



Sparkling Science >

Science linking with School
School linking with Science

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OPINIONCORNER – YOUR OPINION COUNTS

LEADING INSTITUTION

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Opinioncorner – your opinion counts Secondary school students develop and test an online panel for school student research

Opinioncorner – your opinion counts

The project 'Opinioncorner – your opinion counts' started in October 2008. It aims to design, develop, test, and evaluate the first Austrian online panel targeting primarily school students. Therefore it places emphasis on the collaboration with school students. The project leaders, o. Univ.Prof. Dr. Herbert Altrichter and Univ.Prof. Dr. Bernad Batinic, from the Department of Education and Psychology of the Johannes Kepler University of Linz formed a research group consisting of researchers from different scientific fields as education, psychology, and sociology to combine different skills and disciplines.

Project start – Phase One

Students of two classes (11th and 12th grade, respectively) of the commercial upper secondary schools Linz-Auhof and Steyr had to develop – together with the university research team – a website appropriate for young people and to map out a marketing strategy for recruiting students for the panel. At a Kick Off Meeting in October 2008 the students presented first ideas for solving these tasks. After this successful start the students implemented their plans early in February 2009. Afterwards one student stated, "We divided the work to two groups in which we did our best to bring out the optimum of our ideas. Teamwork of students and between students and university was very important for us."

Additionally, in Phase One the project team developed instructional material for teachers and students about questions such as how to develop research questions, how to conduct an online-survey with Opinioncorner, and how to analyse and interpret the results. The material was tested and evaluated in Phase Two. By means of this material, teachers and students will be able to develop a survey on their own. "The material aims to be applicable by both teachers and students from different grades and types of school. Therefore, it was a special challenge to explain social research methods and strategies in a language accessible to school students," reports Mag. Manuela Gamsjäger, project assistant.



The research studies – Phase Two


After the groundwork of Phase One had been laid, the panel was to be used by students for the first time in Phase Two: In cooperation with researchers, students conducted own online surveys regarding relevant scientific topics (see below). They developed a research question, operationalized their hypotheses, developed a survey and analysed and interpreted their data. “The workshops offered by the university were really helpful,” a participating student said. “The material is absolutely self-explanatory, so you don’t necessarily have to attend a workshop in person in Linz. It is sufficient to work through the materials just by yourself.”

Four project teams with 14 students (11th and 12th grade) of two commercial upper secondary schools Steyr and Linz-Auhof participated in the project in summer term 2009. They developed surveys on subjects such as “Student experiences and assessment of new learning methods” and “New Business School – innovative ideas for improving subject-specific education”. A student participating in the project stated, “I gathered an incredible multitude of experiences during this time. I would appreciate to have the chance to participate in such a project again.”

Future plans

In Phase Two first experiences with small teams of students conducting surveys were collected and adequate instructional material was developed which is now ready for application by teachers. In Phase Three surveys are going to be conducted by whole classes of both lower and upper secondary level and their teachers. The following topics have been chosen as research foci, “Gender aspects of student life and student learning” and “Migration and minority status as an aspect of student life and student learning”. “That kind of project work contributes to the democratisation of school in an important way and sensitizes students for important socio-political subject areas,” claims project researcher Univ.Prof. Dr. Johann Bacher.





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