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Buddy project – Building Bridges

ABSTRACT

Worldwide there are more and more youngsters living in a situation of social risk. These are children, adolescents and young adults who live in a situation of poverty, migration, social exclusion, violence and armed conflicts. Worldwide about 50% of youth live in a situation of poverty, of which 20% live in extreme poverty. In Belgium 18% of the youngsters live in poverty, in Brussels this reaches up until 40%. The fact that so many children live in a precarious situation weighs on society. This is a multidimensional and complex problem.

The Interdisciplinary Research Program (IRP): “Voicing Youth at Social Risk” aims to study the voice of these Youth at Risk through the following disciplines; Criminology, Rights, Educational Sciences, Sports and Psychology. Together we want to (1) develop a transdisciplinary theoretical and methodological framework for doing research starting from the perspective of youth in situations of social risk, (2) study and develop prevention and intervention programs in a participatory way and (3) to valorise the research findings based on the perspectives of children and youth at risk.

Following the convention for the rights of the child (1989) we aim to do this in a participatory and preventive way, starting from the perception of the youth themselves. “Children’s social relationships and cultures are worthy of study in their own right, and not just in respect to their social construction by adults. This means that children must be seen as actively involved in the construction of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live” (Prout & Prat, 2015, p. 4).

In this framework we are setting up the Buddy Project: “Building bridges”. This project focusses on homework guidance in a broad perspective and will be launched in the beginning of this academic year. The project aims to bring students of the VUB in contact with children, youngsters and families who live in socially vulnerable situations in the specific context of Brussels. With the help of several organisations the students will be matched to the families.

The students will visit the families at their home once a week during one academic semester. With going to the family’s house, the students will not only be able to help the youngsters with their homework but they will also be able to reach the entire family on a low threshold. Like this future teachers, caregivers and students of other professions will be encouraged to develop their transcultural qualities and to create a certain sensitivity for poverty and other social problems in society. The family will get easy access to support in their needs and the children and youngsters will receive help with their homework and be stimulated to develop in a broader perspective.

We are interested to discuss this pilot project at the conference to acquire overall insight in the experiences and results of other similar projects/studies. We are especially interested in following questions:

- How can we maximize the participation of the children and youngsters in this project?
- How can we prepare and support the students to become a good buddy?
- How can we ensure that all parties (families, organisations, university) benefit from participation in this project?

A dialogue with experts in the field might help us to finetune this project.