

## Workshop: „So what is the difference to other school projects? Best practice in international school projects”

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### Workshop content and aim

International school projects represent a wide diversity in terms of school types, geographical regions, cultural background, resources ...

This workshop aims

- at disclosing this diversity and dealing with it,
- at sharing experiences and
- at discussing both best practises as well as recommendations for successful projects.

### Method(s) and activities

#### I.) „The 9-dots problem“ – an exercise from the T-KIT “Intercultural Learning”:

*The exercise illustrates our limited perspective on things. If we want to find a solution, we need to go beyond the boundaries. Our own, culturally-influenced standard perspectives might be a severe limitation to finding solutions on a intercultural setting.*

*For the description of the exercise, please see the **Annex**..*

#### II.) Presentation of the EuroMed School Forum: Intercultural Dialogue - an international school partnership project that was initiated by the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture. The project was designed as a particular contribution to the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008. It is organised by Interkulturelles Zentrum and is also supported by the Anna Lindh Foundation (Alexandria, Egypt). The Forum consists of 17 secondary schools in Austria, Denmark, Hungary, The Netherlands, Turkey, Israel, Jordan and Lebanon.

##### Various parallels to the aces-project

- a. e.g. involvement of different types of schools, holidays, different nationalities, different religions, different cultural and social backgrounds,....
- b. Similar aims: promotion of mutual respect and understanding, equality of all actors
- c. Similar topics: Intercultural Dialogue, Sustainability, Cultural Diversity, Identity,...
- d. All students and teachers of the respective project groups worked on common projects
- e. The project promoted face-to-face meetings of students and teachers.

For more information on the project, please see [www.euromedschools.net](http://www.euromedschools.net) where you can also download the final project publication.

#### III.) Students and teachers elaborate on their perception of a “successful project”

After the presentation of the EuroMed School Forum and some anecdotes with regard to specific misunderstandings and challenges, the students and teachers are divided into two groups and discuss the following questions:

- a) The teachers reflect on their experiences with international projects and elaborate on the question: “According to your opinion/experience, what contributes to a good/successful/interesting project?”
  - b) The students work on „What makes a project valuable/interesting for you?”
- Keywords of the ideas/suggestions are written on cards.

#### IV.) Interkulturelles Zentrum has compiled **several recommendations** - based on its experience with dealing with international school partnership projects (for all details see the final publication on [www.euromedschools.net](http://www.euromedschools.net)) – the suggestions are presented to the participants of the workshop who are invited to add their cards/ideas.

### **1. Time and preparation**

- Partnerships are based on trust, take your time to get to know each other
- Where possible, plan a preparatory meeting (supports trust-building and enables space to discuss organisational issues,...)
- Enable peer-to-peer communication amongst students as soon as possible (helps to introduce oneself, enables the pupils to overcome their inhibitions when using a foreign language, ...)
- Schedule additional time for setting up suitable materials and possible evaluation instruments for ongoing reflection: e.g. write down your impressions in a "Partnership diary" on a regular basis; establish "Questionnaires" in on your culture or alike, send it to your partner schools at the beginning and the end of the project. Has anything changed? Establish "Partnership newsletters" together with your partner schools. Is anything relevant to the project going on in your school? Share the news with your partner(s)!

### **2. Partnership and participation**

- All activities require the cooperation of teachers both within the own school as well as between the partner schools. Take into account the needs and different situations of all concerned, e.g. the different holidays, the schools' realities, etc. Only cooperation and the joint decision-making within teams allow for sharing the necessary (additional) work.
- "Ownership" of the students can only be guaranteed wherever they are treated equally. When actively involved in the decision-making process, they are most likely ready to take responsibility: ideas concerning the activities, methods or topics already in the preparation phase and during any exchange (e.g. as tourist guides through the city, facilitators during debates, entertainers or cooks at the intercultural evening, reporters you promote the project on the school's website,...)

### **3. Didactical diversity:**

- Educational cultures differ a lot throughout the world > educational concepts and didactical approaches applied within school-partnerships should be carefully discussed among all teachers from the partner schools as some might not be possible in other cultural contexts.
- Teachers are encouraged to look at the differences with a professional "intercultural view" and appreciate the varieties rather than judging what is right or wrong, out-dated or modern.
- Appreciate the variety of methods/educational concepts within international teams
- Methods and activities should be manifold, in order to guarantee the students' enthusiasm. Furthermore, where possible the students should work on a specific issue in international groups as soon as possible.

### **4. Topics of global relevance**

- topics should be relevant/interesting to all partners and not only address problems/issues of one partner school
- Suitable topic has high impact on motivation of the students

### **5. Diversity of languages**

- Communication should be at the centre of any international school project!
- Although it is advisable to choose a working language, the use of all other languages spoken within the partner schools should be encouraged as they are a valuable resource: e.g. create a "Slang dictionary", a "Book of proverbs", "Multilingual songs",...

### **6. Gender equality and cultural diversity**

- Awareness towards gender aspects (different needs, implications on boys and girls...)
- Different religions, school types, status of religious education, access to internet...need to be discussed and considered.

### **7. Multiperspectivity**

- Cross-border cooperation fosters the ability to look at situations, contexts...from different points of view
- The presence of culturally diverse perspectives should not lead to a who-is-right discussion, but can be used to enhance the understanding of the cultural and social conditions of their construction of different points of view

- Face-to-face meetings in the partner countries offer the opportunity not only to get to know the other cultures and countries but to also reflect on one's own culture, visit places one would normally not go to and see all this through the eyes of the others.

## 8. Host families

- Great potential for intercultural learning (possible differences and similarities in housing, food, leisure activities,...)
- Uncertainty, misunderstandings, and even tensions might be part of the experience and should be used as valuable resource for learning.
- schedule "**Home groups**": this evaluation activity allows all participants to take a small step back from the intercultural experience and to actually express, in their national groups and in their mother-tongue, possible doubts and concerns, also with respect to the host family or – on the other hand – the guest. The teacher of the respective group, being the one to facilitate the activity, is invited to find solutions after consultation with the colleagues from the other countries.  
½ a hour once or twice during the exchange is sufficient.
- Host families should be prepared in advance and be met after the exchange.

## 9. Sustainability and support

- Enthusiasm at beginning needs to be embedded in school life to enable sustainability
- The more involved, the better: establish a team of teachers that shares the responsibility for the implementation of activities and evaluates the progress of the whole project.
- Benefit from cross-curricular activities by involving e.g. science, language or history teachers.
- support of governing board of school/director/parents are crucial: try to involve them by inviting them to intercultural evenings, project presentations,...
- consult with partner teachers who might have had similar experiences and difficulties. They might have a solution for your "problem".

## V.) Other practical information, in particular when planning an exchange:

- Communication: we all have different possibilities and attitudes concerning the handling of internet, facebook and alike. Be honest with each other in order to avoid frustration and misunderstandings. However, agree on regular contact and stick to important deadlines!
- be realistic in your goals and clarify expectations with all involved
- clarify legal framework in your country/school
- visa and other important information: provide your partners with relevant data as soon as possible
- at the meeting: provide the others with a draft programme and emergency numbers
- include evaluation activities
- stimulate interaction amongst students that encourages them to get to know each other and to talk in English, e.g. during long bus trips. This will not be required by the end of the meeting, but might be useful at the beginning.
- Arrange activities in different working groups and enable insight into the reality of schools.

## VI.) Further outcomes

- The ideas/suggestions as established by both the students and the teachers cover quite a few of the recommendations as compiled by Interkulturelles Zentrum and in particular the students had very creative and sometimes even opposite (additional) ideas. Find some examples below:

*"inform local media + radio"; "stay at host families to get to know the other culture/kitchen and to save money", "organise real debates (with pros + cons), e.g. involve experts"; "we should also talk about touchy topics, we are all humane"; "We do not listen to each other, we do not admit our mistakes, that is the problem"; "no debates on sensible topics because this could create could create new walls and manifest prejudices";*

*"get in touch with partners before project starts (culture...) as it easier to speak with them (send photos through internet: life styles)"; "I really like our project because there are a lot of my ideas"; "There most always be a choice"*