Abstract

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‘The golden rule’ and enabling technology - Schoolchildren’s experiences give perspectives on promoting health literacy

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Objectives
Efforts to increase health literacy in schoolchildren is about offering opportunities to obtain, interpret, and understand health information as well as using the gained knowledge. The Swedish National Agency for Education clearly states that schoolchildren’s wellbeing and development should be a focus in schools, and health and lifestyle issues are to be addressed. This makes the school arena a suitable place to learn about health issues and develop action competence to know how and when to improve their health. Furthermore, getting schoolchildren involved in the development of health promoting activities may lead to increased wellbeing, as participation leads to increased empowerment, which in turn makes sustainable change more likely. The aim was to explore opportunities for promoting schoolchildren’s health literacy based on their experiences.

Methods
In two studies from the research and development projects Arctic Children, 540 schoolchildren aged 10-15 from the northern regions of Finland, Sweden, Norway and Russia participated by sharing their experiences in written reflections or by filling out an open question in a survey. Data was processed using phenomenological analyzes.

Results
The participating schoolchildren shared a number of experiences, which increased their health and wellbeing. Examples included descriptions of how to foster positive relationships by practicing the ‘the golden rule’ as a metaphor for being honest, respectful, and having empathy for others. Findings also included experiences of how interactive technology became enabling technology increasing health and wellbeing, for example giving the schoolchildren a sense of control, opportunities to learn easier and to share with others.

Conclusions
Combining the findings of these two studies based on phenomenological analyzes I argue that health literacy efforts must be mindful to address all dimensions of health—physical, mental, social, and existential wellbeing. In addition, I suggest using participating, empowering and appreciative processes when promoting health literacy in schoolchildren.

Keywords: health literacy, schoolchildren, participation, phenomenology