

Concept for a European Handout on Cultural and Peer-Learning Approaches for social integration



Education and Culture DG

Lifelong Learning Programme

Foreword

This concept presents first ideas and drafts for a comprehensive European Hand-Out on cultural and peer-learning approaches for social integration of socio-economically disadvantaged youth and young people with migrant background. It is addressed for usage and implementation in all formal and informal educational institutions in EU member states working with these pedagogical methods.

It has been developed under the “Culture and peer-to-peer learning for integration of socio-economically disadvantaged youth” project, which has been supported under the Lifelong Learning Programme as a GRUNDTVIG Learning Partnership. This project started in 2009 and the work under it was implemented until mid 2011.

Partners from Germany, Austria and the associated partner from Denmark already had excellent background of joint previous cultural initiatives, and considering the relevance of the topic to the new member states, partners from Slovenia, Slovakia and Bulgaria were added to the consortium. The formed partnership focused its efforts on the application of cultural and peer-to-peer learning approaches as pedagogical methods in informal education. The intention of the partnership was to exchange experiences of such approaches, particularly for the purpose of assisting the integration of socio-economically disadvantaged youth.

Although this handout refers mainly to partners of schools, the concept can be easily transferred to the needs of responsible persons in the area of youth education and integration of young adults. In particular, it offers approaches and methods of addressing and involving children and young people with a migrant background in cultural cooperation projects.

More information about the project and participating organizations you will find at the Internet Blog:

<http://peerlearning09.blogspot.com/2009/10/peer-learning-under-construction-this.html>

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1. Practical suggestions and recommendations

For the successful implementation of culture and peer-to-peer learning approaches for the integration of socio-economically disadvantaged youth a number of conditions, requirements and recommendations are discussed in the framework of the following topics:

- Institutions working with children and young people
- Target group
- Gender segregation
- Cooperation with schools
- Artistic and educational management
- Design of offers and activities
- Planning and time horizon
- Example of a suitable timing
- Selection of artists for the incentive events
- Advertising and public relations
- Continuation of the activities and cooperation
- Financing

2. Institutions working with children and young people

Institutions which are undertaking such a project should have sufficient experience in working with children and young people with a migrant background. This means that on one hand these target groups are already a "core-group" of the institution and on the other hand that there are corresponding offers, already motivating the children and young people to visit this facility. This also means that the management and staff of the institution are adequately familiar with this target groups and their environment (family, school, and leisure habits).

Important is also that those persons responsible for the target groups are able to assess and select the composition of the groups in an appropriate way. Do the children and young people get on well together (gender, age, different migrant backgrounds)? Does the educational background fit (type of school, grade level, and compatibility with teaching rhythm)? Does the composition of the group allow a continuous work in the school for a longer time or short time offers should be preferred, e.g. in the form of vacation programs and workshops?

Another important aspect is the institution's premises. Appropriate rooms and equipment (stage, amplification system, stage lighting, and microphones, if necessary) should be available for the activities. The workshops should not mainly take place in the participating

schools, but in the premises of youth centers for the purpose of undocking from the school's everyday life and emphasizing the cognitive character of the cultural activities.

The opportunity to perform presentations of own groups and of the incentive events in the institution is also very helpful. If necessary it could be placed in cooperation within larger facilities. However, the "in house" presentation is of course easier and more attractive for the children and youth involved. Even more advantageous is if this is already an established venue and if hosting options are also available. Helpful are also potential spaces for outdoor activities (in yards, gardens or a nearby park); and of course the possibility of highlight performances offered in the participating schools.

3. Target group

The target group should be selected very carefully. For the different kinds of artistic activities, different target groups are suitable and should be motivated. A rap group addresses to ages and characters that are different than those, which are targeted by a theater group. Dance projects tend to be visited by girls, and circus projects are particularly suitable for younger people as an entry activity.

Important criteria for the composition of the groups are gender, age, type of migration background, school and grade level. Joint groups of girls and boys may promote discussions and experiences regarding their own gender role, but can also block activities, especially for children and young people at pubertal stage. Also, although mixed-age groups are actually desirable, it is often difficult to manage their implementation in everyday life. Large differences of interests, both in terms of artistic preferences (what kind of music, dance form, the form of theatrical staging), and in terms of issues treated, could rise. Also the coordination with the teaching rhythm in different schools and classes (stages) can often be difficult for harmonization over a longer period.

Particularly important is the consideration of migration and parental background. These for example are the possible barriers, which are set for children and adolescents due to restrictions by parents and family and traditional cultural and religious attitudes and behavior. The latter could be handled in the artistic discourse context, but a less homogeneous group could also easily lead to failure.

Very important are also considerations for compiling the groups by schools and classes. The adjustment of the teaching rhythm of groups for a continuous and long-term collaboration for children and young people from many different schools and classes is often very difficult. These factors lead to preference of short-term forms, such as holiday workshops, in which the different groups only selectively share issues and then present them together in a performance at the end of the course. In addition, there is often a certain competition or

even rivalry between schools or classes, which does not always lead to productive discussions and results.

Sometimes it makes sense, to compose groups mixed by age, gender, and artistic orientation etc., only after an introduction period with more homogenous groups.

4. Gender segregation

An important result of practical experiences is that a gender-mixed group can work successfully only under specific conditions. Although the participants could promote the direct examination of their own gender role, they could also block activities and exchange, especially if children and youth in the (pre-) adolescent phase are involved. They do not like to treat certain topics in the presence of or even together with the opposite sex. Sometimes in cases of practicing or even presentation of music, dance or theater, the shyness towards the opposite sex could be so great, that any development is hindered, and even presentation events may be refused.

This is not justified in different substantive interests alone. Especially for girls it is often easier to carry out activities separately. For girls with Muslim ethnic backgrounds, this is often particularly important. The parents of Muslim girls are very attentive to the social interaction of their daughters. In several model projects, it was a big challenge to keep Muslim girls staying in the group in the long run.

The issues at this age are not necessarily all that different, but the artistic realization often requires a huge "self-opening" and "come out of one's shell". The inhibition of puberties towards the opposite sex is so high that a presentation is often perceived as an exposure. The initiators need to decide whether they want to experiment with mixed groups or if they want to set up separated boys' and girls' groups. Mixed groups seem possible particularly in a school setting with fixed theater plays or in cultural institutions where theater enthusiastic youths participate.

5. Cooperation with schools

Cooperation with neighboring schools can be an essential element of cultural and peer-learning approaches for social integration. Above all, it should seek cooperation with all-day schools in the area of basic, primary and secondary schools, because there the target populations are most strongly represented and integration requirements are also the strongest.

The implementation of the concept is simplified where there are already other levels of cooperation with the schools that should be involved in the activities, e.g. common lunch

service. Then the partners, the environment and the target groups already know and trust each other, and access to school management, teachers and students is facilitated. Good cooperation with school administration and teachers is an important condition for implementation in everyday life.

This begins with the conceptual planning, e.g. integration as a working group in the school program, pupil's enrolment in the courses through direct contacts and short presentations in classes and ends with content adjustment and timing of offers with the lesson plan / curricula and rhythm.

In the first phase mainly support of the schools for the selection and enrolment of the target groups and the adjustment with the lessons schedule is important. The enrolment in the workshops, courses, and working groups must not only be restricted to notices, flyers and announcements of the teachers inside. Short presentations by the artistic directors have been also very successful. As a result, the children and young people are addressed directly and in a non-cognitive manner and they get direct access towards culture-oriented approaches.

In a second phase more thematic adjustment on the contents of the lessons and individual subjects may be provided, if the development and the interests of the group permit this.

6. Artistic and educational management

The artistic and educational management plays a central role in the implementation of the concept. Such employees should have both artistic skills, as well as pedagogical competencies, in order to be able to inspire children and young people from often difficult social backgrounds for the activities and to motivate them to take part in long-term activities.

In addition, they should have close contacts and references to children and young people with migrant background, and if possible have experience in collaborating with them. The specific knowledge of their behavior, attitudes and expectations is an important basis for appropriate design and implementation of workshops and courses. For girls with a migrant background, it may be important that the management is female.

In addition to skills and competencies a sufficient availability of the trainers should be ensured. Even for these activities a continuous and regular care is necessary. Beyond this, additional dates and units may be required in the short term.

Particularly good bases for appropriate design of artistic and educational leadership are offers for cooperation with culture-related facilities such as music schools, Youth or Communal Centers with special cultural offers, theater education centers, or circus projects. But even then a continuity of personnel must be.

7. Design of services and activities

The appropriate design of the offers is also an important factor in the implementation of cultural and peer-learning concepts. There are many possible patterns of presentation, one-time workshops for one or more days, running courses in half of a school-year or longer, regular weekly or monthly fixed days and time, weekend and vacation courses, etc.

However, one-time and short-term offers are a first approach and only provide incentive, making sense sometimes as an intervention tool for expansion and continuity of project groups. For the sustainable implementation of the concept continuous courses for half of a school-year with fixed weekly schedule are recommended. The regularity and fixed structure usually makes it easier for children and young adolescents to get used to and engage in the offers and setting after an introductory period.

A special appeal lies in the inclusion in the courses of final and interim public presentation events. There is usually a certain shyness and fear of public presentations, but with increasing security in the artistic activities during the course these become normal, and the challenge and interest in the presentation of the newly acquired skills are at the center. A performance in front of their classmates, parents, teachers and other contact persons, in Youth Centers or Communal rooms, then provides confirmation and motivation, as the participants already have experienced such presentations in new and strange environments.

Central aspects of the offers are of course the issues. The purpose of the concept is to focus on issues such as integration problems, violence, professional problems, their own gender role, etc. by non-cognitive nature and thus to take up the children and young people's interest for it. However, it is important not to impose the content, but pick a topic which is in the center of the everyday lives of the target groups, and then gradually introduce them to new topics. The groups should not be larger than 10 to 15 participants per artistic coordinator.

8. Planning and time horizon

A long-term and detailed planning is a key prerequisite for the success of such projects and activities. For a more permanent type of event during a whole school year, the planning of all essential details (funding, design details, partner schools, and target groups) should be clarified weeks before the end of the previous school year, especially those which are directly related to the start of the project school year, so that the enrolment of the target group and the initial implementation can take place.

The starting point of planning is to clarify the financial resources and funding. Only when this is secured, the artistic and educational director can be contracted and the contacting of potential participants should start. In the case of delays in funding commitments, contacting partners (school director, class teachers) in schools, which usually have only a limited time

capacity for such projects, could threaten the feasibility of the project and the partners could lose interest. Moreover, this could lead to a shifting of the beginning of the activities in the school year and the initial stage could be interrupted by holidays, which complicates the continuity of participation and activities in general.

In the next steps the conceptual details (target groups by age, gender, migration background, school type and grade level, artistic direction, type of event, addressing the target groups) between the involved schools and the artistic and educational director should be clarified. As at the end of the school year, teachers are usually busy with the references and conferences, all these questions should be answered at least four weeks in advance.

With the start of the actual project the enrolment should take place through direct contact with the target group. This is recommended to be implemented through posters, announcements and presentations by or with the teachers, and through presentations in classes and on the playground. The direct targeting of children and young people makes sense, when an artistic interest is assumed or even known by the teachers and educators of the youth institution. A little later, well before the next school holidays (especially in the season of early autumn holidays) the initial implementation should start.

The incentive events with performances and workshops by young external artists from Africa, Asia and South America could be carried out in the framework of a summer festival at the end of the previous school year, as a holiday event or after the launch of the new school year. The first incentives are supposed to give motivation for the audience, to discover cultural activities as a form and basis for themselves for facilitating the further enrolment of children and young people. Often such an incentive event successfully contributes to the establishing of a small core group, which later on, in the early school year, can be extended by further enrolments of other pupils.

Example of a suitable timing

for the winter half-year:

Contents	Period	Comments
Developing a concept for culture-related and artistic activities in the youth work	February / March	beginning of the school half-year
Clarify possible partner schools and candidates for the artistic and educational coordination	February / March	
Clarification of the funding	End of April	Easter
Organization of a incentive event with external youth artists from ethnic minority backgrounds	May	
Detailed planning with partner schools and artistic and pedagogical coordinator	May	4 weeks before the end of the school half-year
Implementation of the incentive event with performances and workshops of external young artists	June	at the end of the school half-year
Enrolment of the target group	September	beginning of the new school half-year
Implementation of the concepts in the form of workshops and several weeks of offerings for music, dance, theatre and circus productions	September-January	In advance, at least 4 weeks before the autumn holidays
Organization and performance of events with presentations by groups of the youth centre and youth performances and workshops of external artists	December or January	e.g. as part of Christmas and Advent Festival
Evaluation of the project, review of the concept and proposal, detailed planning of the project continuation	January	In advance before the new school semester

9. Selection of artists for the incentive events

The idea to carry out incentive events with external, especially non-European, artists from disadvantaged backgrounds is based on the positive experiences and results of the KinderKulturKarawane as a core project approach and a corresponding pilot project with youth centres and schools. The incentive events raise interest and motivation of youth in their own institutions and environment. The selection of non-European young artists for the kick-off event plays an important role because the performances and workshops with their peers shall motivate the target group to use artistic expressions also for dealing with their everyday life, problems and perspectives. Accordingly, it is important to invite groups, which are able to inspire the target groups with their cultural activities. This applies to the genre, e.g. music, dance, theater, circus acrobatics and performances or other forms. But even within each genre, it is crucial to take the appropriate measure. Thus a group of young rap musicians will be better addressed to male adolescents, theatre presentations and dramatic productions to the younger, dance projects can reach youth of all ages, circus and acrobatics - younger children and mixed groups inspire girls.

Besides the performances of the groups collaborative workshops have a very mobilizing effect. Here the children and young people from youth centers and schools come directly together with the young artists of the same age from African, Asian and Latin American countries and - in a mostly nonverbal and associative manner - exchange with them, learn from them and experience them as role models for their own development.

In addition accommodation of the external artists in families in the environment of the youth center and school supports the exchange between the children and young people themselves and the mobilization of their own target audience. Often it takes place as a follow up of Internet contacts after a first visit, and sometimes as a continuous exchange by a further invitation or a return visit later on. There is potential, however, it is often restricted by financial limitations.

10. Advertising and Public Relations

Especially for the incentive events an intense advertising and public relations in the context of the carrying institution, the schools and the cooperation partners is necessary. Only then enough children and young people will be reached and interested in the artistic activities and the project, so that a first core group may emerge for its own workshops and events.

Here it is also recommended, besides the usual advertising and announcements, to distribute handouts and flyers in homes and shops of the district and in the cooperating schools and other facilities; and in addition publish supplements in local newspapers. Helpful are also direct announcements of the teachers in the classroom and direct targeting of children, adolescents and parents.

The local media should be included by direct addressing and informing. This is easier if the group has already been formed and can be presented with their development and success, perhaps even over a longer period with regular reports.

It is often easier for local and district newspapers, local radio stations, local television or thematic Internet portals to become interested in integration and youth projects in the field of culture, particularly when accompanied by interesting events and "success stories". Reporting in public media on the other hand has a positive return on the mobilization and involvement of children and adolescents, because it confirms the activities and achievements of the group.

11. Continuation of the activities and cooperation

Culture-related activities for the integration of children and young people make sense if they are offered continuously by the youth centers and the cooperating schools in the long run. Individual short-term actions and events should only be used for creating an initial incentive. Medium-oriented activities over a school half-year have more the character of a pilot project and allow the involved parties to develop the conceptual basis and to establish the cooperation.

Sustainable integration successes can only be expected in the case of regular activities and projects carried out continuously. Only then the culture-based approach can be established in the perception of the target group and the environment, the already achieved children and adolescents will be motivated for intense debates by their artistic activities and new target groups can be integrated into the concept.

For this an appropriate long-term conceptual design of activities and offers is necessary. In addition concepts should be regularly evaluated and the measures - adjusted accordingly. For the evaluation, not only the responsible of the cooperating schools and the artistic and educational coordinators should be included, but also that of the children and young people, for example through age-appropriate questionnaires and interviews.

The stabilization of the collaborations with schools is also desirable. The stronger the established cooperation, the better the activities and offers adjustment to the school framework and classroom topics and the better their embedding in the school reform approaches, e.g. the concept of the open full-time school. If there has been a previous ad hoc or otherwise supported cooperation, it is usually easier to gain the trust and cooperation of the school management and teachers for such projects and for establishing sustainable cooperation structures.

Another important component of the concept is the artistic and educational coordination. Often it is not easy to find suitable teachers for these offers, covering both the artistic side,

and the educational needs of the target group. Cooperation with other cultural institutions, such as music schools, dance projects, theater groups, and circus projects is recommended here.

12. Financing

A central problem is usually the financing and funding of such projects and activities. The more successful the initiation and perpetuation of such projects and activities is, the more sustainable is the rise of the funding question. This aspect of the long-term financing should be taken into account adequately early at the project design stage.

In the public budgets, the means for youth and children are becoming scarcer and scarcer. On the other hand, currently more resources are available for integration projects for young people with an immigrant background and cultural projects for youth. Here it is worth to investigate in advance, whether subsidies are available, especially in the urban and regional youth agencies. Most of these have the disadvantage that they can grant only single model or pilot projects but cannot secure longer-term financing.

In the process of expanding the open full-time school, public support can possibly become available for cooperation projects. Therefore, youth welfare institutions, which are planning such activities, should start collaborative activities with full-time schools.

Incentive events with young artists from Africa, Asia and South America to neighborhood-based projects or from local funds for development cooperation are encouraged as a means for individual action. Even at the country level and in church organizations, there are ways to finance smaller events and activities with a development background.

Other financing options are foundations and private sponsors, such as shops and businesses in the district or in any other environment. In addition, events could be funded to a lesser extent, through entrance fees.