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Encouraging pupils to participate in artistic and cultural processes: an Austrian way

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Image: Sabine Zirker / KKA



It's the middle of June 2018 in Austria and the academic year is coming to an end. Schools and cultural institutions in many towns and cities are currently holding the final presentations of their cultural education projects.

Short plays and staged scenes on the theme "Living Together" are being performed in the theatre, partly developed by elementary school pupils.

An exhibition designed by pupils is opening in the museum, on the culture of remembrance of the town's displaced and murdered Jewish population.

In the auditorium of a secondary school, students, parents and teachers are invited to view the results of a school project on artistic and architectural urban research.

And in the concert hall, students and orchestral musicians are holding a composition workshop and a small closing concert.

Every year, some 160,000 pupils and over 2,000 schools in all regions throughout Austria take part in the many cultural education programmes. These programmes focus on cooperation among school classes, artists and cultural institutions and involve a variety of disciplines, including music, literature, dance, theatre, design, architecture, visual arts, film, photography and digital media. Artists conduct workshops and projects that are integrated into the classwork of the children, while the latter become acquainted with the cultural institutions in their area and get the opportunity to work on projects there.



Image: Martin Kimbacher / KKA

These direct encounters with artists and collaborations with cultural institutions open up new ways for children to engage with culture and the arts. Their skills – from creativity and initiative to teamwork – are strengthened and supported by methods of artistic-aesthetic learning. Joint learning processes among pupils, teachers and artists take place, and thus also support the development of a new learning culture in schools.

In this context, [KulturKontakt Austria \(KKA\)](#) – a non-profit organisation in Austria, supported by the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research and the Austrian Federal Chancellery – supports and promotes a variety of project formats. These include short workshops with artists, semester-long projects with artists or art associations, and ongoing cooperation among schools and cultural institutions over several years. One of our main tasks is to finance and advise impulse projects for education in contemporary art for children and young people – the so-called “Dialogue Events”, in which pupils, teachers and artists experience a creative process together.



Image: Dorit Chrysler / KKA

In addition to the artistic methods, we strive to take various aspects of diversity into account in the allocation of funds, including gender criteria, balance in the participation of different types of schools, and an equitable distribution between cities and rural areas. It is important to us not only that the culture of the majority society is conveyed, but also that artists from a migration background carry out projects at schools.

Related to that, many schools have a heterogeneous, multilingual student body and very actively address the issues of a migration society in their cultural education activities. In cooperation with artists, a broad spectrum of topics is dealt with, running the gamut from

refugees and migration, equal opportunities and violence prevention, gender issues and the culture of remembrance, to social and cultural diversity, social learning, and the critical use of media.



Image: Christina Treichl / KKA

We believe that cultural education activities can provide positive impulses for sensitising children and young people to these issues and can encourage an appreciative exchange of differing opinions and attitudes. The specific methods of cultural education are applied, and also always involve aesthetic-artistic learning. A great deal of social development is reflected in schools, both in a positive and in a negative sense – schools have the potential to act as “future laboratories” of society. Especially in times of increasing right-wing populism, with all its simplification of complex problems, concrete opportunities for children and young people to engage in respectful and reflective discourse are urgently needed.

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Tags: Arts Cultural diversity
