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Teachers' perception of school violence in a sample from three european countries

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The objective of the present study was to explore, in three European countries (Spain, Hungary and the Czech Republic), teachers' perception of the prevalence of different problematic aspects related to coexistence in schools, and of how they are personally affected by these aspects. The results reveal a high prevalence of fights, insults and demotivation/boredom in pupils, according to teachers in these three countries, and they also report pupils' demotivation/boredom as the aspect that most affects them personally. By countries, Spain and the Czech Republic present the highest rates of school violence, with Hungary showing significantly lower rates. Also, there are differences between the three countries analyzed as regards the prevalence and repercussions of a range of coexistence problems studied.

Introduction

In the last few years, in general, an increase in conflicts and violent behaviours among the young people has been observed (Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi, & Lozano, 2002). This is neither uniform in all the countries nor increases the same kinds of violence at the same level. In any case it seems that the bigger presence of this phenomenon can have an influence on the school environment which is in fact a reflection of all social conflicts and values (Smith-Khuri et al., 2004).

In this sense the studies that analyze the common and uncommon features of school violence among the different countries are important (Due et al., 2005; Smith, Morita, Junger-Tas, Olweus, Catalano, & Slee, 1999).

In such a context, teachers play a fundamental role in the achievement of adequately harmonious coexistence and in the implementation of programmes for the prevention of violence (Dake, Price, Telljohann, & Funk, 2003; Juvonen, Graham, & Schuster, 2003; Newman-Carlson & Horne, 2004; Orpinas, Horne, & Multisite Violence Prevention Project, 2004; Yoon, 2004). Currently, despite the presence in the education system of optimistic and

enthusiastic teachers prepared to involve themselves in the solution of the problems, there is also an increase in the level of frustration, since they are faced with extremely difficult tasks, which they are scarcely qualified to deal with (Orpinas et al., 2004); the elimination of these problems requires a series of actions for which there is as yet no general formula, though the situation can be helped by the dissemination of all the accumulated knowledge on how to achieve an appropriate system of coexistence.

Violence and bullying are currently considered to be common to all countries (Smith et al., 1999), and are perceived by teachers as an obstacle to the achievement of an appropriate school climate. Therefore, in many cases where they are detected, measures are taken to deal with them (Fekkes, Pijpers, & Verloove-Vanhorick, 2005), though 76% of teachers believe in the need for some type of preventive action (Fisher & Kettl, 2003).

Teachers also participate actively in bullying, on the one hand as aggressors: over 40% of pupils report having seen a teacher practice these behaviours on pupils, even though only 5% of pupils report being bullied by a teacher occasionally or frequently (Chapell et al., 2004); and on the other as victims, 66% of teaching staff reporting that women are more affected in these cases (Meyer, Astor, & Behre, 2002).

The multiple studies (Chapell et al., 2004; Dake et al., 2003; Fisher & Kettl, 2003; Spanish People's Ombudsman's Report, 2000) that take into account the opinion of teachers on the prevalence of behaviours affecting coexistence in their schools start out from different definitions, analyze different educational stages and use heterogeneous instruments (Crothers & Levinson, 2004; Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Griffin & Gross, 2004; Solberg & Olweus, 2003).

Thus, the aim of our work is to reveal, through the application of a single instrument in three different European countries, teachers' perceptions of the prevalence of behaviours that prevent harmonious coexistence in schools and the personal repercussions of these behaviours that disrupt school climate for the teachers themselves, which can take various forms.

To do so three countries with different social and educational system have been selected. One is Spain, a well-established country within the European Union, the others are Hungary and the Czech Republic, country that have been recently incorporated into the EU and that come from a different political system.

Method

Participants

The study sample was made up of 339 secondary school teachers from 10 Spanish schools, five Hungarian schools and five schools from the Czech Republic. By country, 137 teachers were from Spain, 133 were from Hungary and 69 were from the Czech Republic.

Instrument

Questionnaire on Difficulties for School Coexistence. This is an adaptation of Ortega and del Rey's (2003) questionnaire by Gázquez, Cangas, Padilla, Cano, and Pérez-Moreno (2005). This questionnaire has a total of 26 items and comprises two parts, each with 13 items. The items refer to 13 situations related to coexistence in schools. In the first part, teachers are asked to rate the extent to which the 13 situations are found in their schools, while in the second, they are asked to rate how far these same situations affect them personally. Each situation is rated on a four-point scale, in terms of its presence in the school: (a) high presence, (b) moderate, (c) slight, and (d) not at all. The 13 situations are: (1) Conflicts between pupils and teachers, (2) There are no clear norms of coexistence, (3) Bad language in class, (4) Pupils insult one another, (5) Pupils fight, (6) There are groups which don't get on, (7) There are pupils who are not integrated and feel alone, (8) Teachers just go about their own business, (9) Pupils think the teachers don't understand them, (10) Pupils are demotivated/bored, (11) Use or presence of weapons, (12) Use or presence of drugs; and (13) Problems of intercultural coexistence.

Procedure

First of all the questionnaire was translated into the different languages of the respective countries: Spanish, Hungarian and Czech, following the guidelines of Muñiz and Hambleton (1996). We then made a random selection of schools from each country, whose teachers would be applied the *Questionnaire on Difficulties for School Coexistence*. Once we had made the selection, we contacted the Headteachers and Directors of Studies at each school to obtain their consent, and proceeded to apply the questionnaire individually to the participating teachers.

Results

For the data analysis we transformed the four rating levels (not at all, slight, moderate and high presence) into numerical and quantitative scores, so that “not at all” corresponded to a score of 0, “slight” to 1, “moderate” to 2 and “high presence” to 3. In order to see whether there were differences between the responses given by teachers from the countries analyzed (Spain, Hungary and the Czech Republic), and whether they were significant, we applied a one-factor ANOVA. This test permits us to reject the hypothesis of equality of the mean score for each country in many of the situations analyzed, since the significance level observed is under 0.05. In order to identify the levels of the “country” variable among which these differences occur, and whether they are statistically significant, we used multiple *post hoc* comparisons through the Games-Howell method.

It was found, in the sample as a whole, that teachers report the problems in their school, from highest to lowest frequency, as follows (Figure 1): fights, insults and demotivation/boredom, there are groups which don't get on, no clear norms of coexistence, pupils think the teachers don't understand them, bad language in class, conflicts between pupils and teachers, problems of intercultural coexistence, there are pupils who are not integrated and feel alone, teachers just go about their own business, use or presence of weapons, and use or presence of drugs.

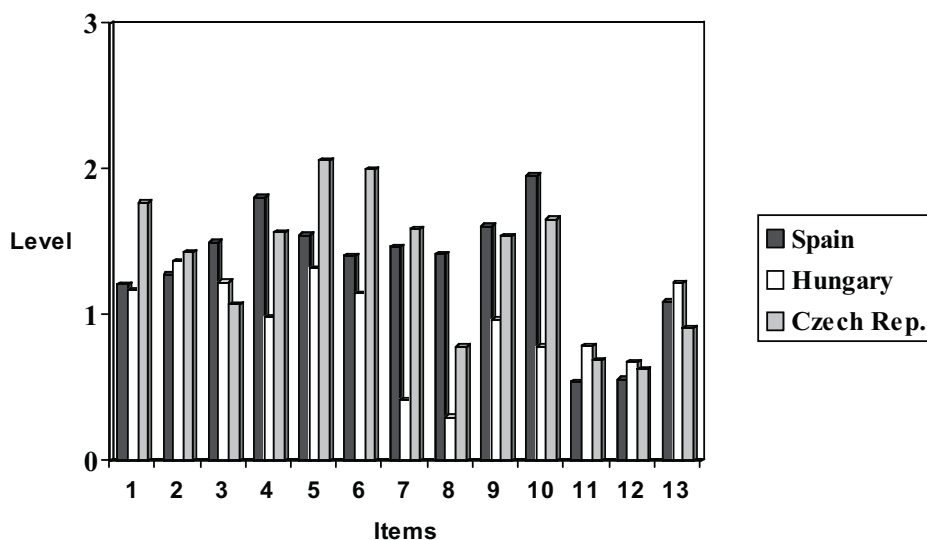


Figure 1. Means. Prevalence of problems

Note. 1: conflicts between pupils and teachers; 2: no clear norms of coexistence; 3: bad language in class; 4: pupils insult one another; 5: pupils fight; 6: there are groups which don't get on; 7: there are pupils who are not integrated and feel alone; 8: teachers just go about their own business; 9: pupils think the teachers don't understand them; 10: pupils are demotivated/bored; 11: use or presence of weapons; 12: use or presence of drugs; 13: problems of intercultural coexistence.

This order changes when teachers are asked how they are personally affected by each one of these aspects (Figure 2). This time the order, from highest to lowest frequency, is: demotivation/boredom, problems of intercultural coexistence, use or presence of weapons, use or presence of drugs, fights, insults, pupils think the teachers don't understand them, there are groups which don't get on, no clear norms of coexistence, conflicts between pupils and teachers, bad language in class, there are pupils who are not integrated and feel alone, and teachers just go about their own business.

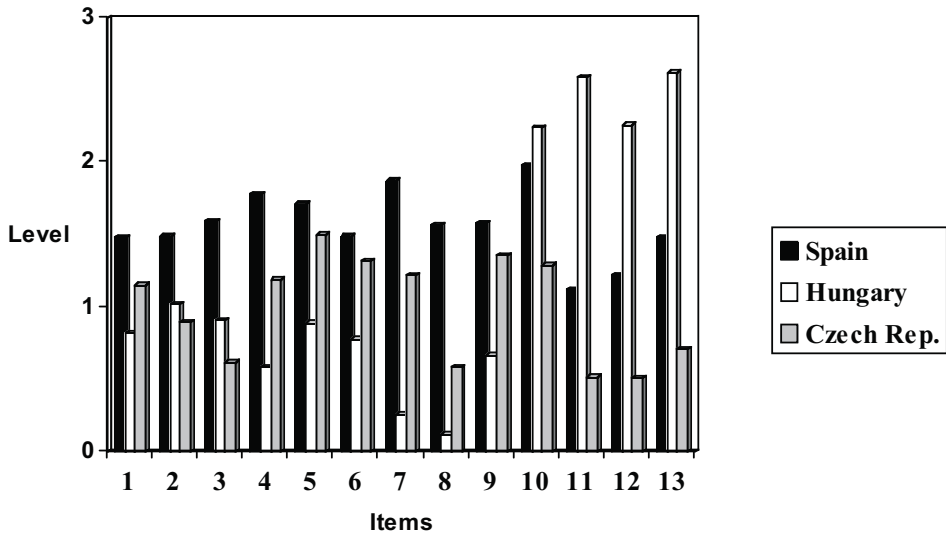


Figure 2. Means. Degree to which teachers are personally affected by the problem

Note. 1: Conflicts between pupils and teachers; 2: no clear norms of coexistence; 3: bad language in class; 4: pupils insult one another; 5: pupils fight; 6: there are groups which don't get on; 7: there are pupils who are not integrated and feel alone; 8: teachers just go about their own business; 9: pupils think the teachers don't understand them; 10: pupils are demotivated/bored; 11: use or presence of weapons; 12: use or presence of drugs; 13: problems of intercultural coexistence.

As can be seen in Table 1, the results of the ANOVA reveal the significance level observed in each case, whose value is always less than .05, except in two cases referring to prevalence (Table 1): lack of clear norms of coexistence, whose intergroup quadratic mean is .634 ($F=.894$ and $Sig=.410$), and use or presence of drugs, whose intergroup quadratic mean is .517 ($F=.979$ and $Sig=.377$). In the rest of the cases we can speak of intergroup differences between the mean scores for teachers from the different countries. It is therefore necessary to apply the Games-Howell method to reveal the countries between which these differences occur.

As it can be seen in Table 2, the teachers from Spain consider pupils' demotivation/boredom, insults, pupils think the teachers don't understand them, fights and bad language in class as the commonest aspects. Hungarian teachers present lower values in comparison with those of the other two countries, and consider the commonest aspects to be lack of clear norms of coexistence (similar to Spain and the Czech Republic), fights (considerably below the Czech Republic), problems of intercultural coexistence (slightly above the Czech Republic), bad language in class, and conflicts between pupils and teachers (similar to Spain). Teachers from the Czech Republic, meanwhile, list fights, groups which don't get on and conflicts between pupils and teachers as the aspects most frequently found in their schools, with ratings in all three cases above those of Spain and Hungary.

Table 1

Prevalence of problems and degree to which teachers are personally affected by the problem. Descriptive statistics and ANOVA

Types of problem	Country	N	Prevalence of problems		Degree to which teachers are personally affected by the problem				
			S _e	Quadratic mean (inter-group)	F (Sig.)	N	S _e	Quadratic mean (inter-group)	F (Sig.)
Conflicts between pupils and teachers	Spain	116	.773	7.960	14.443 (.000)	110	1.133	13.248	13.307 (.000)
	Hungary	130	.779			130	.773		
	Czech Rep.	67	.867			64	.737		
	Total	313	.773			294	.973		
No clear traces of coexistence	Spain	134	1.036	.634	.894 (.410)	133	1.316	10.848	12.282 (.000)
	Hungary	130	.624			131	.644		
	Czech Rep.	69	.776			69	.897		
	Total	333	.842			333	.971		
Bad language in class	Spain	137	.908	4.923	7.884 (.000)	133	1.149	26.119	33.081 (.000)
	Hungary	130	.564			131	.588		
	Czech Rep.	69	.896			69	.773		
	Total	336	.806			334	.971		
Pupils insult one another	Spain	136	.907	22.818	37.694 (.000)	137	1.033	47.131	83.364 (.000)
	Hungary	130	.591			130	.653		
	Czech Rep.	69	.813			68	.778		
	Total	335	.839			335	1.011		
Pupils fight	Spain	135	.821	13.359	23.006 (.000)	136	1.149	21.938	28.274 (.000)
	Hungary	130	.584			129	.640		
	Czech Rep.	68	.718			68	.743		
	Total	333	.780			333	.973		
There are groups which don't get on	Spain	136	.863	16.489	29.851 (.000)	136	1.040	17.207	34.186 (.000)
	Hungary	130	.572			129	.684		
	Czech Rep.	69	.824			68	.837		
	Total	335	.804			333	.900		
There are pupils who are not integrated and feel slow	Spain	136	.779	47.198	106.945 (.000)	133	1.083	85.837	136.920 (.000)
	Hungary	130	.511			130	.481		
	Czech Rep.	68	.674			68	.543		
	Total	334	.826			331	1.069		
Teachers just go about their own business	Spain	107	.923	36.537	68.489 (.000)	103	1.073	62.232	104.683 (.000)
	Hungary	127	.524			130	.344		
	Czech Rep.	54	.691			54	.813		
	Total	288	.806			289	1.011		
Pupils think the teachers don't understand them	Spain	135	.793	15.082	26.115 (.000)	132	.982	28.389	39.081 (.000)
	Hungary	130	.681			131	.673		
	Czech Rep.	69	.833			69	.891		
	Total	334	.815			333	.945		
Pupils are demotivated/bored	Spain	136	.797	47.689	108.918 (.000)	134	.969	20.687	33.532 (.000)
	Hungary	130	.557			135	.593		
	Czech Rep.	69	.536			69	.792		
	Total	334	.846			336	.854		
Use or presence of weapons	Spain	136	.698	2.194	4.916 (.008)	133	1.363	131.062	140.845 (.000)
	Hungary	130	.619			133	.508		
	Czech Rep.	68	.697			69	.633		
	Total	334	.676			335	1.257		
Use or presence of drugs	Spain	134	.683	.517	.979 (.377)	130	1.278	76.713	80.645 (.000)
	Hungary	130	.785			133	.673		
	Czech Rep.	65	.894			67	.786		
	Total	329	.727			332	1.188		
Problems of intercultural coexistence	Spain	135	.926	2.078	3.355 (.036)	132	1.232	92.064	112.623 (.000)
	Hungary	130	.647			135	.533		
	Czech Rep.	69	.728			69	.792		
	Total	333	.793			334	1.169		

The Spanish teachers coincide with those from the Czech Republic in considering as the least frequent aspects the use or presence of weapons and use or presence of drugs, and the Czech teachers add problems of intercultural coexistence to these two. In the first two cases, scores are similar to those given by the Hungarian teachers, but they give even lower scores – significantly lower than those given by the Spaniards and Czechs – to “teachers just go about their own business” and “there are pupils who are not integrated and feel alone”.

Table 2
Prevalence of problems. Games-Howell method

Types of problem	Countries	Difference of means	Countries	Difference of means	Countries	Difference of means
Conflicts between pupils and teachers	[Spain-Hungary]	[.03]	[Spain-Czech Rep.]	[.58]**	[Hungary-Czech Rep.]	[.60]**
No clear signs of coexistence	[Spain-Hungary]	[.09]	[Spain-Czech Rep.]	[.15]	[Hungary-Czech Rep.]	[.06]
Real language in class	[Spain-Hungary]	[.27]**	[Spain-Czech Rep.]	[.43]**	[Hungary-Czech Rep.]	[.15]
Pupils insult one another	[Spain-Hungary]	[.51]**	[Spain-Czech Rep.]	[.34]	[Hungary-Czech Rep.]	[.37]**
Pupils fight	[Spain-Hungary]	[.33]	[Spain-Czech Rep.]	[.51]**	[Hungary-Czech Rep.]	[.74]**
There are groups which don't get on	[Spain-Hungary]	[.28]*	[Spain-Czech Rep.]	[.38]**	[Hungary-Czech Rep.]	[.85]**
There are pupils who are not integrated and feel alone	[Spain-Hungary]	[1.04]**	[Spain-Czech Rep.]	[.11]	[Hungary-Czech Rep.]	[1.16]**
Teachers just go about their own business	[Spain-Hungary]	[1.12]**	[Spain-Czech Rep.]	[.67]**	[Hungary-Czech Rep.]	[.47]**
Pupils think the teachers don't understand them	[Spain-Hungary]	[.63]**	[Spain-Czech Rep.]	[.07]	[Hungary-Czech Rep.]	[.58]**
Pupils are demotivated/bored	[Spain-Hungary]	[1.17]**	[Spain-Czech Rep.]	[.29]**	[Hungary-Czech Rep.]	[.87]**
Use or presence of weapons	[Spain-Hungary]	[.35]**	[Spain-Czech Rep.]	[.15]	[Hungary-Czech Rep.]	[.10]
Use or presence of drugs	[Spain-Hungary]	[.17]	[Spain-Czech Rep.]	[.07]	[Hungary-Czech Rep.]	[.05]
Problems of intercultural coexistence	[Spain-Hungary]	[.12]	[Spain-Czech Rep.]	[.17]	[Hungary-Czech Rep.]	[.30]**

Note. *The difference of means is significant to a level of .05; **The difference of means is significant to a level of .01.

As can be seen in Table 3, teachers' ratings change when they are asked about the extent to which they are personally affected by each aspect. Once again, the teachers from Hungary present the lowest scores, except in the four items they consider to affect them most, to which they give higher scores than those from Spain and the Czech Republic: problems of intercultural coexistence, use or presence of weapons, pupils' demotivation/boredom and use or presence of drugs.

The Spanish teachers highlight pupils' demotivation/boredom (similar score to Hungary), there are pupils who are not integrated and feel alone, insults and fights, with the last three aspects scoring higher than Hungary and the Czech Republic. As regards the Czech teachers, they give the highest scores to fights (higher than Hungary), pupils think the teachers don't understand them (similar to Spain and above Hungary), groups that don't get on (similar to Spain) and pupils' demotivation/boredom (below Hungary and Spain).

Table 3

Degree to which teachers are personally affected by the problem. Games-Howell method

Type of problem	Countries	Difference of means	Countries	Difference of means	Countries	Difference of means
Conflicts between pupils and teachers	[Spain-Hungary]	.66**	[Spain-Czech Rep.]	.33	[Hungary-Czech Rep.]	.33*
No clear norms of coexistence	[Spain-Hungary]	.47**	[Spain-Czech Rep.]	.59**	[Hungary-Czech Rep.]	.11
Bad language in class	[Spain-Hungary]	.67**	[Spain-Czech Rep.]	.96**	[Hungary-Czech Rep.]	.28*
Pupils insult one another	[Spain-Hungary]	1.18**	[Spain-Czech Rep.]	.59**	[Hungary-Czech Rep.]	.59**
Pupils fight	[Spain-Hungary]	.81**	[Spain-Czech Rep.]	.20	[Hungary-Czech Rep.]	.60**
There are groups which don't get on	[Spain-Hungary]	.70**	[Spain-Czech Rep.]	.16	[Hungary-Czech Rep.]	.54**
There are pupils who are not integrated and feel alone	[Spain-Hungary]	1.61**	[Spain-Czech Rep.]	.60**	[Hungary-Czech Rep.]	.93**
Teachers just go about their own business	[Spain-Hungary]	1.45**	[Spain-Czech Rep.]	.97**	[Hungary-Czech Rep.]	.47**
Pupils think the teachers don't understand them	[Spain-Hungary]	.90**	[Spain-Czech Rep.]	.21	[Hungary-Czech Rep.]	.69**
Pupils are demotivated/bored	[Spain-Hungary]	.26*	[Spain-Czech Rep.]	1.68**	[Hungary-Czech Rep.]	.93**
Use or presence of weapons	[Spain-Hungary]	1.47**	[Spain-Czech Rep.]	.59**	[Hungary-Czech Rep.]	2.07**
Use or presence of drugs	[Spain-Hungary]	1.04**	[Spain-Czech Rep.]	.77**	[Hungary-Czech Rep.]	1.75**
Problems of intercultural coexistence	[Spain-Hungary]	1.13**	[Spain-Czech Rep.]	.76**	[Hungary-Czech Rep.]	1.90**

Note. *The difference of means is significant to a level of .05; **The difference of means is significant to a level of .01.

Discussion

Teachers highlight fights, insults, pupils' demotivation/boredom, groups that don't get on and the lack of clear norms of coexistence as the problem aspects most common in their schools, and these are followed by insults, an aspect considered in many previous studies in this field (Olweus, 1999; Peets & Kikas, 2006; Spanish People's Ombudsman's Report, 2000) as the main problem affecting secondary schools. Along with verbal abuse, other studies have also reported social exclusion as one of the commonest problem aspects (Kim, Koh, & Leventhal, 2004).

It may not be valid to compare teachers' perception with that of pupils, since many studies indicate a discrepancy between them, suggesting that teachers tend to report more cases of abuse than pupils, especially when they are asked about the school as a whole and not just their own class (Cangas, Gázquez, Pérez, Padilla, & Miras, 2007; Gázquez, Cangas, Pérez, Padilla, & Cano, 2007; Spanish People's Ombudsman's Report, 2000) – that is, when they are not assessing their personal context of activity. This may be due to teachers' denial of the problem (Sullivan, 2000), or, as Rigby (1996) argues, in a similar line, to the fact that teachers have scarce knowledge of the problems or conflicts that occur and of how these affect the victims. Therefore, we consider, in accordance with Yoon (2004), that future research should include and compare the opinions of the two groups.

As expected, when asked about how they are affected personally, teachers give low scores to the item "teachers just go about their own business", but when they are asked about

how common this aspect is in the school, scores are higher (high prevalence); that is, when they refer not only to their own behaviour but also to that of other teachers, the prevalence of this phenomenon rises, except in Hungary, where analysis of the scores shows that teachers consider it the least common aspect and that which least affects them.

Comparison between the scores given by teachers from the different countries in the two dimensions (prevalence of the aspects in their schools and personal repercussions), for each one of the aspects considered, reveals that in Spain the two coincide, with highest scores (thus indicating highest perceived prevalence and personal repercussions) being given to pupils' demotivation/boredom; this should lead teachers to introduce new and more creative activities in their classes with a view to eliminating the problem (Hong, Lawrenz, & Veach, 2005). Likewise, the Czech teachers perceive fights between pupils as both the aspect most prevalent and that which most affects them personally.

Such a coincidence is also found for all three countries (Spain, Czech Rep. and Hungary) in the aspect perceived as least prevalent and with least personal repercussion: use or presence of weapons in Spanish schools, teachers just go about their own business in Hungarian schools and use or presence of drugs in Czech schools. However, such coincidence is not found in Hungarian teachers, who perceive lack of clear norms of coexistence as the commonest aspect in their schools, but problems of intercultural coexistence that which most affects them personally.

Nevertheless more studies to support these results are needed. They must enable us to see if the differences among the different countries are truly representative of the countries involved or are under the influence of the countries involved (or are under the influence of the selected sample). On equal terms it would be wise to complete the sample with other countries to properly analyze its evolution (Due et al., 2005; Smith et al., 1999).

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L'objectif de cette étude a été de faire connaître la perception qu'a le professorat de trois pays européens (Espagne, Hongrie et République Tchèque) de la prévalence et de la capacité d'affecter personnellement de divers aspects affectant la vie en commun scolaire. Les résultats montrent une grande prévalence de disputes, insultes et démotivation/ennui des élèves, selon les enseignants de ces pays. Cependant, ils signalent aussi en tant qu'aspect qui les affecte

personnellement le plus, la démotivation/ennui des élèves filles et garçons. Par ordre de pays, ce sont l'Espagne et la République Tchèque qui présentent les taux les plus élevés de violence scolaire, la Hongrie venant après de manière significative. On trouve aussi des différences dans les trois pays analysés quant à la prévalence et à la capacité d'affecter des divers problèmes de vie en commun scolaire étudiés.

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Current theme of research:

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Most relevant publications in the field of Psychology of Education:

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