

## Austria

**Integrative Lernwerkstatt Wien Brigittenau**

*This primary school with students aged 6-14 has a reform pedagogy focus and mixed-age classes including children with disabilities. The full-day school offers various compulsory and optional courses to its students, who are taught in flexible groupings that can be mixed or streamed in age and ability. Students document their work in presentations and portfolios to parents and teachers, who facilitate the learning process but leave students autonomous in defined limits. Class councils, peer mediation and other structures are used to develop students' social and emotional awareness. Emphasis is placed on teacher teams planning and reflecting together with regular supervision.*

**Main focus of Innovation:** LEARNERS, CONTENT, ORGANISATION

**Other keywords:** equity

**General Information**

**Name of the ILE:** Integrative Lernwerkstatt Wien Brigittenau (ILB)

**Location/Address:** A-1200 Wien, Vorgartenstrasse 50

**Website:** [www.lernwerkstatt.or.at](http://www.lernwerkstatt.or.at)

**ILE submitted by:** Federal Ministry of Education

**Rationale**

*Why do you suggest that it should be included in the project? How does it respond to 21<sup>st</sup> century learning challenges?*

Our school, which is a state school run by the municipality of Vienna, has had the following structural characteristics from its origin: All 12 classes are mixed-age classes with a reform pedagogy focus (pilot project approved by the Vienna Municipal School Board) for children aged 6 to 14 years. All classes include disabled children of different ages. The school is a full-day school (so-called open school) with two full-day focus days (Tuesdays and Thursdays from 8:30 to 16:00 for all pupils). In Addition to these structural dimensions, the school has, since its establishment, been piloting various forms of compulsory and optional course-offers where pupils spend a (smaller) part of their time at school in mixed groups (based on interest, ability, needs). In addition, the range of afternoon care activities is characterised by a high level of flexibility for staff (in terms of mobility of the coaches), as well as by a relatively large autonomy for pupils (in terms of choose able activities), all within clearly defined limits concerning space and time.

Various forms of active relationship building among all stakeholders, the development of a constructive culture of conflict resolution, as well as the implementation of projects aimed at preventing violence and raising gender awareness contribute to our school's special focus area, which can be described as "schooling the senses and nurturing social skills".

**Evidence**

*Is there any evidence or indications showing that this initiative achieves the outcomes that it is aiming at?*

For the purposes of internal evaluation among parents and teachers, our "quality committee", which has members from all groups of stakeholders, has supplied valuable feedback and data in 2 large-scale surveys carried out so far (2007, 2009) with very high return rates, which provided input for discussing changes and new developments.

Unfortunately, there is no funding available for external evaluation.

**Learning Aims / Intended Learning Outcomes of the ILE**

*What are the core learning aims and which knowledge, skills or attitudes are to be acquired? (These may include outcomes related to learners' social, interpersonal, or meta-cognitive development)*

The key reference framework for our teaching and educational activities includes the Austrian curricula for primary, special and general secondary schools. At our school, pupils are taught according to 5 different curricula at different age levels. Feedback on learning progress and on current focal points of learning activities is provided regularly in the form of personal presentations made by the pupils to parents and facilitators on a portfolio basis (pilot project for alternative performance assessment in the form of an organised collection of student work with comments from teachers). Various structural fixtures (class council, weekly coming-together-time, first steps towards peer mediation, PATHS (Providing Alternative Thinking Strategies) –programme, that is designed to facilitate the development of self-control, emotional awareness and interpersonal problem-solving skills, , extensive contacts with parents, etc.) have been set up to reflect the school's specific focus area (schooling the senses and nurturing social skills).

Regularly offered units dedicated to improve body (self-) awareness (creative dance) and self-confidence-improving offers based on dexterity (handicraft club) as well as daily-life skills (cooking) rank high on our list of priorities.

**Learners**

*Which group(s) of learners is it aiming at? Who is eligible to take part? How many learners are there? What are their ages?*

The school has been a primary school (age range 6 to 10/11) since 1998; starting from September 2009, it will cater also to older learners (up to 14/15 years). In the school year 2009/10, 260 learners are attending our school, distributed over years as follows: Year 1: 47, year 2: 65, year 3: 61, year 4: 65, year 5: 14; year 6 or higher: 8.

**Facilitators**

*Who are the teachers/facilitators? Who are the leaders? What are their professional backgrounds? What are their roles?*

The staff resources provided by the Austrian legislator for teaching and after-school care are referred to as teachers and educators. At our school, we introduced the term “learning facilitators” (“learning coaches”) for all our educational staff, regardless of whether they are deployed primarily in teaching or in after-school supervision, depending on their qualifications and employment contract. In our existing model concept and even more so within the scope of the pilot project approved by the Vienna Board of Education as well as by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education 2009, it is our intention to merge all learning, coaching and support activities provided by all our staff members as best as possible.

**Organization of the ILE**

*How is learning organised? How do learners and facilitators interact? What kind of pedagogy do they follow? What curriculum is used?*

In light of the age and skills mix present at our school, we have introduced a high level of differentiation and individualisation in the learning process. Learning in projects affords children opportunities to learn from one another across age and other categories (“younger” and “older”, “disabled” and “non-disabled”, etc.). On the other hand, there are phases in the learning process where learners are pooled in small same-ability groups or courses to work on or consolidate new contents. Interactions between learning facilitators and learners are governed by the principle of mutual respect, which presents a constant learning curve also for the adults involved in the process.

Our work is based on the so-called reform pedagogy, which has its roots in the 1920s. Our core group teams apply different reform pedagogy approaches in parallel, with different priorities, above all Montessori, Freinet, Jena plan and variants of open learning. (See also our mission statement).

The organizing frame is primarily determined by mixed age classes (so called “Stammgruppen” = home or base groups). Every base group consists of pupils across 3 or 4 year-levels, corresponding to the age and to the intellectual and physical point of development of each pupil. One remarkable structural goal of the new pilot project is the reduction of the range of levels in each base group from 4 years (that has been the institutional framework of Elementary Schools in Austria for decades) to 3 years (“starter groups” from 6 to 9 (10), “advanced groups” from 9 (10) to 12 (13), “finishing groups” from 12 (13) to 14 (15)).

The pedagogical background, the main motive and one of the central goals of the pilot project is to minimize the intersection resulting from the necessity of changing the school after the first 4 years (at the age of 10) for nearly all Austrian pupils (except: international schools, some confessional schools, many of the free schools).

The big challenge in this pilot project is the creation of much better solutions for pupils, parents and teachers/educators in providing a maximum of continuous guidance and learning support for every single child from the age of 6 to 14.

According to this central goal the pupils leave their base group every 3 years (exceptionally and only in single cases already after 2 or only after 4 years – depending on the individual level of development), but remain in the well-known setting and surroundings of their school.

In order to support this flowing switch from a starter base-group to an advanced group or from an advanced group to a finishing group the facilitators (teachers and educators) will only partially change so that there is also a personal continuity for the pupils as far as possible.

The ongoing restructuring process results in the following scheme for school-year 2010/11: 2 starter groups years 1-3, 8 starter groups years 1-4, 2 advanced groups years 4-6.

The prospective scheme for school year 2011/12: 5 starter groups years 1-3, 3 starter groups years 1-4, 2 starter (later on: advanced) groups years 2-4, 4 advanced groups years 4-6, 1 finishing group years 7-8.

### **Learning Context**

*In which context does learning take place? What does the physical learning environment look like? Are community resources used to facilitate learning and how?*

Our project is accommodated in a school building that is about a hundred years old and was renovated in the mid 90s, unfortunately based on outdated pedagogical criteria. Within these limitations, we use our creativity in developing the available indoor and outdoor facilities (courtyard, playground), following a design concept that provides for adequate furniture and attractive learning material and enables the need for social intercourse, physical activity as well as privacy.

An example of this concept is the tree-house one of the core groups is currently starting to build in the courtyard. This project, whose subject is "living and meeting places", took two years to plan and organise and is funded by the school's parents' association and the "Licht ins Dunkel" charity.

Our overall aim is to offer all children, especially the ones with disabilities, a friendly environment that is geared to the children's needs and provides an adequate framework for living and learning at school. This also implies the inclusion of non-pedagogical staff (janitors, kitchen staff, etc.) into the process and raising their awareness for sensitive issues.

### **History of ILE**

*Who initiated it? For what reasons was it started and with what purpose? Have these changed since?*

The foundations for this school model were laid when the school was founded and the Vienna Board of Education appointed, a primary school teacher as school principal in 1997/98, who was previously well known for his innovative work during 14 years of teaching. This new start provided an opportunity to implement an end-to-end model at a school location and, judging by the growing number of parents who want their children to attend, it has proved quite successful.

Based on 10 years of previous activities in this field, we have commenced a pilot project up to the end of compulsory schooling age and are currently putting all our efforts and motivation into preparing its implementation from the beginning of the school year 2009/10, which is going to be followed and superimposed by the creation of scenarios for the expansion and re-structuring of the entire school in the period of 2010 – 2013.

## Funding of the ILE

### *How is it funded?*

Basic funding is provided by the statutory provider, the school authorities and the employer of the “educators”.

The basic funding covers: the building itself, including furniture, all running expenses and repairs, costs for the pedagogical and non-pedagogical staff.

Part of the basic funding is a limited amount for schoolbooks and different learning material - - an amount of € 50, - (elementary school) to € 85, - (secondary I) granted by the federal government. An additional amount of approx. € 45,-/student/year for copybooks, handy-craft material, office infrastructure, copying paper etc. granted by the local government (City of Vienna).

The pupils go free on public transport depending on the submission of a written parental application every year. In addition: Free transport of children with disabilities by special cars, depending on the verification of the necessity through the school authorities.

In some fields of public funding (schoolbooks, public transport) parents are obliged to repay an amount of 5% - 10 % (cost-sharing).

The administration, organisation and control of these repayments are part of the school’s duties, especially of the pedagogical staff.

In order to support the school principal, who is responsible for all these administrative and controlling affairs as well as for the communicative, organisational and pedagogical ones, the parents association grants a part time secretary assistant on basis voluntary donations.

On the one hand parents are charged for meal costs and the special attendance on afternoons with an amount of approx. € 150,-/month. On the other hand, more than 60% of the parents gain subsidy by the municipal government of Vienna. There are 5 levels of subsidy according to the family income, taken for granted only if the parents care for a confirmation by the local authority for youth and social affairs. Some 15% of the total of parents gain a “zero-status”, that means no payments, neither for meals nor for afternoon attendance.

Beside these obligatory payments parents are expected to contribute for excursions or some specific investments in their child’s base group. An internal school-regulation is setting a limit of max. € 100,-/year/student.

In addition, the parents’ association covers a part of the costs for specific such as:

- Financial aid for parents in need of assistance for the participation of their children in special offers such as class excursions to the countryside, therapeutic horse-riding etc.
- Procurement of additional learning material (e.g. a miniature volcano)
- Subsidy for the school and the classes, based on the special needs of the pedagogic teams
- Financial aid in urgent cases of external medical assistance
- Financial and physical assistance in case of special events and matters of public relations (celebrations, newsletter, film ...)

## Learning Outcomes

### *What are the learning outcomes achieved by the ILE, including academic, social, interpersonal and meta-cognitive outcomes? How is learning assessed?*

See responses to question 3. The most frequent, though non-systematic type of external feedback comes from the schools to which our graduates transfer. By and large, the feedback on their social and learning competencies is highly positive.

In addition, evaluative activities are initiated time and again by interested university professors – mostly in the form of diploma theses and papers prepared by individual students, sometimes in the context of practical studies (such as, most recently, the establishment of socio-metric fields of reference in all our core groups within the scope of a master’s thesis written by a student at the Vienna University College of Teacher Training). Unfortunately, we have only a limited influence on the scope and content of such activities.

We hope that, once the scientific advisory board mentioned in the pilot project plan has been set up (currently, no funding is available or earmarked for this purpose), scientific evaluation will be placed on a more systematic footing.

Possibly some kind of a special evaluation of our pilot-project will get in the focus of Austrian BIFIE (a nationwide institute for researching, observing and analysing the educational system's structures and processes), a relatively new founded institution under the guidance of the federal Ministry of Education. BIFIE is also responsible for the coordination and organisation of the Austrian part of international studies such as PISA and TIMMS.

#### **Documentation describing or evaluating the ILE**

*Is there documentation on this learning environment? Is there a website? Films? Research reports or evaluations? Other forms of documentation? (please supply references or links)*

All the relevant documents, including a school newsletter published since early 2008, are available to an interested public on the school's website. Parts of the school concept have been presented in various video documentations. The first issue of a series of planned DVDs on the school was published in the autumn of 2008 and can be ordered via the school's address.

#### **Other information you consider to be relevant to describe the ILE**

The close collaboration and interaction of school management, teaching and non-teaching staff with the parents, in particular with the parents' association and the class representatives, seems to be a special hallmark of our school.

It is very important to the school management to deploy the learning facilitators in such teams and such areas of work that they can leverage their individual fields of interest and qualifications to the greatest possible extent. This approach should have positive effects on the work of our staff with the children and the fostering and nurturing of their specific individual strengths.

We try to reinforce this strategy by assigning all learning facilitators to a variety of teams – joint planning and reflection combined with regular supervision and subgroup meetings, plus full-team conferences involving all (more than 50) staff members five times a year and an annual INSET event in the form of 2- or 3-day retreats for all learning coaches at a location outside Vienna.

Another important tenet is to see our school as a learning system and to continually raise the awareness of all stakeholders in this respect. In this sense, the currently planned pilot project 2009 "Integrative Lernwerkstatt Brigittenau" constitutes a sort of "quintessence" of all the experience that has gone before.

OSR Josef Reichmayr, 1. 11. 2009