trying / adopting new online behaviours. This drives the need to keep constant communication channels open on the topic. Cross-generational activities involving teachers and parents have been suggested to create a global awareness in order to prevent misuse of the Internet and any negative consequence of misuse.

Moreover, it has been suggested by one of the teachers of the school to create a 'social emergency cell' inside the school. Such a cell could be formed by volunteer teachers who could be available upon students' requests for confidential meetings. Such an initiative could indeed be a positive action that would address the feelings of isolation observed in the most of the reported (cyber)-bulling experiences.

Given the needs of new media and information technologies education heighted by the present report, our ultimate recommendation would be to encourage the continuation of such project in school, to foster awareness raising activities promoting safe, responsible use of the Internet and mobile devices to young people and families, and finally to stimulate positive communication between generations on the subject.

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Annex 1

In this Annex, additional material produced during the sessions in the classes are presented. Some material was "edited" in order to be presented at the open day.

Figure A1: Part of the results from the poster activities carried out in Primary 5 of the German section.
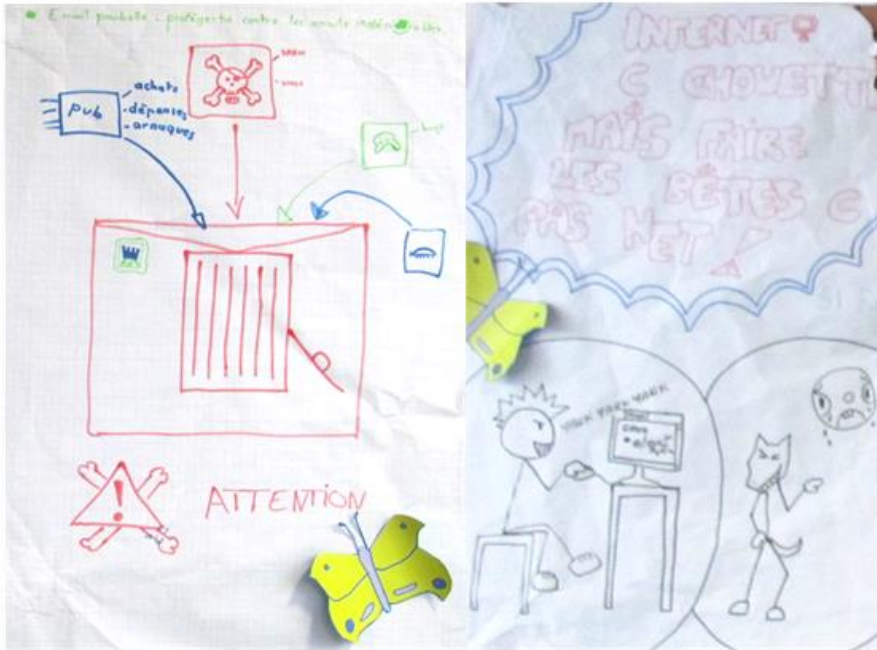
Figure A2: Part of the results from the poster activities carried out in several sections of the early secondary classes (French, Italian and English sections).
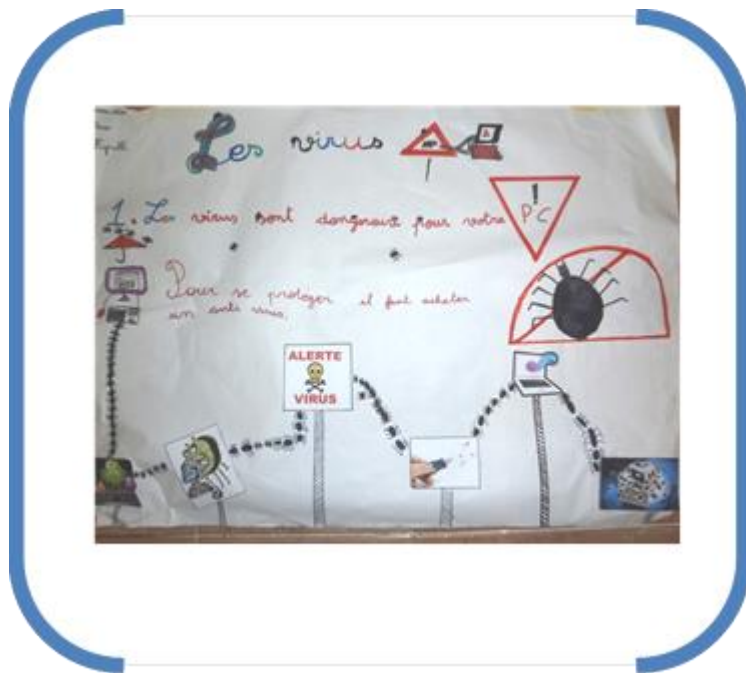
Figure A3: Part of the results from the poster activities carried out in Secondary 1 of the French section.

Figure A4: Part of the results from the poster activities carried out in the primary school in various sections.

Figure A5: Winner of the competition "Stop Cyber-bullying" organised by the IPSC of the JRC at the ESV.

Figure A6: View of the exhibition at the European School of Varese, which was organized after after the activities carried out at the school and after the Open Day of the JRC in May 2013.

Abstract

Cyber bullying is a phenomenon that is rapidly emerging with the pervasiveness and widespread usage of information and communication technologies. Cyber-bullying is a form of bullying. It is a form of aggression (by humiliation, harassment, social exclusion, mockery, unpleasant comments, etc.) involving intentional harmful behaviour.
The European School of Varese is a particularly notable place as students from all EU (and beyond) geographies and cultures live together, both online and offline.
In collaboration with school management, a group of researchers from the Institute for the Protection and Security of the Citizen met several times with primary and secondary students of the European School of Varese. The students were entrusted with the task of producing materials that would be effective in order to raise awareness and to empower the students themselves, their families and the school to attempt to stop the phenomenon from the onset.

As the Commission's in-house science service, the Joint Research Centre's mission is to provide EU policies with independent, evidence-based scientific and technical support throughout the whole policy cycle. Working in close cooperation with policy Directorates-General, the JRC addresses key societal challenges while stimulating innovation through developing new methods, tools and standards, and sharing its know-how with the Member States, the scientific community and international partners.

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