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Science linking with School School linking with Science

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**Vienna, 1020 – Students investigate the
History and Presence of their School**

LEADING INSTITUTION

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SCHOOLS INVOLVED

Lauder Chabad ORG und KMS, Vienna
Sigmund Freud Gymnasium, Vienna



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The Peer Evaluation

The first project year of „Vienna, 1020“ has already been very successful. Students of both schools, the Sigmund Freud Gymnasium and the Lauder Chabad Campus, conducted various Student Research projects about the „History and Presence of their School“ in the year 2009. The Student Researchers' experience was an important starting point for the second project year in 2010. Again, the students were integrated as active researchers and conducted peer evaluations with the help and support of the Department of Education and Human Development of the University of Vienna. Unlike other peer evaluations, which usually focus on teachers as peers, this project was concerned with the students and their perspectives. During the project, the students conducted on-site visits at their partner school. As peers, students were familiar with school organisation and organisational procedures; however, since they were not directly involved with the setting and surrounding of the school they visited, they were able to retain an independent outsider's view. In the course of their school time, students developed an expertise on schooling, teaching and school life in general, and thus could give constructive feedback to their partner students and partner teachers, respectively. The peer evaluation made use of this expert knowledge the students had acquired, a fact that constitutes an important source of information for school- and educational research.

Before the students visited their partner schools, they participated in workshops where they were prepared for their new roles as peer evaluators. Considering the age of the participants, the students were adequately introduced to the foundations of evaluation research and they became acquainted with methods and tools for (participant) classroom observation. With the support of the university staff they discussed, how teaching practice can be observed empirically and what information can be derived from school situations. In addition, the students engaged in photo-research, an important feature of the second project year.

Equipped with a camera and a self-developed observation form, the peer evaluators visited their partner schools for two days and documented noticeable school situations, their own experiences and situations that attracted their attention. The on-site visits represented new and




exciting experiences for all participating students. First of all, the students had to orient themselves to the new environment of their partner schools, a fact that was challenging for all people involved. Since classroom observations by “foreign” students constituted a new and unaccustomed situation for all participants, the first encounters with the partner students and partner teachers were sometimes challenging. Before the start of the project, the students thought that schools in general and therefore both partner schools were equal in all respects: *“I have never visited another school. I had no idea, how it’s going on there. Actually I thought it is exactly the same like it is here or so.”* (Student, LCC). However, in the course of the project, the peer evaluators became aware of the diversity and variety of school life, *“... there were clear differences. First of all, the number of the kids. There were plenty of them. Different to our school, where everyone knows everyone.”* (Student, LCC). Despite the differences of both schools, the students further encountered similarities and shared characteristics of school life. *“And they actually have exactly the same learning material in the French lessons (...) I understood most of it. Just as it was at my school.”* (Student, SFG). The on-site visits, the shared experiences and the cooperation of the partner schools further helped to reduce prejudices and reservations. *“I think it also has put certain prejudices towards the other school out of the way. (...) In the beginning, we went there and expected everything to be very strict and that everything will be strictly religious. We completely misjudged it but in the end it turned out to be different.”* (Student, SFG)

At the beginning of the peer evaluation project, some teachers were sceptical towards classroom observations by the participating students and the idea that students can make qualified statements about schooling and teaching. However, after a first phase of irritation and scepticism the teachers were taken with the basic idea of a “student exchange” in the form of a peer evaluation: *“So for me the project is effective, if I see that students get to know something different and another approach to school and teaching. Especially because of the new friendships among the students the project has already been very successful.”* (Teacher, LCC)

The final presentation of the peer evaluation attracted wide interest at both schools. This was not only true for the participating research partners but also for the students and teachers who were not directly involved in the research process. As members of the particular schools they were interested in an outsider’s view and therefore participated in the final presentation of the research findings. These final meetings were not just used to receive and to give feedback about their own and the partner schools, rather they were places to socialize with opportunities to learn more about the partner school and to establish contacts with students and teachers of both schools, respectively. In this sense, the project „Vienna, 1020“ enabled successful cooperation between the schools and the university and a sustainable dialog between the two partner schools.





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