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University College of Teacher Education Vienna: Cooperation between schools and university with a focus on democratic education

1 Introduction

Austrian University Colleges of Teacher Education are responsible for the education, advanced training, and further professional development of future teachers. A core element of all University Colleges is providing research-based education, particularly in the areas of work-related research, teaching and learning research, pedagogy, subject didactics as well as school and teaching development (BMBWF, 2021a).

An exceptional feature of the 14 University Colleges of Teacher Education in Austria are their 23 integrated Praxisschulen (12 primary schools and 11 middle schools) which serve as model and research schools and thereby connect theory and practice. They play a central role in the University study program, since university students must complete an 8-semester long teaching-practice module at Praxisschulen.

At the University College of Teacher Education Vienna (Pädagogische Hochschule Wien, PHW), one primary school (Praxisvolksschule, PVS) and one middle school (Praxismittelschule, PMS) make the linking of theory and practice possible. Here, teachers create an optimal learning environment for children and young people, introduce university students to the field of work and the profession, develop new concepts and approaches based on findings from educational research, and evaluate and investigate them with regard to their practical suitability together with university lecturers of PHW.

PHW is Austria's largest public educational as well as professional development institution for current and future educators. At present, it offers Bachelor of Education programs for teaching in general compulsory schools and vocational schools, as well as university courses for other pedagogical professions, such as recreational education and elementary education. Currently, approximately 3,200 university students are enrolled in these programs. In addition, Master's degree

programs with different specializations can be completed in the areas of primary education and secondary vocational education.

Together with the University of Vienna and other regional University Colleges for Teacher Education, PHW is part of the “Development Network North-East” and therefore integrated into a joint Bachelor’s Degree Program in Secondary General Education. In the area of continuous professional development, PHW supports educators throughout their entire professional life. It offers approximately 2,600 continued training courses with around 58,000 registrations a year.

The university campus covers approximately 53,000 m² and is located in the tenth district of Vienna, named Favoriten – the city’s most populated district with a high number of residents with a migration background. Integrated into the campus of PHW are the two Praxisschulen, the PVS and the PMS with a total of about 400 students.

2 The education system in Austria

The educational path of every child in Austria begins with voluntarily attending kindergarten at the age of three. Yet, the last year of kindergarten is obligatory. Compulsory schooling in Austria starts at the age of six and lasts for nine years. Children who have reached the age of six but are not ready yet for school need to go to preschool for a year. Compulsory primary schooling lasts four years and aims at providing a general education as well as fostering students’ social, emotional, intellectual, and physical abilities. In order to promote equal opportunities and employability, education is obligatory until the age of 18.

Having finished primary school, children must either attend a middle school or a lower secondary school. After middle school children at the age of 14 typically proceed to vocational schools or even start to work. Some also transfer to upper secondary school. Upper secondary schools are, however, usually attended by those who have visited lower secondary level already. Secondary schools aim at generally preparing children for university education. Children and young people with special needs receive a basic general education either in an inclusive class of a primary or middle school or in a centre for inclusion and special education.

While almost all EU countries run compulsory schools as comprehensive schools, differentiation takes place very early in Austria. Already after attending primary school, pedagogues must decide whether a child should proceed to middle school or to lower secondary school. This early differentiation often results in an educational inequality where usually children from a lower socio-economic background have less chances of obtaining a higher education. Despite clear research results, the discussion about early school selection is still on going and prevents the nationwide introduction of comprehensive schooling (BMBWF, 2021b).

3 Praxisschulen at the University College of Teacher Education Vienna

“Living at school together” – this is the central guiding principle of the two Praxisschulen of PHW. It applies to everyone involved in school life and refers to a collective participation in terms of being actively involved in school development and taking part in decision-making. Cooperation and supporting each other are fundamental aspects of the school community whereby the strengthening of the individual is focused on as well. To ensure that appreciation, responsibility, acceptance, and inclusion are brought to life and that PHW Praxisschulen remain a place of democratic learning, necessary basic democratic competences such as moral awareness, judgement and opinion-forming are gradually initiated and practiced with the students.

PVS is a school for 6- to 10-year-olds. Around 200 students, who speak 19 different languages, are taught by 21 teachers. There are seven regular classes and two multi-level ones at PVS. Pedagogical work focuses on the following aspects: Independent Learning, Social Skills Training, Progressive Teaching Strategies, Research-Based Learning, STEM Disciplines, Alternative Assessment, Digital Literacy Training, Action-Oriented Teaching, Gender Conscious Pedagogy, Individualization and Differentiation, Active Learning, and work at the juncture of primary and secondary school.

PMS is a school for 10- to 14-year-olds. It is oriented towards the strengths of each individual student and focuses on the promotion of subject-specific as well as essential personal competencies. PMS has a total of eight classes, with one inclusive class, and two multi-level classes, where students from the age of 10 to 14 are taught together. Each school level is supervised by a small team of teachers. Teaching is mainly done in teams. The basic principles are openness to the world, tolerance, and inclusion. PMS considers itself a place where all involved find a pleasant learning and working atmosphere (Jakl et al., 2017a).

A central concern of both PHW Praxisschulen is their work in the area of school development, such as the development of new as well as the advancement of existing pedagogical and didactic models and their evaluation. In addition, the pedagogical work at PHW Praxisschulen offers university students and university lecturers of PHW an ideal field for common research projects (see section 4).

Another important task of both schools as a place of learning, research and reflection is to accompany university students during their practical studies and to support the development of their teaching personality (see section 3.3).

3.1 Founding history

In the School Act of 1962, post-secondary teacher training with university character was established in Austria for the first time. 1966/67 the Pädagogische Akad-

emie Wien started with a four-semester long Primary School teaching program. From 1976 onwards it also offered a six-semester long graduate program for Lower Secondary School and Special Needs School. In this context, Praxisschulen, formerly called Übungsschulen (training schools), had the task of gradually introducing student teachers to professional life. Step by step, Übungsschulen developed into training and research schools and began to set clear contextual impulses for the practical studies of prospective teachers (Klement et al., 2002).

Finally, as part of a consistent further development of teacher education, University Colleges of Teacher Education were founded in 2007. They became the third academic educational institution in addition to universities and universities of applied sciences (see section 2).

Every Austrian University College of Teacher Education integrates two Praxisschulen: a primary school and a middle school. In 2005, paragraph 23 of the Higher Education Act (HG) defined their tasks as follows: "...to participate in the introduction of university students to teaching by means of a highly job-related practical education, as well as providing a platform for testing new ways of teaching" (Jonak & Münster, 2014, p. 91). Furthermore, "the practical training in education and teaching is to be supplemented and consolidated with regard to school reality" (ibid.). For the implementation of these legal requirements, teachers with appropriate professional, pedagogical and methodological-didactic competencies are employed at Praxisschulen. Today there are 14 University Colleges of Teacher Education with 23 integrated Praxisschulen (12 primary schools and 11 middle schools) in Austria.

As a further important step of reform in teacher education, competence-orientation was introduced in 2015. Since the goal is to guarantee a high-quality academic education based on scientifically grounded theory and practice (BMBWF, 2021c), an intensified integration of theory, research and practice has been implemented into the curricula.

All educational programs follow the Bologna structure, which means they are divided into a four-year Bachelor's program and a Master's program lasting at least one or two years.

3.2 Legal aspects

According to § 23 of the Higher Education Act (HG), the legislative body has clarified that the provisions and curricula specified in the School Organisation Act are binding for Praxisschulen (RIS, 2021a) as well. Additional tasks and duties of Praxisschulen are also statutory (§ 33a para. 3, HG). Furthermore, rectors of the University Colleges of Teacher Education can lay down more detailed requirements for on-site teaching practice (RIS, 2021b).

In the light of this legal background, PHW defines several further achievements and goals of PHW Praxisschulen. PVS and PMS thus consider themselves "...ped-

agogical centres [...] for teaching and education focusing on the individual promotion of the development [...] of social competence, research- and evidence-based school and teaching development in the sense of ‘good practice’ examples for other schools, for the development, implementation and evaluation of future-oriented didactic-methodical models and concepts as well as teaching and learning formats, and as a permanent didactic research facility” (PHW, 2023a, p. 45).

Ultimately, PHW Praxisschulen must adhere to the same content-related requirements regarding democratic education as any other school with the right of public access. However, due to its educational commitment stated in the HG and defined in the provisions of PHW regarding research-guided, exemplary and contemporary teaching, democratic education is carried out with particular attention to its exemplary function, scientific foundation, special didactic quality, and future orientation. To fulfil these distinctive goals, research-based and pioneering concepts of democratic education are provided not only for PHW Praxisschule but for other schools as well.

3.3 The pedagogical concept of Praxisschulen at PHW

Both Praxisschulen consider themselves as being part of PHW. Therefore, Praxisschulen need to fulfil numerous further functions than regular public schools and thus face further challenges, such as also integrating university lecturers and university students into school life. Furthermore, not only the school’s curriculum but also the university curriculum needs to be acknowledged. Lesson contents thus are not only aligned with the school curriculum, but also with the curricula of PHW together with the needs of both students and university students.

PHW Praxisschulen see themselves as places for developing skills and competencies of students, university students, teachers, and university lecturers. PHW Praxisschulen are the meeting point between theory and practice since practice alone will never be able to specify all theoretically possible situations and thus will always remain incomplete, and theory, on the other side, will never be able to provide concrete action guidelines for all conceivable situations and thus will not be able to claim completeness (Adl-Amini et al., 1979, p. 135).

The guiding principle of PHW “learning by reflective doing” refers to the concept of the Reflective Practitioner by Donald Schön (Schön, 1991). In this context, university students learn to engage in a reflexive dialogue with students and thereby adapt lessons situationally, but also improve lessons in retrospect by developing a scientifically reflexive habitus (Schrittesser & Hofer, 2012, p. 149). PHW Praxisschulen run as workshops rather than as traditional schools. So they offer the necessary space for action and support learning and teaching not only facilitated by the spatial proximity of PHW Praxisschulen and PHW but also by the fact that some teachers work as university lecturers as well. In special settings (e.g. Didaktik Live), university lectures also teach at PHW Praxisschulen as part of their courses.

This scientific yet practice-oriented approach is also crucial for democratic education as a teaching principle at PHW Praxisschulen. Since 1978, democratic education in the form of a teaching principle is compulsory for all types of schools, grade levels and subjects in Austria. In didactic terms, Krammer's (2008) competence structure model of democratic education is a prerequisite for the enactment of democratic education as a teaching principle in Austrian schools.

The broad framework set by the fundamental decree, ranging from the further development of democracy and human rights all the way to overcoming racism, xenophobia, and antisemitism, enables teaching to be adapted to the interests of the students and teachers (see section 4).

4 The linking of University and Praxisschulen

The law does not regard Praxisschulen as one of the departments of PHW. Yet, PHW does and so enables a closer cooperation with both schools. PHW Praxisschulen are managed by PHW's Department of Educational Sciences and Practical Studies which supports university students during their practical studies. Both PHW and PHW Praxisschulen are considered entwined places of learning and reflection which significantly contribute to competence development and professional understanding and related attitudes (Fichten, 2017). During the entire academic year, university students of all semesters teach at PHW Praxisschulen. In close alliance with the university courses, university students build up professional competence and are consistently forced to base their actions on research. All university students gain their first teaching experience at PHW Praxisschulen and consequently are prepared for the following semesters in which teaching takes place at regular public schools throughout Vienna.

Teachers at PHW Praxisschulen fill in two roles: on the one hand, they are educators of their students and, on the other hand, they work as mentors of university students from PHW. They supervise and support university students by developing their professional skills and preparing them for the job. They share the responsibility of teaching and transmitting didactic knowhow as well as basics of educational science with university lecturers.

The organization of the practical studies at PHW is very complex. During the Bachelor's program, university students are expected to complete their practical studies not only at different school levels in different districts of Vienna but also under the supervision of teachers of different pedagogical and professional foci, such as reform pedagogy, creativity, language education, or STEM. At PVS approximately 120 university students from the BA program are assigned to teachers in groups of 3 to 5. Additionally, 30 students from the MA program need to be served as well. This makes around 150 students completing their practical studies

at PVS each semester. Throughout Vienna more than 294 groups of university students need to be accommodated.

Teachers of PHW Praxisschulen do not only act as mentors within the practical studies. They also teach courses which are part of the Bachelor's studies, for example in primary education and didactics.

An example of networking between PHW and Praxisschulen in the field of education is the project "Didactics Live". The aim of the project is to link teachers and students of PHW Praxisschulen with university lectures and university students. Together with university students, university lectures conduct their lessons in co-operation with teachers and students of PHW Praxisschulen. The primary intention of "Didactics Live" is not only to theoretically acquire subject-specific contents of the university courses, but also to experience them practically and authentically with students during the lessons. The formation of a democratic culture in an educational institution is beneficial to the development of an understanding of democracy among all those involved. "Didactics Live" is an example of democratic culture at PHW together with its Praxisschulen where university lecturers autonomously decide whether their seminar is taking place in the seminar room or practically in the classroom. In addition, seminars with a curricular reference to democratic education or political education offer the opportunity to transfer concepts directly to students and university students (Burtscher-Ebner & Jakl, 2017).

Lifelong learning is a fundamental principle of the European education policy (Terhart et al., 2014) in which teacher training plays an important role. This is why teachers from PHW Praxisschulen participate in the conception and implementation of sustainable courses in the field of further education and also act as university lecturers.

In order to further develop school and teaching, it is legally anchored that Praxisschulen proactively design, test, and evaluate new ways of teaching based on evidence (Jonak & Münster, 2014, p. 91). Research activities are thus always carried out in close cooperation with PHW. Research teams of PHW work on questions from PHW Praxisschulen and report back results as a basis for further work. Teachers at PHW Praxisschulen can also be part of research teams together with university lectures. Moreover, PHW Praxisschulen provide a field of research for university lectures and students. University students have the opportunity to conduct research at PHW Praxisschulen as part of their Bachelor's and Master's theses, to develop and explore their own ideas, and to become involved in everyday school life.

As examples of research activities, two joint research projects of PVS, PMS and PHW will be briefly presented. Both illustrate the possibilities of linking these two places of learning – PHW and PHW Praxisschulen – in a profession-oriented

manner and show the intensive collaboration between educational research and educational practice. The focus is on generating evidence-based school practice. The research project *“Professionalization by Resource Orientation: A Potential Analysis at Praxisschulen”* was carried out to meet all tasks and duties of PHW Praxisschulen. The objectives were: 1.) to make the existing resources and strengths of the surveyed teachers at PHW Praxisschulen as a building block of school and teaching development and as examples for students of how professionalization processes can take place visible, 2.) the presentation of links with other institutions, 3.) generating ideas, visions, wishes and expectations for the further development of the pedagogical and organisational concepts of PHW Praxisschulen and 4.) the collection of information about purposeful efforts to support students as mentors within the scope of Practical Studies since PHW Praxisschulen also provide a clear impetus for the practical studies of students in schools. Teachers of both PHW Praxisschulen were interviewed in their roles as actors and experts in order to reveal resources such as training, language skills, personal competences, but also external relations and ideas about further developments. In this way, existing resources within PHW Praxisschulen as well as connections to other institutions can be made visible. The results of this research, which is designed as an ex-ante evaluation, are also used as the basis for the planning of prospective duties and responsibilities of mentors in the context of teacher training and enable the expansion of the networking between PVS and PMS and serve as a basis for collaboration in research and development projects (Ctibor-Petrik et al., 2017). *“Heart over foot”* (*“Herz über Fuß”*) was developed and introduced as a project in the field of social learning at the PVS in the school year 2015/16. The aim is to strengthen students’ personality development and self-efficacy and so affecting the entire school culture in the long run. (Jakl, 2017b) (see section 5.2). The accompanying research project aims at evaluating the extent to which the project contributes to empowering students to develop strategies for dealing with difficult situations, to gain a more conscious body perception and to increase expression in speech and body language. Furthermore, the influence and effects of the project on everyday school life in the context of teacher professionalization processes is investigated. For this purpose, focused group discussions (Bohnsack, 2000) were held with students and teachers. On the one hand, these group settings were based on the idea that experience can be reconstructed in shared narration, and particularly on the creation of familiar situations for the students. On the other hand, the focused group discussion served to display topics that have been set as evaluation objectives by the research team in advance. Selected results of research show the development and modes of action of the project *“Heart over foot”*. Teachers report that the project has a fundamentally positive effect on the students’ personality development. They become more self-aware, start to gradually perceive their own needs and develop self-confidence and

empathy. On the other side, teachers question the project's effects on students who show disruptive behaviour, such as laughing out loud or not participating at all – seemingly due to an inability to handle the content. Yet, most of the students perceive the effects of the project solely positive regarding self-awareness, self-confidence, positivity, and empathy.

Teachers regard the project as an entry into the broad field of personality development. It thus aims at the well-being of everyone involved in school, including students, teachers, parents, and university students. From a researcher's point of view, however, three essential points are necessary to further develop the project: parental work, dealing with difficult students, and the organizational problems of integrating the project well into the school day (Schuh, 2020; Riegler, 2021).

5 Democratic education at PHW Praxisschulen

PHW Praxisschulen are a place of democratic education and a place where democratic values and human rights are lived, exemplified, and learned. This requires a scientifically based didactic concept which derives from pedagogical and socio-political everyday experiences.

5.1 Theoretical considerations

Due to the high degree of abstraction and the complexity of the topic, democratic education is often only assigned to students at the upper secondary level. However, empirical studies such as those of van Deth's project „Demokratie Leben Lernen“ show that the development of political awareness and political socialization already begins in early childhood (van Deth, 2007).

The following didactic principles are at the centre of the concept of democratic education.

Action orientation in the life world of students (inductive approach): from the concrete example of the life reality of the students to the general abstract. One approach to democratic education takes place in an action oriented way (Behrmann, 1996, p. 121 in Liggesmeyer, 2019, p. 33). The central element is the experiential learning of democratic elements which can be found in the life of the students, meaning that only aspects which students are exposed to in their social environment can be used for democratic education. Simple imitation of democratic elements is thus not desired. Rather, it is about gaining an understanding of the connection between elements from the students' daily lives and their relationship to democracy. Social learning must be integrated into the context of learning democracy and into a context of justification. In this way, students should understand how social behaviour is related to a democratic society. This is challenging to implement, and of course, the younger the students are, the more

it is since politics usually have low significance in their lives. It is thus necessary to, as Behrmann puts it, convey the context of meaning. (Behrmann, 1996, in Liggesmeyer, 2019, pp. 33f).

Real participation instead of pretended participation: Real participation means being able to exert real influence and take responsibility. School as a pedagogically protected space for democratic education (Liggesmeyer, 2019, p. 41) enables experience-led action by avoiding undesirable external influences on the one hand, but on the other hand, harbours the danger of uncritical pedagogical action without an external corrective. Often, there is hardly any transfer from what is learned at school to real political understanding. Experiential learning yet only takes place by genuine participation. Inauthentic, pretended participation which rarely has any effects on real life leads to political apathy and disinterest (Kempf & Kuhn, 2017, p. 279). Genuine participation requires basic democratic structures, a distribution of responsibility, and a loss of power by teachers as former decision-makers. Teachers need to accept this and simultaneously make students aware of their own increase in power by consistently setting clear boundaries.

Democratic sense-making and maturity instead of imitation and specialized knowledge: Student's political autonomy and maturity must be considered when planning and giving lessons as an overall goal. The focus is not on retrievable factual knowledge but on providing students with working knowledge to develop their competencies since the formation of meaning enables orientation in a political world. According to Lange, this construction of meaning is developed in civic consciousness and "... makes it possible to interpret political-social reality and to influence it by action." (Lange et al., 2013, p. 22) in order to make political reality understandable and explainable. While some core concepts such as heterogeneity, distribution, conflict, or participation are already suitable for primary school students, concepts such as statehood, social change and rule or legitimacy of rule are to be increasingly incorporated at the secondary level.

Self-determination, co-determination, solidarity, and human rights: As a further concept for learning democracy, Herdegen sees reason as a central element for democratic education. Through early practice in dealing with problems which concern everyone as well as experiencing democracy at school, not only loyalty to democracy but also acceptance of democratic principles, an understanding of their meaning, and the formation of a constitutional patriotism should be developed (Herdegen, 1999, p. 6 in Liggesmeyer, 2019, pp. 37f). Self-determination and co-determination with the goal of political autonomy must not be put in opposition to solidarity and human rights since social and political learning go hand in hand, and consequently enable reasonable self-determination, the ability for co-determination and solidarity (Liggesmeyer, 2019, p. 37).

5.2 Practical implementation of democratic education – selected examples

Based on the theoretical ideas described above (see section 5.1), PHW Praxisschulen have developed their individual programs and mission statements (see figure 1). As visible in figure 1, both heads of PHW Praxisschulen are deeply committed to support and motivate any process and project which enables active democratic participation. Thus, action orientation and genuine participation in school are considered a core element of school life. At PHW Praxisschulen, students should not only acquire subject-specific knowledge but also personal and social skills.

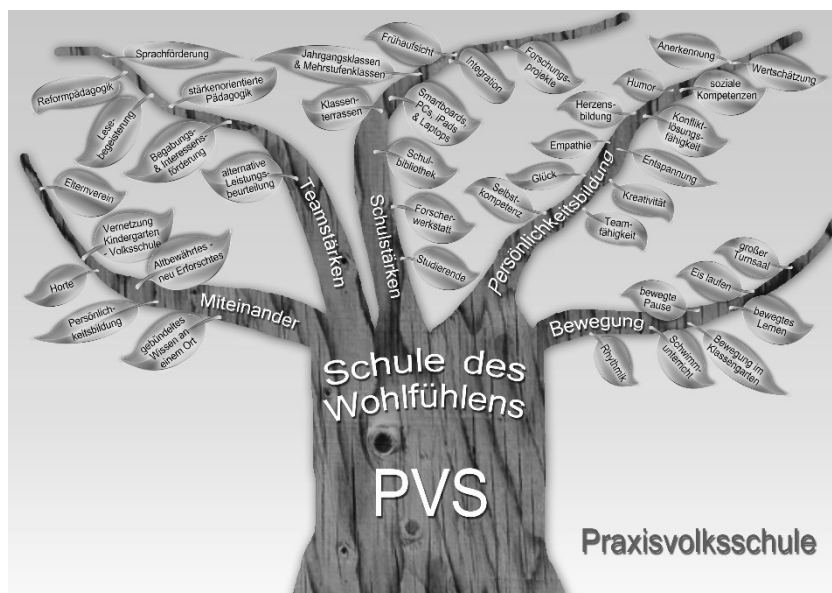


Fig. 1: School of well-being (Graphic: S. Jakl)

Ideally, students will thus evolve into self-confident personalities who are committed to democracy (see figure 1). At PHW Praxisschulen, genuine participation means having the chance to vote class and school representatives, participating in the students' parliament, or establishing class or even school rules together. These conventional forms are defined by law and enable students to help shape their school.

Consequently, rules and values which are important for a successful collaboration and a positive class atmosphere are worked on in all classes at PHW Praxisschulen. These are always captured in a creative way so to easily adhere to them (see figure 2). Each class at PVS and PMS elects two class representatives who collect the children's concerns, discuss them with the teachers or bring them forward to the school parliament. In addition to the class representatives of all classes, both elect-

ed school representatives attend the regular meetings of the school parliament. All class representatives also elect a guidance teacher who discusses their concerns with the elected representatives in the school parliament.



Fig. 2: Setting class rules together (Photo: S. Hanzlik)

Step by step, however, further innovative forms of students' participation are established. The main goal of these innovations is to help students to stand by their opinions, to accept other opinions and to experience that everyone can make a difference. Students are, for instance, allowed to participate in the process of lesson planning. They are invited to bring in their topics of interest and then collectively decide on the ones that will be worked on collaboratively. Students of grades 3 and 4 are even allowed to make suggestions concerning the teaching method. Consequently, attention and motivation highly increase in class.

Other forms of participation involve the design of sports weeks or project weeks where students usually plan and develop daily programs in groups. Different alternatives are then presented and finally a collaborative democratic decision is made by the majority.

Currently the students of PHW Praxisschulen are working on the design of an outdoor site near the school building. After a general renovation of the school building, which was completed in 2021, an existing open space is now to be

adapted for students and university students for lessons or leisure activities. For this purpose, a multi-stage participation process has recently started where students can contribute their ideas and suggestions in workshops.

In the following, further projects from everyday school life at PVS and PMS in the field of democratic education are presented.

Assembly: At PHW Praxisschulen school assemblies are part of the daily agenda and serve not only to exchange information but simultaneously to create a strong feeling of belonging and membership. At PVS and PMS all students, teachers, school administrators, and university students are invited to attend the meetings once a month. Current topics are discussed, key aspects from the “Heart over Foot” program are implemented, non-violent communication is practiced, news is exchanged and special projects or events in the classes are reported. At the end of each meeting all participants sing the school song together (see figure 3).



Fig. 3: Assembly at PVS/PMS (Photo: PVS)

„Nightingale“: The project “Nightingale” is a mentoring program for students with special needs (Nightingale included) and/or migration biographies (Nightingale Vienna). Over a whole year, university students of the PHW meet with students of PHW Praxisschulen once a week for spending time and talking about issues which currently affect the child. The program provides a practical insight

into the work of inclusive education. Moreover, it facilitates learning by doing and offers a platform for gathering practical experience. University students intensively experience the students' world. Additionally, the possibility of joint recreational activities allows for a meaningful participation of students as well as university students. Before the program starts, university students need to attend an obligatory workshop where they analyze the educational and personal situation of their assigned student by comparing it to average or ideal conditions. In doing so, university students, typically coming from the educated middle class, often gain invaluable insights which help them realize how privileged they are not only in material but also emotional terms. As part of the program, they are obliged to keep a diary and share their insights in regular meetings with a university lecturer. In a final meeting of reflection, one university student once said: "When I started the project, I thought I was only helping one child. I never expected to learn so much about myself. I never thought the relationship and the weekly meetings could be so intense".

Observing – Interpreting – Shaping: The "BIG" project integrates everyone involved in the developmental process of a child. Through this holistic approach, children, parents, and teachers bring in diverse perspectives as equal partners and thus together expand the scope of action in order to enable the child's further development. Whilst teachers observe students participating in making democratic decisions and learning to deal with problems unconscious emotional dimensions through collective interpretations are uncovered and lastly will set further processes in motion. Here, too, the participatory approach of democracy is directly communicated to the students through a non-hierarchical structure. Different core concepts can be used to perceive different perspectives. Students, for instance, may experience participation as a core concept, whereas parents may feel the concept of their child's integration into the school process strongest, whilst teachers, on the other side, might notice the concept of appreciation (Leskowa, 2017).

„Heart over foot“: In recent years the interest in developing the students' personality and promoting their social competences has grown. To promote these competences, subjects called "personality development" and "social learning" were introduced (Hoffmann, 2008, p. 13). The project "Heart over foot" was created to foster personality development. The project name was developed in collaboration with students. The heart is seen as a symbol for the emotional world of everyone involved. The attached feet represent the huge focus on body language that is part of the project (see figure 4). Physical struggle was discussed in one class and a child shared the following solution strategy: "First the heart and then the foot" (Jakl, 2017b, p. 104).

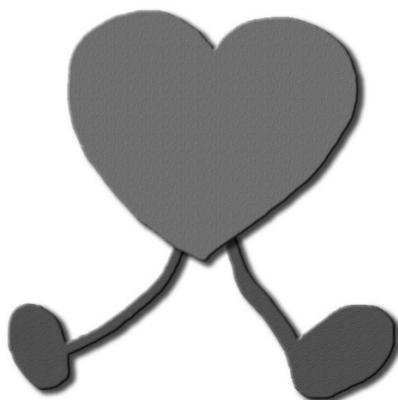


Fig. 4: Hear over foot project logo (Design: Sandra Melchart)

“Body language makes up more than 80% of our communication” (PHW, 2023b). Communication skills are thus to be developed as an essential part of the policy-related competence of the students (Krammer et al., 2008). Article 29 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which is referred to in the Basic Decree on Political Education, stipulates that education shall be directed towards the development of the personality of children (RIS, 2021b). The “Heart over foot” project specifically promotes body perception, the development of a positive self-image, the expressiveness of body language and the resilience of students (see figures 5, 6). The aim of the project is to develop, promote and strengthen social competences of all participating students. The ability to cooperate, to handle conflict, to work in a team and to build self-esteem are just some of the competences to be achieved (Jakl, 2017b, pp. 105f). According to a multi-stage program, guided exercises and reflections are regularly held at school (PHW, 2023b). This broadens personal competences in the sense of democracy as a way of life (Himmelmann, 2008). These include self-learning and self-competence (Schuh, 2020).



Fig. 5: Student works (Photo: S. Hanzlik)



Fig. 6: Student works (Photo: S. Hanzlik)

6 Outlook

In the context of participating in the LabSchoolsEurope project, four key research principles which seem to guide the work of much of today's lab schools were identified: transdisciplinarity, collaboration, experimentation, and transformativity.

For PHW Praxisschulen, transdisciplinary collaboration is of great importance and is lived daily. On one side, transdisciplinary collaboration is legally anchored within the framework of practical studies by accompanying university students into professional life and offering a field of research for both university lecturers and students. On the other side, cooperation takes place between teachers and university lecturers within joint research projects and university seminar courses. The cooperation is also supported by the fact that both schools are part of the PHW campus and thus learning spaces such as the Media Lab, the House of Mathematics, the Researchers' Lab and the Learning Lab can be used by both Praxisschulen and PHW.

Furthermore, all professional development courses at PHW are available for university lectures as well as teachers of PHW Praxisschulen.

Currently, Praxisschulen are undergoing a transformation process (Krainz-Dür, 2019). In addition to the support and guidance of university students in the context of their practical studies, research and school development are equally focused on. Praxisschulen are therefore constantly asked to develop and implement research-driven and evidence-based concepts and methods as well as to create realistic scenarios for a school of tomorrow in order to contribute to the technological, demographic, socio-economic, ecological, ethical, and cultural challenges of today's society.

In the coming years, PVS and PMS will gradually be converted into all-day schools and merged into one campus for students between 6 and 14 years old. Correspondingly, democratic education will also continue to progress and flourish as part of this school-related development.

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