

“Fusion Skills”: The Viennese school system is still in the very beginning – News flashes from the side line

By Michael Wimmer/Wimmers Kulturservice

This year the University of Applied Arts organized a European conference about the search for „*specialists of de-specialisation*“. The intention of me as the curator was to get rid of a traditional teacher profile, which is narrowed to one or two unconnected subjects to be learned in school. Instead a new generation of “*specialists of de-specialisation*” should be trained to anticipate the world not in the frame of 10 or 12 strictly divided subjects but as an inexhaustible inter-related richness of knowledge to be mediated in school. To be convincing, stimulating and by that successful contemporary teachers have to meet the whole complexity of problems young people are confronted with in their private or in their future professional life. As a consequence new teacher training programs for future art teachers have been developed which are not only about the arts but combining different disciplines in theory and practice. The assumption is that taking part in projects which intend to knot e.g. arts and science approaches the students will experience the multi-dimensionality of teaching and learning processes. In doing so the learners are not any more narrowed in the frame of specialist knowledge of this or that discipline but learn about meshing knowledge and skills to find appropriate answers for the actual challenges.

To be honest, this kind of organizing everyday schooling is still an exception in Viennese schools. Following a long tradition most of the teachers are still devoted to a narrow system of subject specialization which already starts with the very young and becomes even more rigid the older the students become. In consequence the school system is going to lose contact with real life in a comprehensively interconnected society.

Beside the mainstream some schools try to get rid of the traditional curriculum by replacing traditional school organization with project orientation in which different thematic references are created. Therefore new ways of cooperation are implemented. Teachers of different subject areas build teams, share their disciplinary backgrounds and develop commonly their teaching programs. But also partners from out of school are involved, be it cultural institutions, NGOs or private companies which allow valuable experiences for the students not possible within the school walls. So called “Campus Schools” are located in an environment together with out of school education providers like music schools, libraries, adult training centers or sport clubs.

Ministerial service institutions like KulturKontakt Austria intend to promote schools to cooperate with individual experts e.g. artists or scientists as well as with institutions. Programs like *culture connected* or *(p)arts* have been launched to raise awareness and provide necessary resources. Respective projects may last only few hours or a whole school year and by that change traditional learning attitudes towards the acquisition of “fusion skills” considerably. These efforts are supported by a new country-wide framework curriculum dividing schooling not only in subjects but in education areas like “culture and society” or “environment, nature and technique”. This kind of synopsis allows individual school locations to merge different subject approaches alongside the intentions of each education area. At the moment the culture department of the city of Vienna is preparing a program (working title EduArt) implementing a Viennese model of interdisciplinary art mediation with a

particular focus on school development which is driven by the acquisition of “fusion skills” even when the term is not verbally mentioned.

Often private school initiatives dare to build an avant-garde: E.g. the school initiative “w@a1” (<https://www.walz.at>) offers a new way of teaching and learning. For at least two months teaching and learning follows a specific thematic issue which is negotiated from different disciplinary angles by that allowing the learners to deal with the complexity of reality. Additionally it is part of the educational offer to take part in a “*training company*” developing “real” products and services to be placed on the market. The youngsters slip into different job profiles like product developer, designer, product and sales manager, accountant or marketer. In their professional roles they learn to handle “real things” when they combine learning and practicing and make schools not a place to learn about unconnected fragments of the world but in the world.

As the autonomisation of the Viennese school system is rather confusingly growing there is no systematic observation how far the implementation of the idea of mediating “fusion skills” has gone so far. Because of a growing unmanageability we just can assume that a few places are meanwhile rather advanced in this direction whereas others remain in 19th century traditions. It is a weakness of the Viennese education board not being able to steer or even sanctify responsible actors, is it head teachers or other engaged or ignorant colleagues.