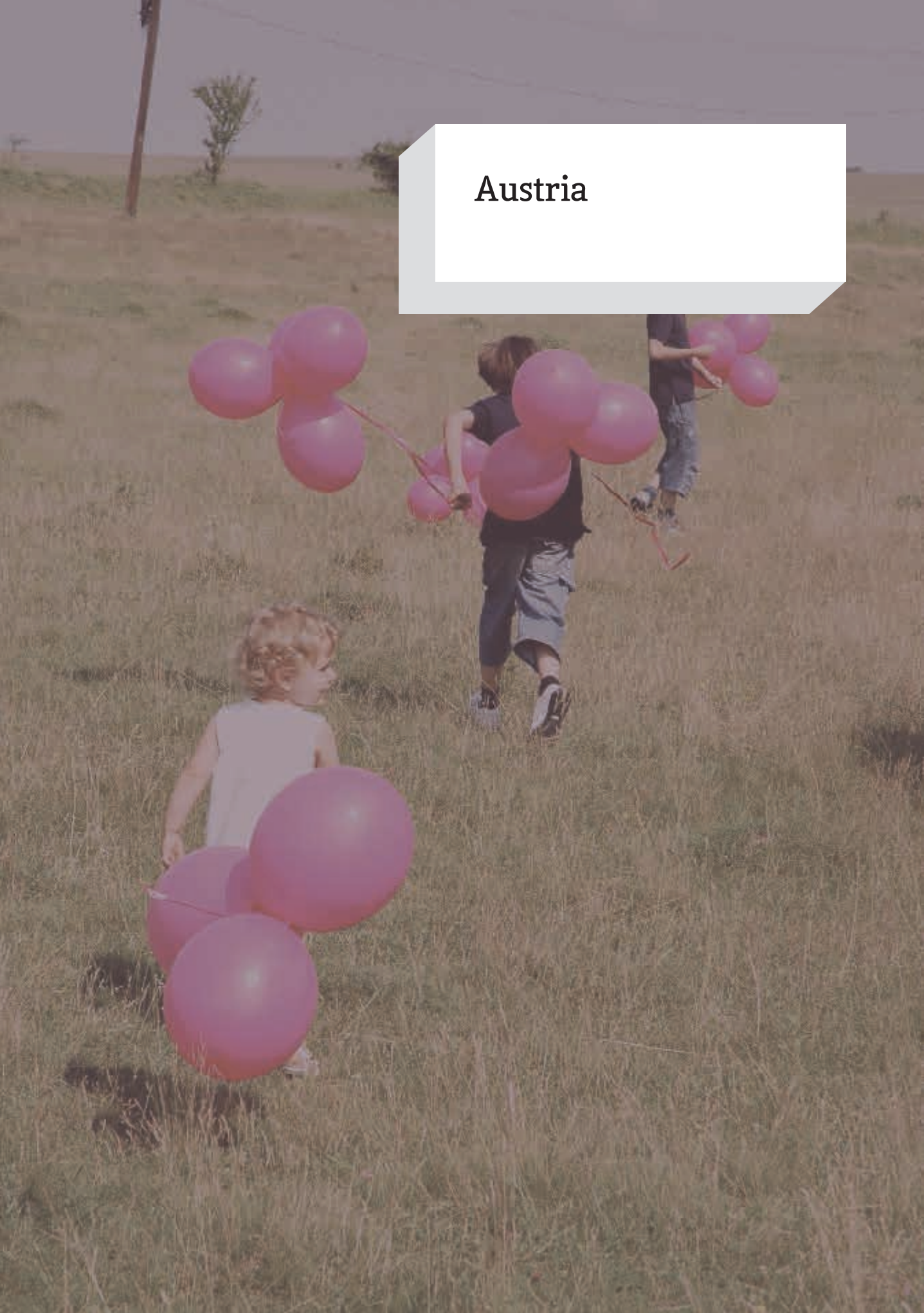


Austria





Social and Emotional Education in Austria

Martina Leibovici-Mühlberger and Christopher Greulich

Abstract

When we look back on our time at school, what do we remember? Most often it is the people, the relationships, the fun times and the challenges. Much of what we remember is based on how we felt, especially the particularly good or especially bad experiences. Given the amount of time we spend at school we come away with an overall impression of what our years of schooling were like. While it is clearly a matter of personal perception, there is a startling amount of anecdotal criticism, at times delivered with a sense of resignation, about what it was and is like to go to school in Austria. For the past ten years it has been easy to track an ongoing, and increasingly heated public and political debate about the need for comprehensive, educational reform. The growing sense of urgency has received additional momentum through critical interpretations of Austria's consistently weak performance in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) study. Even more recently, despite 2011 being officially named "Jahr der Bildungsoffensive" (the Year of Education) in Austria, there was a major and very public initiative led by a former politician with support from diverse sectors of society, which successfully gained enough support for a petition with the motto, "Österreich darf nicht sitzenbleiben"¹ ("Austria cannot be allowed to fail" - a slogan playing on the idea of having to repeat a school year because one has failed). The petition demanded radical reform based on twelve core areas.² When the polling stations closed, at 20h00 on 10 November, 383.724 Austrians had signed the petition.³

There is a startling amount of anecdotal criticism ... about what it was and is like to go to school in Austria.

This being said, the perceived weaknesses of the current education system are certainly receiving attention through initiatives of the government. Across the complete scope of education, these initiatives address a wide range of structural and organisational issues; the need for improved and monitored standards, educational leadership, improving pedagogical deficits through teacher selection and training, and increasing the reach of existing socio-emotional support services. It is against this contentious backdrop that the search for social and emotional education (SEE) in Austria is being carried out.

This chapter will first provide an insight into the history of education in Austria dating back to the educational reforms of Empress Maria Theresa in 1775. Then an overview of the current structure of the education system will be provided, including key statistics and features of schooling in Austria. This will highlight both the real need for general reform as well as the

difficulty of raising awareness and acceptance about the absolute necessity of providing students with evidenced based and well implemented social and emotional education programmes. Officially this task has been allocated to the Austrian Centre for Character Development and Social Learning (Österreichisches Zentrum für Persönlichkeitsbildung und soziales Lernen - ÖZEPS), which was established in 2005 by the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture. An examination of ÖZEPS' overall priorities and initiatives will provide an understanding of the official direction being taken, and the extent to which social and emotional education has become a fundamental feature of the Austrian school system.

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Then three case studies will be presented as examples of school programmes which have had a positive impact on the social and emotional well-being of students. The first of these is a programme called *Schulfach Glück*, (Well-being), which was initially piloted in 2009 in six schools in Styria (a region of Austria) and has now grown to include ninety-six Styrian kindergarten, primary and secondary schools. The second case study is an officially registered programme and called *Kommunikation und Sozialkompetenz*^o (KoSo - Communication and Social Competence) which was originally developed by Dr. Renate Wustinger specifically for the Sir Karl Popper School in Vienna. KoSo is now being implemented in Austria, Germany and Switzerland. The third case study is about the *Schülerinnenschule* (*the Students' School*) in the Werkstätten- und Kulturhaus (WUK - Workshops and House of Culture), which uses one of the oldest, alternative teaching approaches in Austria. Here social and emotional education is more than a programme, it is part of the fundamental nature of the school itself.

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Christopher Greulich, MA is an Australian educator with a passion for guiding, inspiring and believing in the potential of adolescents. He has worked in Australian and International schools in Austria for over twenty years as a teacher, sports coach, creator and facilitator of pastoral programmes, and senior manager. With degrees and training in the humanities, education, international relations and counselling Christopher Greulich is now the co-founder and CEO of The G Zone OG, a company based in Vienna, Austria. With the mission statement Be All You Can, The G Zone provides Personal Coaching for Teens and Young Adults, and guidance for those living and working with them. As the company is based in Vienna Christopher Greulich has an interest in the dynamic landscape of Austrian education, especially the extent to which the current developments will address the needs of adolescents beyond the realms of academics. He has two daughters aged 13 and 16.

The History of Education in Austria: Cultivating bureaucrats and maintaining the status quo

Austria is a central European country which, less than a hundred years ago, was an Empire under the rule of the Hapsburg family whose dynastic rule spanned approximately seven centuries. This empire stretched geographically from the current Austrian borders largely to the east, including Hungary and parts of Poland, Romania and the Ukraine. Through marriage their influence extended as far as the Netherlands, Spain and Sicily. At school Austrian children learn about this influential royal family, which provided quite a number of Holy Roman Emperors. Special attention is given to the reign of the Empress Maria Theresa (who lived from 1717 – 1780 and ruled from 1740 – 1780), who instituted a number of reforms, including those which planted the seeds of formal, compulsory education.

Considering her reforms and those of her son Joseph II, it could be said that their primary focus was to strengthen the position of the crown by undermining the influence of the

There was also to be a focus on the education of the general populace.

Empress Maria Theresa believed that for her people to be faithful Catholics and loyal subjects they needed to be at least minimally educated. There would be a new school system based on the Prussian model, which instituted compulsory attendance for students aged 5 to 13, beginning with kindergarten at age 5, specific training for teachers, national testing for all students (the test results were used to classify children for potential job training), a national curriculum set for each grade, and set text books. In 1869 complete state control of all aspects of education throughout the Empire was established through a new imperial education law (*Reichsvolksschulgesetz*). Amongst the reforms introduced through this law class sizes were reduced to a maximum of eighty on the basis of the conclusion that a recent military defeat was based on the high level of illiteracy in the Austrian army. Emperor Joseph II continued the reforms, introducing the German language as the language of instruction at university. In 1784 he decreed that at any loca-

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regional nobility and the Church, centralising authority and strengthening the structures and efficiency of Austria's military and civil service. Regulating the high school and university education of the future administrators of the Empire was the main but not the only focus proposed by Gottfried Van Swieten, Head of the Education Commission (*Studienhofkommission*) which was founded in 1760.

tion where there was a parish church and where there were school-aged children⁴, a school would be built. There were three levels of schools. The most extensive were the elementary schools, sometimes called *Trivialschulen*, which were founded to impart the classical skills of reading, writing and arithmetic. In the towns more exclusive middle schools (*Hauptschulen*) provided vocational

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instruction for the middle classes, generally forming the basis for better occupations and, for some students, a more advanced education. In addition to German, mathematics and perhaps other languages, courses provided basic skills and insights into the processes and technical knowledge of craft and service businesses. In order to provide a higher level of education for those likely to attend university, and to ensure the uniform training of teachers, the 'model' academic schools (*Normalschule*), were also established by the Education Commission.⁵ Model here refers to establishing and ensuring the 'norms' for what was considered effective teaching.

Peter Stachel in his essay entitled, "*The Austrian Education System between 1749 and 1918*"⁶ pointed out that it was quite remarkable that the purposefully designed structures of the educational institutions established by the Hapsburg monarchy survived largely unchanged into most of the post-monarchial countries of the former Empire. Rosa Schmidt-Vierthaler, describes Austria's education system as a "historical corset"⁷. She refers to various features of the current school system as always having been part of the system. For example, the different types of schools, having to repeat a grade if you fail only one subject, the standard fifty-minute lesson, which may have both military and clerical origins, and the grading system of one to five. The latter was simply expanded from the original three levels of the Prussian

model to now be 1 - Very Good; 2 - Good; 3 - Satisfactory; 4 - Sufficient; 5 - Not Sufficient. These grades are merely academic boundaries and are not accompanied by any written information about the individual student. Schmidt-Vierthaler also quotes the educational scientist Stefan Hopmann as saying that approximately eighty percent of subject material still taught today has survived since the mid-nineteen century; a period which focused on sustaining the economic framework of a country.

School teachers were initially drawn from the Church and the Army and they used approaches based on familiar values - loyalty to the state, a disciplined approach to learning and closing ranks in order to keep up appearances in the face of external scrutiny. Quoting a resolution from Joseph II, Stachel points out that the purpose of all educational reforms was to produce loyal servants of the state, no matter what their role or position in the social structure.⁸ In addition, he comments that, rather than providing the opportunity for personal development and social advancement through education, there was a real fear about the possibility of creating permeable, social boundaries and that this was something to be guarded against. Hence the educational structures served as a means of controlling the social mobility of the general population through limiting accessibility to certain educational institutions. These elements of lack of mobility and accessibility

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are arguably still reflected in the feature of academic selection applied after only four years of primary schooling, and the training, official and even social status of teachers in the various educational institutions of Austria today.

Now a country of almost eight and a half million inhabitants, Austria became a member of the European Union (EU) in 1995. Since then it has experienced a more stringent, external examination of its policies, structures and progress. In addition, Austria's approach and progress are compared to that of its EU partners on a regular basis. This is a very positive scenario for Austrian education because, whether seeking to meet agreed standards or encouraging initiatives for improvement, education remains a central political theme. However, while accepting of its responsibilities, the process of change has

bring about meaningful reform while having to contend with constant negotiations with stakeholders involved on the frontlines of education, over arguably minor matters such as the current use of the title "Professor" for teachers in certain types of schools.

In 2011 there were 1,145,214 six to eight-year olds in Austria.⁹ The reform of education in Austria is clearly not an easy undertaking as it goes beyond the development and implementation of a few policies and initiatives. Instead it would seem that Austria is seeking to develop a new culture of education. This can only be achieved through a change in thinking amongst the general population about education, beginning with clarity about which outcomes are the most important, and a greater student focus. To bring about a change in culture there is no quick-fix and this is a difficult position for any government

Austria is seeking to develop a new culture of education.

posed many challenges to the Austrian Federal Government. The Federal Ministry for Education, the Arts and Culture (BMUKK) is under constant public scrutiny and is criticized anew with the release of each new set of official findings by the Organisation for the Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), or the EU. The BMUKK is seeking to

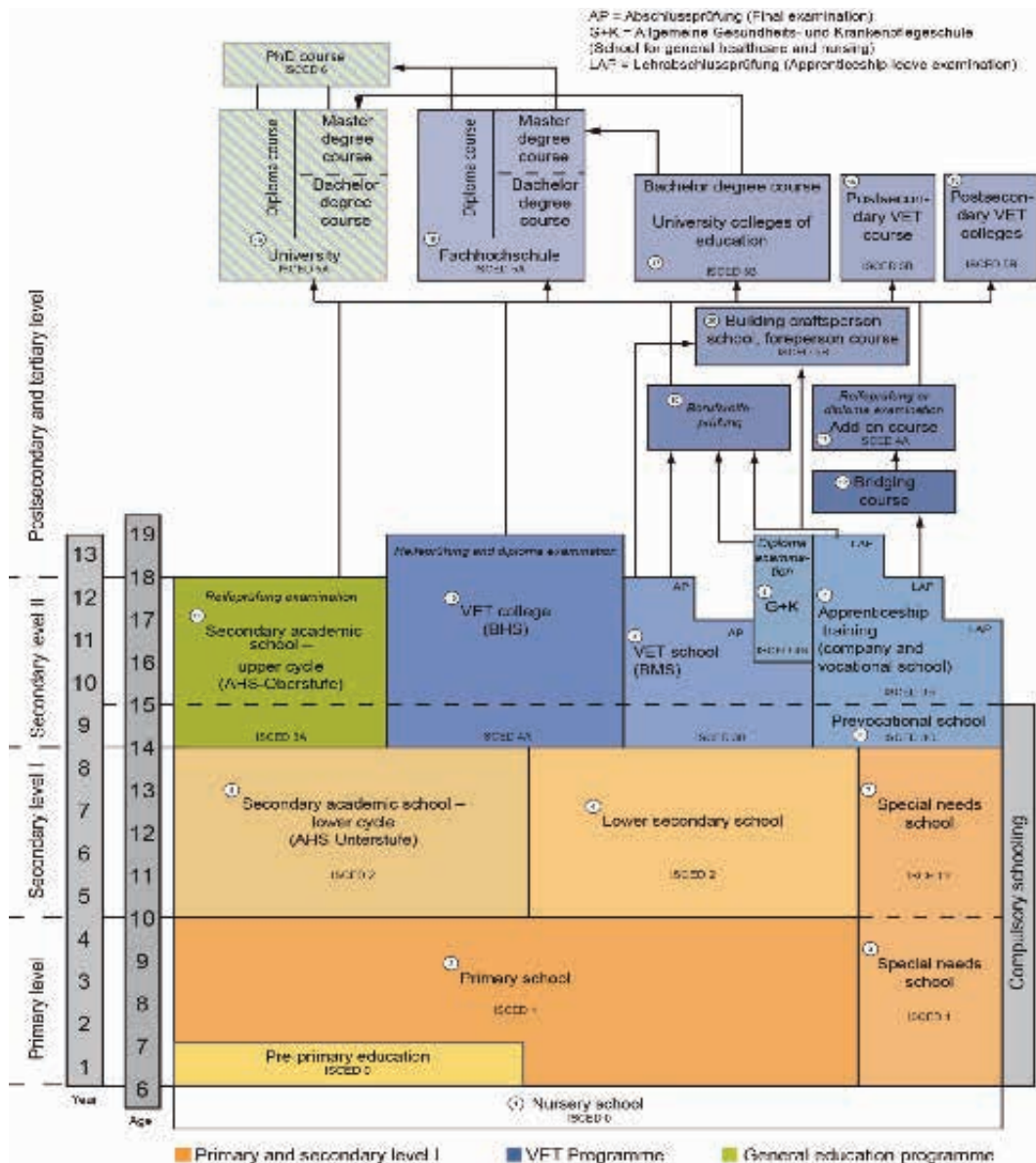
to be in when elections are based on the short-term delivery of promises. In the meantime, the current student cohorts are having to contend with either the existing, 'old' culture of education, or are taking part in pilot programmes, some of which may lay the foundations for the new culture of education. During this time of educational reform

there needs to be clarity about the central focus of education. This should move beyond the merely academic to include a more holistic view of the student and balanced development of their physical, emotional, intellectual, social and spiritual characteristics.

The Austrian school system

The structure below was published in June 2011.¹⁰

Officially every child needs to complete nine years of compulsory education. Even if a student has to repeat a school year, it is still possible to end their school education during the period of Lower Secondary Education, provided that nine years of attendance have been recorded. At this stage there is no official discussion about the extension of this compulsory period of education.



Kindergarten

Since September 2010 it is compulsory for every child from age five to attend kindergarten for at least a year, prior to entering Primary education.

Primary education (Volksschule) lasts for four years, from age 6 to 10.

Lower secondary education (age 11 to 14) lasts for four years and students may attend one of the following:

- *General secondary school (Hauptschule).* Many schools offer a combination of specialty areas such languages, information technology, art and design, music, sport, or home economics. In German, mathematics and foreign languages students are streamed and if a certain academic level is reached then students may transfer to the academic secondary school. In the third and fourth years, particular attention is paid to preparing pupils for working life. This is accomplished by means of compulsory “career orientation” classes, through job-sampling days, and through going on work-related excursions and field trips.
- *Secondary academic school – lower cycle (Allgemein bildende höhere Schulen)* These are divided into *General Academic (Gymnasium)*, *Science-based (Realgymnasium)* and *Economics-based (Wirtschaftskundliches Realgymnasium)*. Beyond the basis suggested in the name, these schools may also offer a combination of the various specialty options mentioned above.

Since September 2012 a new school ‘type’ has officially appeared in the education system. This new type of secondary school is also referred to as the New Middle School (NMS).¹¹ Previously a pilot model, the NMS has now been formally established with a significant number of such schools now

spread throughout the Austrian provinces. With a total of 946 middle schools in existence by the autumn of 2013, the aim is that by 2015/2016 all Lower secondary schools will be transformed into NMS and eventually only the NMS should exist as the main school for this age group.¹² The goal of the NMS is to provide a joint school for all 10 to 14 year olds who have completed the fourth grade in primary school. Apart from eliminating the separation of children into different educational avenues too early, a central feature of the NMS is a broad implementation of a new learning culture based on individualization and inner differentiation, catering to both individual learning needs and the students’ own beliefs about learning in different subject areas. Instruction at the NMS follows the curriculum for the lower level (5th to 8th grade) of the academic secondary school and is designed by teachers from both types of lower secondary schools.¹³

In 2010/11 43.7% primary students transitioned into Lower secondary schools, 33% into Academic secondary schools – lower cycle, and 20.7% into the New secondary schools. The remaining students may have gone on to attend a school for children with special educational needs or to those designated as private schools with their own statutes, which may also have the official recognition to issue some type of official school report. An article in *Der Standard* (2013) references Statistik Austria in stating that approximately ten percent of students at various levels attend one of the 600 private schools.¹⁴ The government supports the integration of students whose learning may be impeded in areas of reading, writing, mathematics, understanding or concentration into ‘integration classes’ within other school types. There are, however, also Special Needs Centres which operate as a base for mobile specialists and which have their own school for

students assessed as needing more support than can be provided in another school, for example, the significantly physically and mentally challenged or those with significant behavioural issues. Also of note here is that, while class sizes at this time were generally under 25 students, in all three types of schools some classes were larger than this and in Secondary academic schools - lower cycle 38.5% of classes had between 25 and 30 pupils, with 0.7% having more than 30 in a class.¹⁵

Upper secondary education (age 15 to 18/19) lasts for four to five years and includes the following options:

- *Secondary academic school – upper cycle* (*Allgemeinbildende höhere Schulen: Gymnasium, Realgymnasium, Wirtschaftskundliches Realgymnasium and Oberstufen-Realgymnasium*). In these schools the programme started in the lower cycle is continued.
- *Pre-vocational polytechnic school* (*Polytechnische Schule - age 15-16*). In the ninth, and a possible, voluntary tenth school year, students are prepared for a career with more general education classes, career orientation and basic vocational training. With career orientation as the basic goal of all courses numerous opportunities are created for students to become familiar with working life. A programme of company visits and work experience days at companies, non-school institutions and workshops is designed to help students select their vocation. Basic vocational training is offered in various trades (elective subjects). These correspond to a wide variety of careers in trade and industry, and enable students to acquire basic abilities, skills and knowledge (key qualifications). Depending on their vocational interests and inclinations, each student selects one of seven subject areas:

metal, electrical, wood, construction, commerce/clerical, services or tourism. Students who pass the final examination at a polytechnic school are also entitled to transfer to the second grade of a medium-level secondary vocational college of the same type. Essentially this school type provides a bridge for those needing to complete their ninth year of compulsory schooling, who are considering an apprenticeship or entering the world of employment. Provided they meet the requirements, they can also switch across to a vocational college and continue their education.

- *Vocational secondary education* (age 15 – 18/19), lasts for four or five years depending on the course chosen. For the last two decades secondary technical and vocational schools and colleges have been experiencing a steady rise in student numbers. They offer general education, further technical theory in fields such as business, engineering, agriculture, health care or tourism, as well as practical training in the form of compulsory work placements. Currently 40 per cent of Austrian teenagers choose to serve an apprenticeship and 14 per cent opt for further education at a secondary technical and vocational school.¹⁶

In 2010/2011 by the tenth grade or the second level of the upper secondary school (age 15/16), when the pre-vocational option has already been completed by students, 38% of school types were those specifically supporting apprentices, 35.2% were schools for intermediate or higher technical or vocational training, and only 20.1% were Academic secondary schools – upper cycle, 4.8% were for intermediate and higher level teacher training and the rest were either approved schools for general education or training. In terms of class sizes, 20% and 30% of classes in the different schools had

between 25 and 30 students, and especially in the technical or vocational schools 15% to 18% of classes had more than 30 students per class.¹⁷

All upper secondary streams lead to a qualification for tertiary education, either the **Reifeprüfung** or **Matura**, which provides access to higher education. In 1997, the **Beruf-sreifepfung** (Vocational Certificate) was introduced, which also gives access to university and programmes at universities of applied sciences (known as “Fachhochschulen”). Apprentices are now able to pass an examination to gain access to higher education. The new *Secondary Technical and Vocational Certificate* was designed for apprentices who have successfully passed their final apprenticeship examination and for those completing their trainings at vocational colleges, including Nursing Colleges and Technical Medical Colleges.

average of 71 percent poorer results than their Austrian born counterparts and were thus clearly disadvantaged in the system. One reason suggested for this statistic was that these students were in classes with a high percentage of other students with migrant backgrounds, and it can also be noted that there is a current lack of diversity in the cultural background of teachers.¹⁹ A further observation was that *the Austrian education system was highly selective*, based purely on academic performance. This referred to the fact that children whose parents were not, relatively speaking well educated had less of a chance of receiving higher qualifications than in countries such as The Netherlands or Ireland. Direct reference was made to how early the selection process takes place. Around the age of 9 or 10, teachers make a decision about whether a student will attend a lower secondary school (Hauptschule) or the first level of the academic secondary school (Gymnasium) for the following year.

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The landscape of education in Austria

In the article “EU: Criticism about the Austrian School System”¹⁸ released in 2007 it was reported that on a number of its educational indicators the EU was quite positive about the Austrian school system. One area however, was definitely in need of attention. Based on the findings of the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) study results at the time, *students with a migrant background scored an*

The EU report was based on the findings of the OECD, which stated that countries with selective education systems generally rated poorly academically compared to countries with more inclusive systems. In Austria the level of education a student may attain was more closely linked to that of their parents than in other EU countries.

One area, which has long been the source of heated discussion, is based on the perceptions

of the work done by teachers in Austria. On the one hand their public image is that of civil servants who work half a day, have long holidays, fail to bring the students up to EU standards and are not held accountable. From the other side teachers talk of burnout symptoms, the pressure of doing the job of parents in addition to their own and of being made scapegoats. It was predictable that the role of teachers would be reviewed by the government and in February 2009 the press re-

conform more closely to other EU and OECD countries.

While under discussion the qualifications for a kindergarten teacher (which are not of university level) remain unchanged. Kindergarten teaching qualifications can be gained by completing a five-year programme, beginning after the lower secondary school level at an Institute for Kindergarten Teacher Education (*Bildungsanstalt für Kindergarten-*

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ported on an argument that broke out between government and teacher representatives about the plan for the teaching load to be increased by two contact hours a week within the teachers' contracted 40 hour week. The government based their measures on the hours worked and money earned by OECD colleagues in other countries, and the teacher union representatives interpreted this as a claim that Austrian teachers were "lazy dogs", saw the likelihood of lost jobs and threatened strike action.²⁰

In Austria there is a discernable link between the low, societal recognition of the teaching profession and a hierarchy in the system of teacher training, most easily recognised at the level of income.²¹ Until recently in Austria, teachers in the various schools and levels of education were not required to have the same qualifications. These qualifications varied from college diplomas to university degrees. The goal of very recent reforms to address this discrepancy is to

pädagogik - BAKIP). This provides a high school diploma and qualification for kindergarten teachers. Alternatively, students who have already gained their high school diploma can complete just two years at a college which is often attached to the BAKIP.

Before 2007 primary, lower secondary, special needs and pre-vocational school teachers were trained in three years, at post-secondary level, in *Teacher Training Colleges (Pädagogische Akademien)*, each of which was attached to a school. These colleges have now been transformed into universities providing qualifications at degree level and also have the mandate to pursue occupational and application-oriented research. This move, while important in terms of training, has not yet really had an impact on the status of teaching as an occupation. Secondary academic and vocational school teachers have always been trained at university. The minimum duration of studies is nine semesters (approximately four and a half years) which includes a practical training

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period. On completion, students sit an additional examination in their major teaching subject and are then awarded the degree of Magister/Magistra. They then have to complete one year of work experience as a probationary teacher before becoming qualified.²²

Based on the statistic that by 2025 around half of the 120 000 teachers in Austria will be retiring it is clear that the training of teachers is fundamental to improving education in Austria.²³ Given this, the next challenge will be to move away from discussions such as whether all teachers, including primary and lower secondary teachers, have the right to call themselves by the title “Professor”²⁴, to focusing on discussions about the selection of potential teachers and professional performance standards in the classroom. The very practice of using titles in schools to signify status depersonalises the nature of a pupil-teacher relationship, which should contribute to a positive and safe environment where students can be supported and learn in areas other than just the academic. This fact has not been lost on many of those working directly with students.

In August 2009 in a national press article a teacher in one of the secondary academic

schools is quoted as saying that Social (Competencies) Learning should become a compulsory subject in all schools.²⁵ The last statement in the article was that this would only work in the broadest possible context, and that to just do a non-compulsory activity under this heading would not be enough. The teacher pointed out that school was a great resource for learning social competencies. However, for this learning to take place, the inflexible structure of time and space allocation in schools would need to be addressed. The article included comments about the need for a different school culture, based on respectful collaboration, where the student could learn the essential “soft skills”, and how to cope with the existing pressures, fears, changes and challenges. The 2009 OECD report stated that “Austria does well in meeting their children’s material needs... but in areas of child health and safety and risk behaviours, their performance falls short of these heights”. Behaviours in this report included experiences with smoking and alcohol, and also the suicide rate. While Austrian children reported liking school, “Bullying is a problem in Austria. With 16% of children reporting being bullied recently, higher than the OECD average of 11%.”²⁶

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Clearly the needs of students in Austria, as elsewhere in the world, stretch beyond the academic subjects. However, it can be difficult to change a culture when indicators repeatedly show that Austria is struggling to improve the academic results of students in schools. In December 2010 the Austrian authorities had to explain the PISA results, which ranked Austria thirty-one out of thirty-four places in the reading literacy

average of 1660, the number of actual contact hours in the classroom is clearly below average.

On a more positive note,

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component.²⁷ In September 2011 Austria received a further OECD update about its progress and the title of the news article said it all: “Scolding from the OECD: Education has no Priority in Austria”.²⁸

The school-related statistics included the following:

- Austria belonged to those countries in which, between 1995 and 2008 the growth of expenditure on education was clearly behind the growth of the Gross National Product. In 2006 expenditure was 5.5 percent of the GDP while the OECD average was 5.7 percent.
- Students in Austria aged seven to eight, and nine to eleven, received fewer hours of instruction than students of the same age in other OECD countries, while those aged twelve to fourteen receive a little more than the OECD average.
- While the Austrian teacher has a legally contracted total teaching time of 1776 hours per year which is above the OECD

or upper vocational school or apprenticeship.

- Based on expenditure per student, Austria belonged to the countries, which have spent the most annually on educational institutions; on a combination of elements including facilities, staff and development.

In response to these statistics and the internally perceived, ongoing international humiliation due to the PISA results, it was no surprise that in the space of only a few months between the end of 2011 and early 2012 there was a polarising public petition called the “Education Initiative”, (*Bildungsinitiative*).²⁹ This was followed by another round of very heated negotiations as the Federal Minister announced the intention to create a new contractual basis for the role and working conditions of teachers. With regards to the first it could be argued that each of the points raised in the petition can be found within the overall government plan for educational reform, and that it is the time being taken to make significant and visible progress which is the primary source of tension.

As can be seen through the eyes of the media, the process of reforming education in Austria over the past five years has been a serious struggle. It would appear that most of the public discussions have revolved around the nature of the structure, content, staffing and delivery of the academic curriculum. That the students have needs beyond the academic is clearly recognised and evidenced in discussions. However, it is difficult to find social and emotional initiatives in education at the forefront of reform. This is not to say that such initiatives do not exist.

The social and emotional landscape of education in Austria

According to the Austrian Federal Minister for Education, The Arts and Culture, Dr. Claudia Schmied, in the foreword of the official publication, *Educational Reform for Austria: The Implementation of the Complete Concept*: “The prosperity of our country is determined in the classroom”.³⁰ With this unequivocal statement of what is at stake, further statements are made under the heading: *Why it is worth the effort. Modern educational policy*. They cover a range of key topics, but do not seem to be grouped to highlight more than general priorities. Depending on how one reads the list or how much one is to assume as a given, there is no stated commitment to the student as a whole person, beyond supporting their ability to achieve academic outcomes and contribute to the economic foundation of the country. An examination of the stated government goals, directly related to school and with an implementation timeline from 2007/2008 to 2016/2017, shows a strong focus on improving the framework for the delivery of a better education, but less of a focus on the wholistic needs of the student.

In the storm of reform teachers certainly have their hands full in terms of not losing sight of each individual student while

providing all students with a strong basis of knowledge and skills. In conversations with students one very quickly hears about the culture of learning in each classroom and what priorities and expectations have been set either directly or indirectly. Together the teachers and support staff of a school establish the learning culture of the school. At the simplest level the culture of a school can be understood as ‘the pattern of how we do things’ in our school, and the ‘we’ includes students, staff and the role of parents. If we were to ask first-time visitors to a school to independently comment on as many features of the people and the place as they can and then to look for similarities in what they have said, and then do the same with the students, parents and staff, we will get a glimpse of the culture of the school. What is it then, which is spoken about as the culture of Austrian schools and student-staff relationships?

In preparing students for the demands of the modern world, the primary purpose of Austrian schools has been to deliver education to ensure the future of Austria’s economic foundations. The students are products of a system, which is creating the necessary parts of the machinery at all levels. As such the role of teachers has always been to impart the required level of knowledge and to sort the students out into the appropriate channels for further training, something, which already happens at age ten in Austria. This role has also defined the fundamental nature of the relationships in schools from primary through to the end of secondary education. One quickly realises the serious nature of learning when formal assessment begins in grade one, the majority of assessments throughout a student’s school life are content based tests/examinations, and the main skill required to graduate from school is the ability to memorise subject content. While there is a broad spectrum of subjects they are all essentially content based and assessed, and

the three main subjects, which are particularly heavily weighted in determining a student's progression through school are mathematics, German and English. Education in Austria is clearly content focused and not student centred, and the role of teachers is to impart knowledge and to test it. Positive relationships in Austrian schools are based on individual personalities rather than systemic values of mutual respect and collaboration, or the role a teacher may play in nurturing the personality of a child or adolescent. In fact the latter is seen as being the domain of the parent and the partnership of student, teacher and parent is played out on the level of academic performance or discipline.

In this time of reform how is the culture of schools in Austria being addressed, guided, and nurtured and to what end? It also raises the question about whether this is one of the roles that social and emotional education in

motivated and contrived and in its implementation more like an enforced initiative and lacking in fundamental acceptance.

It will certainly take time to change the values of the system and regardless of the perception of new policies, they do provide an opportunity for concerned and motivated stakeholders to show initiative and start programmes to address the needs of children and adolescents in schools.

One such example, clearer in its goal, and less intrusive than a compulsory initiative is the government programme, which began in 2007 called "Together for fairness and against violence – The white feather". This is a major, ongoing initiative, originally developed to raise awareness about juvenile violence and bullying. The objective of the programme is to actively demonstrate an ongoing commitment to ensuring that children and teenagers grow up and learn in a

Education in Austria is clearly content focused and not student centred, and the role of teachers is to impart knowledge and to test it.

Austria can play? In the first instance, it is possible to find a menu heading on the BMUKK website called Social Learning (*Soziales Lernen*), where it is noted that schools are places built on a foundation of mutual respect, where social skills and competencies are transmitted, learned and used. As such, schools are required to consciously function in such a way so as to serve as an environment for social learning experiences.³¹ Against the backdrop of existing school culture as outlined above, and the public outcry for immediate and effective reform, this concept may seem a little politically

safe environment. The White Feather programme consists of a set of resources to be used by students, teachers and parents for the prevention of or, where necessary, intervening in juvenile violence (See <http://www.gemeinsam-gegen-gewalt.at>). Regarding the previously mentioned OECD statistic of 16% of Austrian students in 2009 reporting recent experiences of bullying, this is a very important initiative.³² Since 2010 the government's goal to increase the number of school psychologists and educational social workers was also implemented. Overall it would appear that the social and

emotional well-being of Austria's young in schools definitely has some priority. However, the combination of individual initiatives started by interested and motivated teachers and overall school programmes introduced in response to government policies still need leadership, guidance and drive; officially this is one of ÖZEPS' tasks.

The Austrian Centre for Personality Development and Social Learning (ÖZEPS - <http://www.oezeps.at>), part of the Austrian Department of Education, was established in 2005. The stated mandate of this centre is to provide momentum for the promotion and "anchoring" of the methods, models and opportunities for implementation of personal and societal competencies within all educational and training institutions. This includes teacher training, setting and monitoring professional standards, and organisational development. In addition, ÖZEPS' role is to cooperate with students, parents and guardians.³³ ÖZEPS describes itself as a 'learning' organisation which is building a bridge between educational research and the reality of school; so between theory and practice.³⁴

Put simply it is redefining the scope of LEARNING. This is not necessarily a new approach in global terms, but for Austria this perspective supports the push for educational reform. ÖZEPS has taken the process of LEARNING, linked to RELATIONSHIP (BEZIEHUNG) and TEACHING AND LEARNING (UNTERRICHT) as the thematic framework for what it is promoting.

Learning is a social and active process, only possible with the participation of the learner, involving both motivation and interest, and taking place in specific contexts.

- *Learning and teaching* is the lynchpin for the successful development of every school

in areas such as the taught curriculum, assessment and reporting, and pastoral care programmes.

- A *good relationship* based on trust and respect between the student and the teacher is a prerequisite for successful learning and teaching.³⁵

Therefore ÖZEPS sees its role as strengthening on all levels the personality of educators and those being educated, to support them in developing effective learning relationships, and in shaping the contexts of learning and teaching in order to make learning a fruitful experience.³⁶ Based on this foundation some of the areas being developed by ÖZEPS in terms of materials, programmes and training include: Individualised learning and differentiated teaching, positive assessment and achievement evaluation, prevention of violence (the previously mentioned White Feather initiative), peer mediation and co-working with stakeholders. They are also involved in initial teacher training, ongoing professional development, and the establishment and implementation of professional standards in education.

According to Mag. Brigitte Schröder, the first and current Head of ÖZEPS, the directive from the BMUKK to schools is unequivocally clear. Learning in its broadest context is to be made available to each individual student in such a way so that they can access it and participate fully to the best of their ability.³⁷ What the minimum requirements are and how the consistency of what is delivered is monitored is unclear and ÖZEPS is currently in the process of completing a report about Social Learning (SL) as it is being delivered in Austrian schools. This report will also serve as a collection of recommendations and tools for all schools. While the aim is to eventually integrate Social Learning (SL) into the learning and teaching of all subjects, it already exists as an individual subject area in many

schools. This subject is compulsory in all secondary schools except for the Secondary academic schools, which are in the process of curriculum review. According to guidelines, SL may be delivered during one or two timetabled hours per week or delivered in blocks in the form of projects or other initiatives.

'Personality Development and Social Learning' events are regularly organized for teachers by ÖZEPS to promote the learning of social competencies by teachers, and provide professional support and networking across schools. An example would be the conference held in March 2012 specifically on the theme of Peer Learning.

ÖZEPS clearly has a big job ahead of it and will have its work cut out to maintain a balance between the needs of the students and educators in the broad context of LEARNING, and the direction and expectations of its 'employer' - the BMUKK, in the midst of the battle for reform. While Personality Development and Social Learning have been made pillars of the new direction in education they have not been thrust into the spotlight. ÖZEPS faces a number of hurdles such as the still selective structure of schooling with all its biases, where academic performance is rated as a very high priority, and where there is a group of teachers for whom change, for whatever reason, may not be desirable. Perhaps it is politically unwise to promote the well-being of stakeholders in a public battle over standards, working conditions and comparative statistics. Instead it may be better to maintain a very strong focus on Learning in the broadest context of Learning and Teaching, and to let this guide any change. In this way ÖZEPS would remain a facilitator and this approach would allow for creative ideas to grow and initiatives to speak for themselves. One such initiative doing just that is in the Austrian state of Styria.



When school and happiness do not collide but coincide

"The homework for today – Simply be happy! – **How a new subject is changing school.**"³⁸

This idea was based on a perceived need from students and teachers and, with the development of a new model, was implemented in 2009/2010 with six pilot schools, twenty-one classes, almost 500 students, over 2000 hours of preparation and review, for the delivery of about 800 contact hours.³⁹ By 2010/2011 there were forty-nine schools⁴⁰ and a list for 2012/2013 indicates an additional 45 schools associated with the programme.⁴¹ While the majority are primary schools, the programme is also in middle, secondary academic, and vocational schools. In German, the school subject is called "Glück", and this name is the cause of either consternation or amusement because the term used in German can mean both "luck" and "to be happy". The Glück programme was developed by Ernst Fritz-Schubert, the head teacher of the Willy-Hellpach-Schule in Heidelberg, Germany and was then adapted for the Austrian context by Dr. Chibici Revneanu. As such it is important to understand a little of the background to the subject from Ernst Fritz-Schubert's perspective.

a) "Glück" as developed by Ernst Fritz-Schubert

Fritz-Schubert wrote a book (2008)⁴² about the process of introducing the subject "Glück" into his school and it should be remembered that the setting for much of what he wrote is Germany, although one can usually draw

parallels with the system in Austria, given the connected history of school development in the two countries. In the first six chapters he describes the reality for a student in a school system which starts to be selective when the child is ten; an age after which some of the most important processes and stages of maturation and brain/cognitive development take place. This is then placed in the wider global setting in terms of the impact of economic competition, which fuels the motivation of countries to ensure that their children and adolescents can keep up or be ahead of others. This is linked to the rise of stress-

are able experience even the most challenging of experiences from a mentally healthier position and perspective. From this point on Fritz-Schubert moves more in the direction of thinking about the 'how'. He introduces the concept of "Glück" as "to be happy" in the context of "moments of happiness" as well as an overall sense of positive wellbeing in one's life.⁴⁵ In the search for and consideration of various sources of happiness and well-being, the focus fell on what the Austrian therapist Viktor E. Frankl calls the "existential vacuum" or the lack of a sense of purpose; something Fritz-Schubert described as being com-

In systems where having to repeat a year or being relegated to 'lower' schools were options the (levels of school-related) fears were especially strong.

related illnesses in the young and statistics, which were beginning to show that school-related fears were now evident in an alarming number of children. The level of school-related fear increased through the grade levels. In systems where having to repeat a year or being relegated to 'lower' schools were options the fears were especially strong. Needless to say, the roles and expectations of parents and educators were also highlighted as having a significant impact.⁴³

As an interesting perspective, Fritz-Schubert then refers to the words of psychologist, Alina Wilms, who coordinated the psychological response team for victims after a shooting rampage, when she stated that, "Children must be raised tougher to withstand disappointment, to think positively in difficult situations and to search for new perspectives".⁴⁴ This clearly refers to the personality of children which must be developed so that they

mon amongst students for whom school was merely a cognitive exercise.⁴⁶ Filling this existential vacuum with opportunities for self-development, self-discovery, selflessness and even challenge is a way of addressing the matter of purpose.

In discussing the need for children and adolescents to learn to trust themselves and others, four elements from research on resilience were identified. All of them refer to the nature of the relationships surrounding a student. These elements are: strong ties to a role model or mentor, the atmosphere of the school, the young person's social network, and the family. Within the school it is clear that members of staff must take on responsibility for more than just the academic context, as they clearly determine the nature of the environment. Teachers are there to give support and orientation to students. Fritz-Schubert states that educators essentially seek

to impart a sense of ‘humanity’ with the appropriate ‘values’ such as justice, honesty and freedom. Through experiences of demonstrated honesty, openness and tolerance and the personal values of respect, trust, independence and responsibility a sense of harmony should be established. While there is no question that standards and expectations can be high and challenging goals for personal achievement set, a focus on mistakes, unfair or irrelevant consequences, or a lack of choice, consideration and empathy would essentially shake the foundations of a student’s trust in themselves and others.⁴⁷

programme was made up of a wide cross-section of occupations all related to working with people.

b) *The Austrian Chapter of “Glück”*

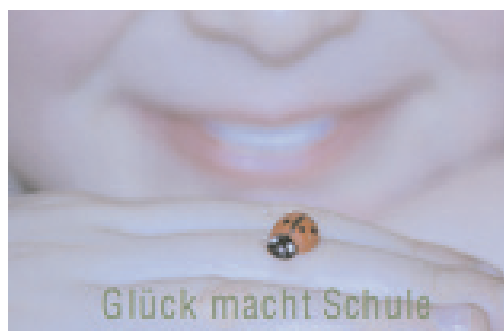
While the philosophy, rationale and structural framework of “Glück” are basically the same in Germany and Austria, the exact content and methods do vary.

In the year 2000, the first primary school teachers in the province of Styria became “Glück” ‘personality tutors’. In Austria the Pedagogical University in Styria is the base for

Fritz-Schubert states that educators essentially seek to impart a sense of ‘humanity’ with the appropriate ‘values’ such as justice, honesty and freedom.

So the challenge for a school is to focus on the student in a manner, which promotes personal growth on all levels while maintaining the integrity of being a formal institution of education. If this is achieved the students will feel valued, have or develop a sense of purpose about this time in their lives, while constantly developing their personality and the resources they need to feel confident about moving on beyond school.

To more concretely define the thematic areas of the programme Fritz-Schubert looked at the subject called “Well-Being” run at Wellington College, a private boarding school in England⁴⁸ and at the work of Lord Richard Layard who wrote the book, *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science*.⁴⁹ Fritz-Schubert also thought about how the latest knowledge of neuro-biology, neuro-psychology and sports science could be used in school and in the end his creative team that developed the



the introduction of “Glück” as a subject in schools, and, as was the case in Germany, the project was given a scientific research status, whereby data would be collected and evaluated over an initial period of four years. The “Glück” model is based on a specific curriculum, differentiated to cover all levels of schooling (ages 6 to 18) and is based on six modules; one more than in Germany. Overall the content of the five modules is the same and the additional module is ‘The Self and Social Responsibility’.

The stated goals of the whole programme are to educate happy and self-assured students, impart life skills, and to maintain a focus on the psychological and physical health of the children and adolescents, thereby also establishing a foundation for the prevention of violence in Styrian schools.

The pedagogical delivery of the subject is activity and project-oriented, and to support teachers there is professional development conducted by the Pedagogical University of Styria, a handbook with useful models and examples of lessons, and an online platform for the exchange of information and ideas. For staff there is a weekend training workshop per module and an official certificate is awarded upon the completion of all six modules. It is not compulsory for a teacher to complete all six modules. However, the teacher responsible for a particular module in their school is required to have completed the training for that module. . Students are not graded but they are required to keep a personal journal to keep track of their thoughts and reflections about their experiences in each topic area. As opposed to Germany where students can also choose this subject for matriculation, in Styria it is considered a supportive subject for learning life skills. Once adopted by the school it is compulsory for the students to participate in the programme. The framework of delivery is based on one lesson per week during a thirty-six week school year. However, schools have autonomy in deciding how this time will be spent; for example, in individual project days, a project week or in a lesson once a week.⁵⁰

The six modules are:

- 1 The Enjoyment of Life - Emotional Well-Being (Freude am Leben-Seelisches Wohlbefinden)
- 2 The Enjoyment of Personal Achievement (Freude an der eigenen Leistung)
- 3 Nutrition and Physical Well-Being (Ernährung und körperliches Wohlbefinden)
- 4 The Body in Motion (Der Körper in Bewegung)
- 5 The Body as the Medium of Expression (Der Körper als Ausdrucksmittel)
- 6 The Self and Social Responsibility (Das Ich und die soziale Verantwortung)

The first module, which has the motto, “to strengthen the strengths”, is designed to highlight that optimism and a positive, self-image increases a sense of wellbeing, and respectful contact with others creates a good atmosphere. Students take a good look at themselves and others from various perspectives in the contexts of their ‘identity’ and what it means to ‘be happy’ or experience ‘well-being’. In the second module the students are guided to recognise that effort and commitment bring about positive emotions and that happiness or wellbeing is actually a dynamic process in which they can be pro-active and initiate change. Challenge, potential and realisation of goals are normal parts of life to be encouraged. Here a topic of focus is the student’s world of learning in a broad sense; exploring their own learning patterns and competencies and considering how these can be best used and developed. Often students lack adequate nutrition in their daily lives and this is addressed through Module Three which addresses nutrition, how it impacts on one’s ability to perform, and the direct connection between eating habits and health. Students get the opportunity to explore the world of agricultural produce, spices, and herbs, by using all their senses. They experience the benefits of a shared meal in terms of preparation and consumption as sources of wellbeing and consider the cultural differences of table culture. In Module Four the main point is that movement contributes significantly to the promotion of an individual’s general state of health and leads to an overall sense of wellbeing. Additionally it serves as a good

release valve for aggression. Schools are encouraged to consider activities beyond the realms of traditional sport and competition. The intention is to help the student discover what they enjoy in terms of movement, individually and in a group. The module also provides some cognitive background to physical improvement and achievement, and thereby helps students to learn about their body and to know how it feels with a balance between movement and relaxation.⁵¹

Taking into account the connection between body and mind, or the physical and the emotional, the fifth module, the Body as a Medium of Expression is aimed at providing students with different contexts through which to explore this. With an introduction to the dramatic arts, students individually and in groups experiment with and present or perform the elements of voice through speech and sound, and the body through expression and movement. This promotes a greater sense of awareness about the 'roles' played by people and the positive development of creativity and fantasy. Further to this, a connection to the rhythms of nature is sought. Last but not least is module six, based to some degree on Fritz-Schubert's discussion about a sense of purpose. Designed to bring forth a connection between the search for meaning and personal wellbeing through the experience of empathy and selflessness, this module is about taking action as an individual or as a group to serve the needs of the wider community.⁵²

At the end of the 2009/2010 school year, the educational authority of Styria issued a press release in which the results of a survey of all 'Glück' pilot schools were made public. No information was provided about the nature of the survey. The press release included comments that:

- The trust between teachers and students had developed and deepened so that even

conflict situations from outside school could also be handled in class discussions.

- The students developed a sense of pleasure regarding their own school performance.
- There was a better climate in the classroom.
- The 'Glück' journal was a major anchor for the students.
- The working atmosphere with the students was often very enjoyable and most of the time they were very enthusiastic.
- "The work with the students in this hour also made us, the teachers, happy."
- 'Glück' is the new favourite subject for students!⁵³

Additional feedback from students and teachers provided by the Pedagogical University in Styria included:

- As in no other subject, we could meet the needs of the students and get to the bottom of diverse problems.
- Students identify with the subject of "Glück" (it is important to them).
- Students take responsibility for themselves – and develop a sense of social responsibility.
- It can only work with the commitment and conviction of the teachers.⁵⁴

In the "Glück" programme it is not usually the students who decide what it is that they should be taught, and they might not even understand why they are learning something particular or doing a certain activity, but it is the students who reflect on what they are being taught and it is in the students' reflections that the teachers find the purpose of their teaching work. The subject 'Happiness' or 'Wellbeing' is being delivered by motivated and trained staff with the aim of achieving the goal of educating children to be happy and self-assured, and focusing on relevant life skills which will ultimately generate a positive cycle which will have its own momentum.

Teachers who have opted to be part of this new subject are clearly benefiting personally, as they explore the concepts of 'happiness' and 'well-being' themselves and then share this with their students. For example, teachers commented on the fact that it was a lovely experience to explore the ideas of nutrition with the students and then to purchase ingredients together, prepare meals as a group and to sit down to share them properly. Also that in the module about the body in motion they had the opportunity to try different kinds of physical activity beyond the sports programmes of their schools, such as kendo, kayaking or dance. With the growth of this programme there will be the familiar challenges faced by all new programmes such as meeting the demand for training or the consistency of delivery by a staff still fortunate enough to be able to choose to participate in the programme.

It may be an early indicator that of the 94 schools registered with the programme in 2012/13, 60 are primary schools and 20 are some form of the lower secondary school⁵⁵. However, given the very positive start made in schools at all levels, the support by the authorities, the reported benefits for the students and staff, and the opportunity to influence the traditional culture of relationships within Austrian schools, this pilot programme is providing a social and emotional momentum.

From a programme which is riding a wave of growing popularity and public awareness to one which is perhaps less known in Austrian educational circles, but which is also making an impact and spreading within and beyond the borders of Austria.

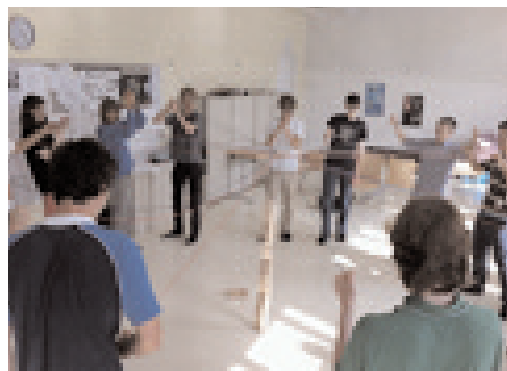
The Way of KoSo® (Communication and Social Competence)

"I see myself seeing myself"
Paul Valéry

"I see myself seeing us"
KoSo

"We are reflection"
Roman Braun⁵⁶

Information about this programme is not widely distributed and as such it was sought directly from the founder of **K**ommunikation and **S**ocialkompetenz (KoSo), Dr. Renate Wustinger. The English translation of this programme is Communication and Social Competence and in this case study it will be referred to by its original acronym, KoSo. Until recently Dr. Wustinger was a teacher and the coordinator for KoSo at the Sir Karl Popper School (SKPS), which is part of the Wiedner Secondary Academic School in Vienna. This semi-independent school was established in 1998 as a pilot school for the support and advancement of gifted students and Dr. Wustinger joined the faculty as a teacher of French. She pursued ongoing personal and professional development in the areas of didactics, mediation, neuro-linguistic programming (NLP), and occupational supervision amongst others, and at some point the idea of a subject teaching students content and skills from these and similar areas was considered. In 2000/2001 the programme was born. Given that the school itself was a pilot school, it was possible to develop KoSo as a pilot project, approved by the Vienna School Authorities. While there may be some variety in the delivery of KoSo in different schools it should be noted that the consistency and quality of the programme is maintained by way of the fact that it is a registered product ®, and an organisation must receive the approval of Dr. Wustinger to offer it. The primary sources of information regarding the programme are the website (www.koso.at), the book outlining the methodology⁵⁷, the teacher work book⁵⁸, and interviews with Dr. Wustinger and students in the programme.



While attending a KoSo lesson for Grade 6 students (aged 15 – 16) of a Secondary Academic School a comment made by the teacher before they began a teamwork activity was, “This should be interesting because there are a lot of Alphas in this class.” Also, “This group’s main theme is ‘dominance’”⁵⁹ This was a reference to the fact that the same group had completed a number of such activities and in the reflections and discussions about the application of group dynamics theory which followed the above themes had emerged. The students were given a task to complete, which required coordinated movement and communication. Each of the students, standing in a circle had a string connected in the centre to a ring. Below the ring was a small, wire loop like a trapeze. Standing around on the floor were small, wooden cuboid blocks, each with a slit cut into it at particular angle. The task for the group was to manoeuvre the trapeze to the slit of an agreed block, pick it up and place it in the centre of the circle. Each block was to be

placed on the previous one to construct a tower. In round one they were allowed to speak and in the second round the task was to be completed in silence.

It was clear from the practiced manner in which the group engaged with the task, that they had done quite a few such activities. This, however, did not mean that that they were ‘pretending’ in the presence of a guest and that personality traits were not evident in members of the group. They just got on with the task at hand and according to the teacher each member of the group was authentic. For anyone who has participated in or facilitated such group activities, it would be clear that this was not an unusual task, but it was also not an easy one.

What was remarkable was the nature of the discussions at the point of task evaluation and reflection. The students were examining all elements of the task and the behaviour of the participants, including themselves, in a

“When the human being observes themselves in their own ‘looking at the world’, and shares with others what has been perceived, then they are particularly close to their own being (human).” (Wurm, 2012).

very intellectual manner, referring to the terminology of group dynamics theory and models of communication. A look at the written material produced about and for the programme, would lead to the observation that the programme is based on a very strong theoretical foundation and essentially delivered on a cognitive level. So where is the social and emotional learning?

The pedagogical goal of KoSo is an ontological one – the study of the nature of existence and being.

“When the human being observes themselves in their own ‘looking at the world’, and shares with others what has been perceived, then they are particularly close to their own being (human). That the abilities, commonly quoted and valued in the working world as ‘soft skills’, can also be acquired is a side-

dividual interpretations and reactions. KoSo is considered both a subject and a “methodology or even a ‘meta-methodology’ for interpersonal communication, whereby in a particular setting the students experience the complexities of communication, observe and include themselves in the observation, which... allows for a very special form of learning.”⁶¹ This systemic-constructivist approach is emphasized throughout the programme material and the introduction of the teaching workbook states that KoSo is not called SoKo because it is communication which is seen as the primary element and the foundation for social competency. As such the existing constructs of knowledge and perceived realities are dealt with as the result of communication. Through various activities the students gain an insight into systemic connections at various levels – the individual, the group, organisations, and society.⁶² The subject material for this programme is very

... simulations, group challenges, role-plays and theatre improvisation are important methods of teaching.

effect: It is about embracing without fear, and living with, the competency of personal liberty or freedom and the responsibility resulting from this.”⁶⁰

This is certainly a lofty philosophy, however this vision also makes clear the high expectations of the programme and the belief that these are achievable. As with ÖZEPS, which works with the concept of ‘learning’ and the Pedagogical University of Styria which works with ‘happiness or wellbeing’, for the Sir Karl Popper School (SKPS) and KoSo the focus is ‘communication’ in its widest theoretical and practical contexts, intricately linked with the social condition of cultural, situational and in-

extensive and theories, models and tools range from areas such as streams of constructivism, transactional analysis, and elements of neuro-linguistic programming and family systems sculpting to conversation techniques, managing intra- and interpersonal conflict, leadership styles and social and organisational networks.

Essential to the teaching and learning process of KoSo is the connection to one’s actions or behaviour in concrete situations. As such it would be appropriate to see KoSo as an activity-based subject. This means that activities such as simulations, group challenges, role-plays and theatre improvisation are important

methods of teaching. When asked, students completing their fourth and final year of KoSo indicated that generally speaking, during the first two years it was approximately a 50 – 50 split in time between theory and practice, and during the final two years when they had chosen to do KoSo as a graduation subject the split was about 70 – 30 in favour of theory.⁶³ The process of reflection is considered at the heart of KoSo and in the reflection process nothing is considered to be irrelevant. The teachers and students are part of the context and provide for themselves and each other the material and forum for the processes of KoSo.

“What happens if nothing happens?
Something always happens! Even if
nothing happens, there is the question,
“Why did nothing happen?”⁶⁴

The typical KoSo progression of communication sees a change in the focus of the reflection. This means that students would reflect upon the nature and role of each of the elements in the order listed below:

1. Perception
2. Emotion
3. Language
4. Methods
5. Theories⁶⁵

In the midst of this activity, communication, reflection and social interaction, we then see how the social and emotional needs of the students are also being met on a variety of levels – understanding is the key. They begin to recognize and understand the components of social settings and interactions, and experience in a very focused manner the various elements which play a role in constructing each context. An example of this would be dealing with a conflict, which may have occurred in school. If the students involved had already had KoSo training it is likely that through activities and/or role-playing, they may have

examined the nature of conflict in depth and in a variety of settings. As such, in addressing a conflict in school, through their level of understanding, the students involved would be able to more quickly arrive at a point of resolution, either by themselves or with the support of other students or staff. Reflection is a shared process and the perspectives and interpretations of others confront each learner. Differences are a central and inevitable feature of each KoSo experience and then in a process called ‘Re-Entry’, the learners decide how much and in what capacity they might take the results of their reflections into account with regards to their own, future actions.⁶⁶

The handbook states that in KoSo there is opportunity for growth in three areas:

- The dimension of ‘**Personality**’ – to improve readiness/preparedness for change.
- The dimension of ‘**Knowledge**’ – to improve the ability to make choices.
- The dimension of ‘**Social Interaction**’ – to improve the ability to communicate.⁶⁷

So how does KoSo look from the perspective of the student? As a subject it has its place in the upper grades of the school (the final four years of school), and in the SKPS this is delivered in two compulsory lessons a week for grades five to eight (approximately ages 15 to 18), and from 2003/2004 onwards KoSo could be chosen by students as a subject for examination and graduation. Additionally the SKPS has a coaching programme for the students which, according to Dr Wustinger, allows the students to address other personal and school-based needs or concerns, and does not therefore affect KoSo as a subject.⁶⁸ This means that KoSo is first and foremost a subject taught within the timetable and not a programme or tool for handling the challenges of daily school life faced by the students. KoSo is not a method designed for deliberate application to school situations. However, by

providing an increased understanding and awareness of human contexts KoSo contributes to a smoother running of the system to the benefit of those in it.

On both the official website and in the methodology book one can find the reflections of Magdalena Steinrück after she completed four years of KoSo. She begins with the comment that KoSo has the peculiar feature that it can be connected to everything, a sort of “universal versatility”. Magdalena’s first phase of experiences with KoSo was shared with twenty three other students who did not know each other. This changed rapidly as the first lessons were filled with communication

point in time for each individual student that they ‘realised’ what was going on. The “oh now I get it” moment. This might have come unexpectedly, however, as it was usually at a moment when they, as individuals, were particularly engaged in trying to find an answer or understand ‘why’ something was the case; and frequently this realisation came about during the process of reflection at the end of an activity.

Magdalena stated that the second phase of KoSo began two years later for her when she chose it as one of her subjects for graduation. A number of students who also did so gave reasons such as enjoying the

“KoSo gave me self-confidence when I expressed an observation which led to a new direction of thought and a turn in the process of the group.” (Magdalena Steinrück).

activities and the flow of or integration of the subject into their school life was helped by its regularity. There was no real sense of working on personal development as the students enjoyed both interaction and the discovery of new things together. There was a discovery of discovering taking place and she felt that intuitively she knew the foundations were being laid for important realisations. The significance of reflection was learned as a familiar pattern of questions became obvious, and understood better when this pattern was applied to the emotional states in activities where various levels of communication were identified.⁶⁹ The students in the KoSo classes explained that at first they did not really understand why they were doing things such as reflecting in a specific way and repeating the process with each activity. It was usually at a

experiences of the previous two years or wanting what they perceived as the ‘final picture’ of the programme.⁷⁰ During this phase it was felt that the skills that had been practiced could now be applied effectively and students described enjoying moments when they experienced the recognition of something familiar or important in another context, or experiencing moments of discomfort in real life and applying a model from class to then take action or resolve situations.⁷¹ In the programme there was then a move towards bringing in the larger contexts of organisational and societal structures, but also towards an even greater intra-personal focus. Magdalena described this phase as like an oval running track when one would pass the same spot over and over again, but still move forward overall, because while it is in

principle the same spot, the next time round it is of course different in some way.⁷² The final year of KoSo is more philosophical in nature and connected to theory. However, by this stage students are able to connect theory and their everyday experiences. At this point Magdalena described that they were then given the same experience as when KoSo had first started for them – their teacher confronted them with material which directly challenged their assumption that they now had a strong basis or construct for dealing with the world. This was a reminder that just because you can “see seeing”, “discover discovering”, and that you think you can now observe yourself in the act of observing, it does not mean that some sort of end has been reached – after all this was never the point of KoSo.⁷³

“KoSo is what you make of it. KoSo gave me self-confidence when I expressed an observation which led to a new direction of thought and a turn in the process of the group. Every contribution counts and through this KoSo can become everything, just not nothing. After all even nothing is something.”⁷⁴

As one could well imagine, the degree to which a student might access what is offered through KoSo, on cognitive, social and emotional levels may depend on a number of factors such as personal engagement, level of academic ability or the type of school. The fourth year students who were interviewed agreed that the course is VERY teacher determined. They were of the opinion that it is not only the knowledge of the teacher but very much the experience and personality of the teacher which determines the ‘success or effectiveness’ of the course. It is a way of thinking and harder to teach or share than content.⁷⁵ While it is no guarantee for effective teaching, since 2003/2004 various Pedagogical Universities and individual schools

provide training for teachers who will teach or want to learn about KoSo. To understand the extent and framework of what teachers need to learn about KoSo to start teaching the subject, a school in Kilchberg, Zurich announced that prior to starting the course teachers would undergo six days of training with Dr. Wustinger. They would cover, amongst other topics:

- the essence and fundamental approach of KoSo, the distinctions between this subject and other social learning programmes, and connecting KoSo to the rest of the curriculum.
- the didactic principles for teaching KoSo, models of communication, activities for perception and interpretation, feedback structures.
- the relevance and significance of constructivism for pedagogy and communication.
- activities using improvisation theatre, basics of group and team dynamics, models of conflict transformation, and conflict free communication in school.⁷⁶

As one might imagine, such training is likely to be very intense, especially if this direction of content and skills is completely new to a person. This introductory training is no guarantee of a quality level of delivery and schools would certainly have to consider how to ensure ongoing support for staff and students as they build the basis of this subject. The effectiveness of the programme would be helped if teachers already have some background in these areas, and if not, team teaching or rotating students through units taught by an ‘expert’ teacher could be an option. There is likely to be some discussion about whether KoSo is timetabled as a formal subject in a school, for which class levels it is compulsory, and whether students will be awarded marks and an overall grade in their end of year school report. The cognitive level

is really aimed at the older students (ages 15 to 18/19) in a school system and even they will need time to personally experience and understand their own realisations, if the programme is to be delivered according to its original vision. While an exciting option with non-academic benefits, with regards the topic of this paper, in the end KoSo is not a tool designed to provide an immediate measure of support and learning directly in the context of social and emotional education. Schools will require other programmes to address the needs of all students.

The SchülerInnenschule in the Werkstätten- und Kulturhaus (WUK) (The Students' School in the Workshops and House of Culture)

The final case study is different from the first two in that it goes beyond being an additional programme or subject. In this case the nature and structure of this more flexible school model is based on the social and emotional needs of the students.

This is an initiative developed by a small private school. The so-called Schülerinnenschule in the Werk- und Kulturhaus, (the Students'



Hofmühlgasse (Freie Schule Hofmühlgasse) and the School Collective (Schulkollektive), the Schülerinnenschule in the WUK is one of the oldest, private and alternative school projects centred around social and emotional education in Austria. The Schülerinnenschule is based on democratic principles, which underpin all decision making processes and engage pupils, teachers and parents in a constantly moderated communication process about the nature of daily school life, structural questions, school governance and the range of projects offered by the school. This means that the school seeks to operate on the principle of shared solution building and decision

The Schülerinnenschule is based on democratic principles, which underpin all decision making processes and engage pupils, teachers and parents in a constantly moderated communication process ...

School in the Workshops and House of Culture) was founded in 1979 and since 1982 has been situated in Vienna's ninth district. It is a school for students aged 9 to 18 and currently has approximately 50 students. Other than the so called Free School

making in as many areas as possible while adhering to the requirements of the Vienna School Board.

There is an agreed set of values and principles that all members of the school community

must respect as a basis of contributing to the community. These include non-violent, respectful behaviour, a certain mindfulness towards each other and respect for the uniqueness of each individual and their talents. Through these values and principles a certain attitude and school atmosphere is created, fostering understanding of each person. This way the school achieves a very strong sense of belonging and fairness among all pupils. The Schülerinnenschule has become a beacon in the landscape of alternative learning and a role model for many other initiatives, which wish to change course from the traditional academic learning approach towards a mindset focused on social and emotional education. Particularly during the last few years

first to ninth class (ages 9 to 18) of the Austrian school system, i.e. for the whole period of compulsory schooling.

- Students can be awarded a certificate of achievement on completing their studies at the school, which enables them to continue on to further education at other schools.
- The school is following the academic guidelines of the “Glocksee-Curriculum” which allows for a more individualized approach to each pupil and develops their social, emotional and creative skills and level of self esteem.
- Personal experience is an integrated and important aspect of the learning process.
- Classes are not based on the age of the pupils but according to the individual

Classes are not based on the age of the pupils but according to the individual levels of achievement in subject areas.

the school has begun to change its structures and procedures in terms of modern principles of organizational development, thereby addressing the area of quality assurance in the education provided.

The basic school structure and the educational aims of the Schülerinnenschule in the WUK are:

- The school runs on a five day, whole day routine, from 08:00 to 17:00.
- The school is a private school but has the official status required to issue school reports.
- The school provides places for 50 students which makes for relatively small classes across the age groups.
- The school has a staff of eight teachers.
- The school provides education from the

levels of achievement in subject areas.

- The teachers function as facilitators for the personal learning processes of each student.
- The assessment of student learning includes self-evaluation and portfolio work, and tests may be given but are not essential if the meeting of the learning objectives can be assessed through other means; personal academic targets are discussed with each student individually and a personal work plan is created every academic year. Students therefore follow their own timetable.
- Parents are involved in the school for a minimum of ten hours per month, providing help with projects such as theatre productions, maintenance or participation in other areas of school life such as

chaperoning trips when additional help is required.

- Besides the normal individual timetable there are three blocks of time in the year which are reserved for larger projects to foster cooperative leadership skills, self esteem, team building, developing flexibility in dealing with a wide range of life situations and finding creative ways to solve contemporary problems on various levels. Projects might include work experience or extended trips. Some examples of projects can be found at the end of this case study.

An example of daily school life in the Schülerinnenschule in the WUK:

School starts for all students at 9:00 a.m. in the morning. In the period between 7:00 a.m. and 9:00 a.m. students can already arrive and share breakfast together and with the staff. Then three times a week the school day starts with a Plenum of all students, where school life, new things, pressing personal matters and important school issues are openly discussed among all the students

After the Plenum the regular school day directed towards academic content begins, based on each student's personal timetable of classes. Before the midday break there is a set of three longer class periods. During the midday break students have lunch together, taking turns at helping to coordinate the meal. After lunch classes resume, with a focus on sport, crafts or other creative activities. Various group dynamic activities also allow students to develop their soft skills.

Some examples of projects at the Schülerinnenschule in the WUK:

Three times a year this daily school routine is suspended to free up larger blocks of time for projects. Projects are part of the wholistic approach to learning through an integrated process of direct experiences involving all the senses, the development of new competences, the integration of prior and new knowledge, collaboration and finding solutions. The team as a social body with its interpersonal relationships and the specific relationship between teacher/facilitator and student is held in high regard. Encouraging

Coming to decisions through consensus rather than by voting is the aim, regardless of the matter raised.

together with the teaching staff. The most important aims of the Plenum are to give students the opportunity to actively participate in decision making concerning all school-related matters, to foster a culture of negotiation and respect, and to provide the experience that their own ideas and opinions, however critical or strange they might initially seem, may be of importance to the whole community. Coming to decisions through consensus rather than by voting is the aim, regardless of the matter raised.

social responsibility, teamwork, personal initiative and creativity are often the main objectives of the projects. The projects are a few days to one to two weeks in length and sometimes the locations are international; and have included trips to California, Great Britain or Morocco. The projects are usually compulsory, however, this does not always apply to the international trips.

The project topics vary, but are mainly connected with the daily life or life contexts of the

Encouraging social responsibility, teamwork, personal initiative and creativity are often the main objectives of the projects.

students. Projects can be proposed by the students and are discussed in the Plenum. Everyone from the school body can contribute to and participate in the projects. All ideas are considered. The slogan is: the sky's the limit!



The Girls-/Boys Project

The Girls-/Boys Project is run through the whole school year, providing girls and boys with the possibility to critically reflect on their roles as females and males in everyday society. Self-awareness and self-reflection, my place in my peer group, the increase of self-esteem and understanding one another are the targets of the activities in this project.

The project uses the methods of group dynamic activities, group discussions and a wide range of forms of creative expression such as dance, role-play and theatre workshops, painting and sculpture.

Animated cartoon project

The animated cartoon project has been run for many years. The Schülerinnenschule has become famous for this project and has won many prizes for its animations. Examples of the animated cartoons made include:

- 2002/2003 Cartoon "Children Rights";
- 2004/2005 Cartoon "Wir sind alle anders und doch gleich" ("We are all different and similar at the same time");
- 2005/2006 Cartoon "Sie - Es - Er" ("She - It - He");
- 2007/2008 Cartoon "FAIR" ("Fair", - Fair Trade, Fair Play, being fair in the workplace, being fair with one another in politics and in daily life)

During the animated cartoon week the students work with artists, finding a topic and transforming the idea into an animated cartoon. Storyboards are worked out, the script

The Schülerinnenschule has become famous for...(the animated cartoon) project and has won many prizes for its animations.

is transformed into visual sequences, the scenes are pinned down, the film sequences are shot and the sound files are produced. All these steps involve intense engagement and growing together as a production team. At the end there is the presentation of the animated cartoon and an analysis. The animated cartoons are sent to specific festivals and contests.

Personal quotes from the students might give the best idea about what it is like being a student at the Schülerinnenschule in the WUK.

Nicki, 15 years

I think that in our school learning is very easy. I like it very much, that we children can say our opinion and have a vote about what we are doing e.g. to which places we travel.

Luise, 12 years

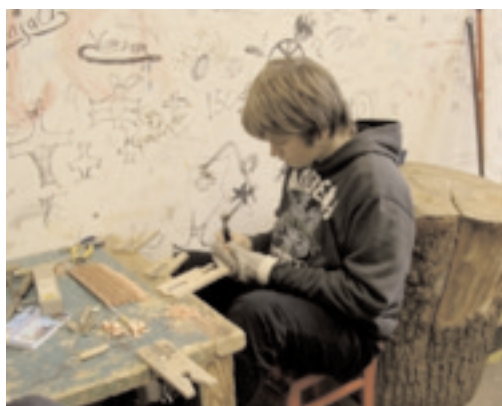
I like this school because we are a democratic school. Everybody counts. I like it very much that we can study in our rhythm and personal way. Three days per week we have Plenum. The Plenum is very convenient because we get all the information for the whole week and speak about all matters of the school. We also have great projects and trips.

Felix, 14 years

I love this school, because we can organize and decide nearly everything on our own. We even decide our own rules as a community.

Charley, 14 years

I like to go to this school, because I have the feeling that I can develop my personal talents and skills. In my former school I hated that I was not seen as an individual but only as one among many others. In our school here it is the complete opposite. I can organize my time according to my work rhythm and I feel much more self responsibility. I also like to be here because I feel that I can participate in the decision making process. I know that



my opinion has an equal weight to all the other students' opinions and even to that of the teachers.

Indiana, 16 years

I am a heavily dyslexic person. So I have big difficulties in writing and reading. I never fitted into traditional school systems. It is the first time that I feel that I belong to a school environment. It feels like the school saved my life...

Private schools like the Schülerinnenschule in the WUK have come to fill a very real need in the Austrian educational landscape. The traditional school path is not able to deal with the social and emotional needs of students who do not fit the mould, and it is a rigid mould at that. It is not always easy for such schools to exist and without them a number of students would be lost. In the end, official

The traditional school path is not able to deal with the social and emotional needs of students who do not fit the mould, and it is a rigid mould at that.

recognition is not the same as receiving government subsidies and therefore financial viability is always a key factor.

Conclusion

The story of social and emotional education in Austria at this point in time is unfortunately about the very real struggle the country is facing to confront the notion of changing a culturally distinct and historically fortified pillar of the society – its system of education. Despite a general sense of doubt about real change, over time the grumblings of the population about its own system became louder as year after year the same questions are still raised about features of the school system, which do not make sense, about the way students suffer and how parents always have to find ways to help their children to survive. Over a very long time the system has been politically sustained and administratively run by those who also went through it. Based on its organisational stagnation the whole structure could not help but show signs of strain and it was only a matter of time before pressure impacted in such a way which could no longer be ignored. No doubt there were always individual educators and schools which provided an environment and learning experiences which students will remember fondly, however, systems of school education are about addressing the contemporary needs of all students.

The pressure began to increase when Austria's borders were opened to the wider context of Europe and it had to establish baselines for progress in various areas, including

education. Authorities enthusiastically shared knowledge and initiatives and Austria actively sought to gain valuable insights into various other models of education, which included elements addressing competencies and needs beyond the academic. The problem was not a lack of research, or the good intentions; somehow the problem was in transferring theory to practice. There has always been a lot of head shaking and public finger pointing whenever this issue has been raised, as no one wanted to take responsibility for the lack of progress. The spark, which caused an explosion to match the historical build up of pressure, was the release of OECD and EU reports and statistical results. From this point on the topic of education has regularly been on the front page of newspapers and almost every element of the historical structure and system has come under intense scrutiny.

It would seem that for many people the academic priorities of education are still the top indicators and the changes being made to the selective nature of the structure with the New Middle School and the standardisation of teacher qualifications will serve to strengthen the delivery and learning of the core literacies. However, these changes are also addressing social and emotional factors and introducing fundamental change to the culture of education. While these changes are not being accepted without some resistance, with the current media focus being on the difficult negotiations about teacher working conditions, the changes will automatically bring fresh perspectives about the interconnectedness of elements which meet the wider needs

of a school community. The creation and work of ÖZEPS in 2005 to guide Social Learning in Austrian schools has shown that the government recognises the need to address social and emotional education. While schools are required to offer programmes in

ten previously labelled as alternative, which many years ago saw the need to provide students with an alternative to the rigid nature of 'normal' Austrian schools. In many ways this type of school has always been preparing students with a greater array of competencies

(Schools) will need to continue moving in a direction which reflects SEE as a pillar of education, reflected in more than just single programmes and projects.

this direction there is still a need for growth, guidance and consistency to ensure the acceptance and effectiveness of such initiatives. They will need to continue moving in a direction which reflects SEE as a pillar of education, reflected in more than just single programmes and projects. There is still some way to go before SEE is seen in the culture of the schools, evidenced by the relationships, in the delivery of the curriculum and reflected in the positive recollection of how time at school has been spent.

This time of reform provides an opportunity for schools to adopt initiatives, models and programmes, which suit their student and school needs, and which have already experienced some measure of success.

It is good to know that schools like the Schülerinnenschule in the WUK exist; schools of-

to manage their lives. Given the nature of the New Middle School, the Schülerinnenschule and other 'alternative' schools may now provide valuable examples of how better to cater to the wholistic needs of a broader student body.

Programmes or subjects like KoSo are amazing to experience if delivered by very competent teachers and the wealth of cognitive and personal challenge should not be limited to a few schools. In fact something like KoSo may be perfect for the Academic secondary schools which are currently going through a process of curriculum review, and which may also be required to deliver programmes aimed at social learning. Given the nature of these schools, it would be an opportunity for them to develop a strong, yet different social and emotional culture by developing a deeper, cognitive basis for SEE and growing

(The Schulfach Glück) programme has arrived at a time when there is a deep desire for an educational environment which cares for the people who spend much of their time there.

from there. It should be noted again that KoSo is not the sole catchment area for various social and emotional factors in the Sir Karl Popper School. The school also has a coaching programme, which has been designed to provide students with additional support on a more personal level.

It is no surprise that the programme Schulfach Glück is meeting with such overwhelming resonance. This programme has arrived at a time when there is a deep desire for an educational environment which cares for the people who spend much of their time there. In offering students and staff the opportunity to explore the realms of 'happiness' and 'well-being' together using six realistic modules it is building relationships based on shared experiences. Even indirectly carrying this approach across into subject areas already introduces a better dimension to the learning and teaching which takes place. Going from six pilot schools to ninety-six participating schools in the space of four years, this programme allows for an optimistic view of SEE in Austria.

Social and emotional education is yet to experience a real boom throughout Austria and for this to happen some fundamental attitudes and perceptions need to change. Education as a whole is a difficult topic in Austria at the moment, and often the vision for the future has been blurred by a narrow focus on academic indicators. It is however, with determination and conviction that change must be made to happen to avoid the stagnation of the past. Social and emotional education addresses the need for students to be allowed to grow, and growth means change. The process of growth has begun in Austria and the future is positive.

Endnotes

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A modern, unbureaucratic and more autonomous school system involving all stakeholders and not subject to political influence.
That kindergartens are considered equal to school and Kindergarten teachers equal to school teachers.
A comprehensive range of pre-primary centres such as day-care centres and kindergartens as well as 'whole-day' child care options across the whole of Austria.
An education system in which the talents and abilities of all children and adolescents are recognised and continuously furthered throughout their schooling.
An end to the system of repeating a year of schooling for failing certain subjects as is currently the case, and an end to the need for such extensive tutoring of students outside school.
A range of 'whole-day' schools.
A socially fair and inclusive education system in which the division of students according to interests and ability only takes place after the stage of compulsory education.
An improvement of the recognition or status of the teaching profession and a financial plan to support this.
A commitment to the extension of and financial support for tertiary institutions and universities.
That the goal of 40% of school graduates being qualified for tertiary studies is reached by 2020.
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