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## Science linking with School School linking with Science

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### **Tricks of the Trade – Field Research with Pupils**

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Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, Institute for Education in the Arts  
Institute for Organisational Development, Vienna  
Academy of Media Arts, Art and Media Studies, Cologne, Germany  
University of Mainz, Department of Sociology, Germany

#### **SCHOOLS INVOLVED**

Cooperative Middle School 8 Pfeilgasse, Vienna



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Austrian Federal Ministry of  
Science and Research

## Tricks of the Trade – Field Research with Pupils

**“What do you think about science?” – For two years, beginning in autumn 2008, the “Tricks of the Trade” project of the Viennese research society “Science Communications Research” tested social scientific field research in schools. Pupils aged between 11 and 14 of the Pfeilgasse Cooperative Middle School together with their teacher Dagmar Schulz and a team of social scientists and cultural studies scholars headed by the sociologist Veronika Wöhrer studied their social environment in three of their own research projects.**

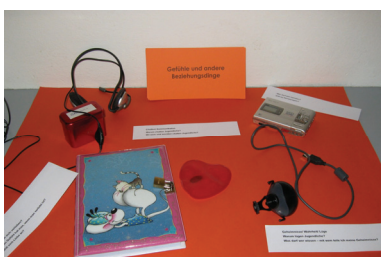
In the school years 2008-2009 and 2009-2010, the “Tricks of the Trade” project worked together with the Pfeilgasse Cooperative Middle School. The project had several goals: It involved studying whether and how social research with young people from a cooperative middle school may be carried out. It also involved testing the applicability of participative social research methods to a target group of young people. And, finally, it involved gathering field data through mediation work in order to examine the interconnectedness of the categories gender, class and ethnicity in the imparting of knowledge to young people.

### Between Research and Knowledge Transmission

In the field work the roles of the social scientists overlapped: The young research team acted both as agents of social scientific knowledge or as coaches of a social scientific research project and as sociological observers of knowledge transmission and research processes. In working with participative social research methods it is necessary to listen to and take into account the wishes, needs and ideas of one’s co-researchers – in this case the pupils. The latter determined, as a result, the research questions being asked and also to a large extent the matching research designs. In this way, instead of ex-cathedra teaching and large group discussions in the class consisting of 16 pupils (ten boys and six girls), the switch was soon made to small group work.

### About “Park and Graffiti”, “Trusting Places in School” and “Young People’s Chat”...

Soon, the talk about and the presentation of research ended up becoming “stale” and the researchers took the desire of the pupils for moving from talk to action seriously. Three research projects were developed by the pupils on the topics of “park and graffiti”, “trusting places in school” and “young people’s chat”. Interestingly enough but hardly surprising for this age group, the groups were initially strictly divided into one group of boys and two girls groups – something that would later change. Excursions were carried out in the groups, participatory observations were tested, field notes were compiled, interviews were conducted and photo documentations were produced. Interpretive procedures such as theoretical coding (Glaser/Strauss 1998) were fit into a form suitable for the young people. At the completion of the “young people’s chat” project, which raised interesting questions about transnational communication, the play with identity(-ies) in the Internet and the chat room as a trusting place, a programme was produced together with “student radio” on young people’s chat (which can be heard at [www.schuelerradio.at/sendungen/2009-11-04](http://www.schuelerradio.at/sendungen/2009-11-04)).



For the young people as well as the researchers, the collaboration involved learning from one another: The researchers learned a good deal about the life world of 11- to 14-year-old pupils of mostly “migrant backgrounds”, about their perspectives and interpretations. The pupils in turn learned about new ways of reflecting on their own social situation.

### ... on “Migration”, “The Social Scientist Job Profile” and “Football”: on which Pupils do Research

In the school year 2009-2010, the method of working together was switched from biweekly meetings in the school to a week-long project week. During this week – again in small groups – three topics were intensively worked on and researched. Then, over the course of the summer semester, the findings were evaluated, documented and presented in school together with the pupils before finally being edited for the project homepage at the address [www.tricksofthetradeproject.info](http://www.tricksofthetradeproject.info).

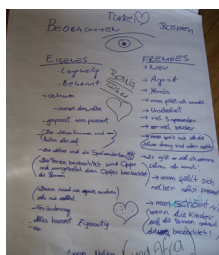
The projects of the second year dealt with the topics of “migration and borders”, “occupation and research” as well as “football”. Once again numerous excursions and interviews – organized at short notice – were carried out and the information collected was documented and discussed. For this purpose, questionnaires based on simple quantitative methods were produced and evaluated, independent investigations were carried out and concept boxes were designed. Elements of supposed failure were also used productively. For instance, the girls in the “football” group, frustrated at recognizing that football is a boys’ thing, began working on the topic “women and football”, did research on the topic, interviewed a woman football player and a cultural studies scholar and drew connections between the individual interviews and racism and sexism in football.

### Researching Research: Participative Co-Research


One of the challenges of participative social research in the area of knowledge transmission is at the same time, alongside carrying out research projects with children and young people in the context of the system “school” was also to research this process itself. In doing so, the pupils were not “passive” subjects of study but rather partners in the production of data. In this way, findings relating to four topics could be obtained to which the pupils made a decisive contribution.

### Findings

As far as concerns intersectionality in the educational system (and the issue of how “educational disadvantage” is constructed in everyday school life), scholarly communication with young people (especially with respect to how social scientific methods and issues may be tested) as well as the methodological discussion in the social sciences (on the issue of how participative research processes may be shaped and conducted), the project produced interesting findings, which were presented at conferences and published in social scientific journals. Also in terms of the question of how pupil research projects may be designed, what tools and methods exist, and how findings may be protected and “cyclically” researched, the project around the sociologist Dr. Veronika Wöhrer has produced a multitude of experiences and recommendations that were collected in a “bag of tricks”. These are accessible to the public at the project homepage. In the end, the participation of the pupils formed the centrepiece of the “Tricks of the Trade” project – an approach that demands considerable time, attention and flexibility but which at the same time makes up for this by providing a multitude of findings and new experiences, both in terms of social scientific research and in terms of the transmission of knowledge.







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