



Sparkling Science >

Science linking with School
School linking with Science

PROJECT OUTLOOK 29th November 2008

TRICKS OF THE TRADE
Social Research with Pupils

LEADING INSTITUTION

Science Communications Research
Coordinator: Dr. Veronika Wöhrer
Contact: veronika.woehrer@univie.ac.at

SCIENTIFIC CO-OPERATION PARTNERS

University of Vienna,
Department of European Ethnology
Institut für Systemische Organisationsanalyse,
ZOOM Children's Museum,
Biomodels Austria,
Vienna Academy of Fine Arts,
Institute for Education in the Arts

SCHOOL INVOLVED

KMS 8, Pfeilgasse



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Austrian Federal Ministry of
Science and Research

Tricks of the Trade Social Research with Pupils

“What do you think of science?” – The project “Tricks of the Trade” by the Viennese research association “Science Communications Research” wants to contribute to developing and clarifying this question. In a two-year research project, 11- and 12-year old pupils of “Kooperative Mittelschule Pfeilgasse” will carry out social research together with their teacher Dagmar Schulz and the researchers from sociology and cultural studies Doris Harrasser, Bernhard Höcher, Alexander Martos, Karin Schneider and Sabine Sölkner, with sociologist Veronika Wöhrer as project leader. “We are looking forward to, together with these pupils, ask questions about learning, knowledge and science and observe spaces where knowledge is produced and communicated”, says Wöhrer.

In the next two years, questions about “science” and “research” are going to be asked and worked out together. The pupils will test methods of qualitative research, such as interviews or participant observations, and investigate social spaces of learning and knowledge production: After the observation and analysis of their own school, the projects will in a second phase continue with observing a scientific research lab. This is important to bring up the issue of “situated knowledges” and to question seemingly given factors.

“Participatory Action Research”: Research in Action


The joint research helps to develop a critical, reflecting attitude towards their own surroundings and therefore opens up courses of action and competences concerning science and research for the involved pupils. “Our punch line would be that the pupils develop an instinct for the relativity of knowledge, for the fact that knowledge is produced; an instinct for the ‘construction’ of reality, for the fact that this is not always obvious. This is what it’s all about”, says cultural scientist and art educator Karin Schneider.



On the scientific level, the project aims at reflecting and further developing methods of participatory action research: These methods are tested together with the pupils and applied to the school context. Furthermore, questions concerning gender, class and ethnicity within knowledge acquisition processes are asked. Therefore, analyses of intersectionality in regard to gathering knowledge are a main issue of the project. As *participatory action research* changes the social space it investigates, self reflection on a theoretical and methodological level plays an important role: “The most important question in such a participatory project would be: How can one make use of the fact that not only the persons in the field, but also the researchers learn something about themselves?”, stresses Doris Harrasser.

At the first meeting, many pupils expressed their enthusiasm about the project and already had some ideas how social research at school could look like. Several children reported afterwards that they liked the “question game” at the beginning of the session, just as the “guessing what they do here” and the subsequent first discussion about research. An 11-year old pupil wrote: “They told us that we are going to make a project together with them for two years and I was really happy about that.” The research team, too, was very pleased with the first meeting. “I am very surprised that we researchers were welcomed with so much interest and cooperation by the children”, says sociologist Bernhard Höcher. He expects many new insights about knowledge communication between research and education from “this enterprise of a (researching) collaboration with the pupils”.





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