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INTERCULTURAL TRACKING

Pupils do research into migration history/ies

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Intercultural tracking. An investigation of historical perceptions of young people in culturally heterogeneous classes

Austria is an immigration country - this is also reflected in the composition of school classes. 16% of Austrian pupils' mother tongue is other than German – in Vienna the percentage is even 38%. Until now the altered situation was addressed above all in the field of language competence by introducing supportive German classes and additional tuition in the respective mother tongues. „The various backgrounds of the pupils are not only relevant in terms of language skills but to the entire education“, says Gertraud Diendorfer, Executive Director of the Democracy Centre Vienna. Young people attending the same grade have different family histories and experiences transmitted through generations which can differ in a significant way. In the research project „Intercultural tracking“, which will be carried out in the next two years at the Democracy Centre, the historical consciousness of pupils in culturally heterogeneous classes will be investigated. In the course of the project, strategies for an inclusive education, taking up the different experiences of the pupils, will be developed.

In search of migration stories and one self

Strong emphasis is put on the cooperation with schools, teachers and pupils. 70 girls and boys between 15 and 22 years old will deal intensely with the topic of migration in the coming months. They are attending three different schools: the HTL Wien 10, the Schulzentrum Ungargasse and the BG Gmünd, close to the Czech border. With the support of the project team of the Democracy Centre Vienna and their teachers the pupils will become researchers themselves and make an interview with their parents about migration stories in their families. Before that the pupils will be interviewed about their historical perceptions. In social memory research the biographical context is regarded as one of the central sources for the formation of historical perceptions. By asking their parents an additional source can be opened up and the young people can be motivated to reflect on their own point of view.

In mid-October the first workshops took place at schools where the project was presented to the pupils. „I am very interested in the project since my ancestors come from Turkey and I would like to find out how they immigrated to Austria,“ says 17-year old Mustafa Günes.



But also young people whose parents were born in Austria might encounter previously unknown migration stories. „I am looking forward to learning something new about my family and to meet new friends“, says 15-year old Robin Redl.

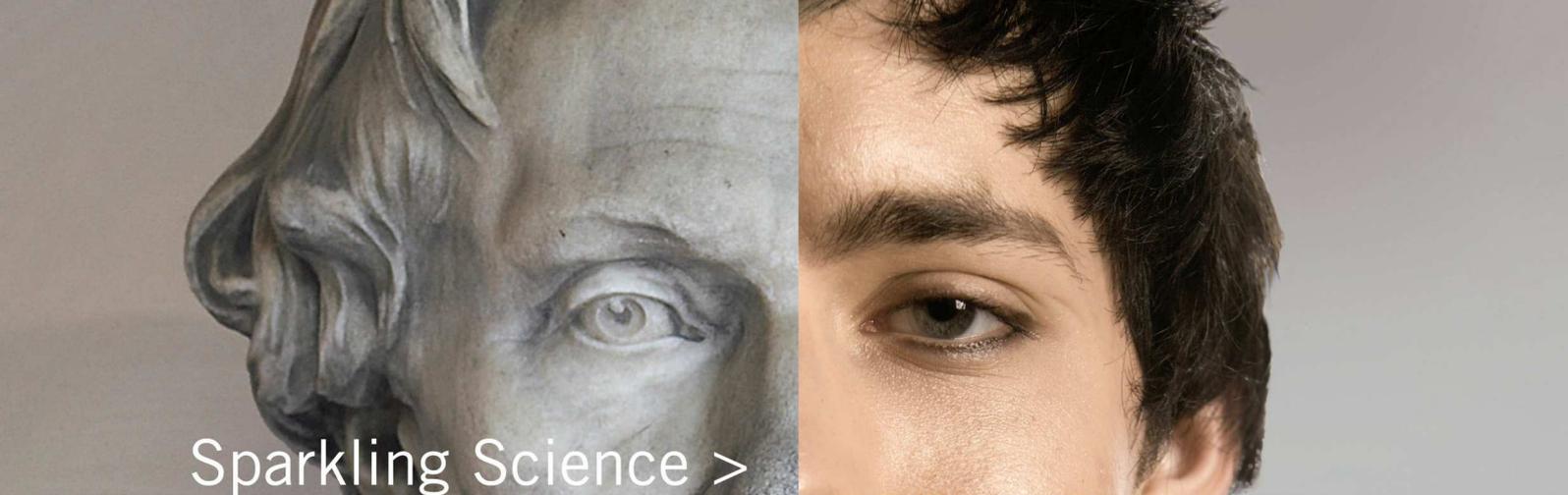
Petra Dorfstätter, a staff member of the Democracy Centre Vienna, reports „In schools migration is frequently a topic charged with emotions. By reflecting on their own point of view and by dealing with migration stories in their vicinity young people should be able to develop a critical historical and political consciousness“. To this end a first step was taken in the workshops: The girls and boys were asked to write down their ideas of „Heimat“ which led to surprising results. „For many young people „Heimat“ means a place where one feels good. It is not something static and can refer to several places and persons connected to them,“ says Alena Pfoser, a staff member of the Democracy Centre.

Before beginning with their intercultural tracking in January the pupils will be acquainted with scientific methods and learn how to create a questionnaire. After all, social research has to be well prepared. „I would like to experience how scientific work is carried out in a professional way“, 15-year old Fabian Hirnschal defines his expectations of the project. This includes the presentation of the research results with active participation of the pupils. In cooperation with the NGO „Initiative Minderheiten“, that in 2004 organized the exhibition „Gastarbajteri“ about the history of labour migration, the pupils will create a travelling exhibition to be shown at other schools.

Cross-linking different knowledge spaces and places of learning

Herbert Pichler is one of the teachers at the Schulzentrum Ungargasse whose pupils participate in the project. For many years he has been dealing with the topics of migration and integration: „The project presents an excellent opportunity to open up schools and to connect learning processes to actual practice“. Also for the teachers' own work the project should be a source of new ideas and teaching approaches. „I expect the project to bring about new insights, materials and an exchange of experience,“ says Helmut Kahler, a teacher at the school in Gmünd. „Intercultural tracking“ is a first step to cut down barriers between the systems of education and science. Gertraud Diendorfer is convinced that „by cross-linking different knowledge spaces and places of learning a benefit for all project partners can be generated.“





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