

# Ordinance governing the principles of project-centred teaching

English version



**bm:bwk**

Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture

# ORDINANCE GOVERNING THE PRINCIPLES OF PROJECT-CENTRED TEACHING

**D**evelopments in society keep posing new challenges for schools. The growing complexity means that the future demands on educational work are also becoming increasingly less predictable.

This fact is also considered in the restructuring of the curricula: general guidelines have been modified and have become less centralised and the autonomy of the individual schools has been increased. By applying adequate educational methods schools must increasingly allow for the development and promotion of dynamic abilities and different skills as only well-informed, competent, and motivated people will be open for the changes in society and will be prepared for the new developments.

This is the basis from which the following guidelines are deduced:

## Didactic guidelines

- Differentiation by the individual possibilities, demands, and needs of the learners within the learner group
- Acquiring new knowledge and realising connections and structures with the help of examples (exemplary learning)
- Teaching the ability of autonomous learning and knowledge management (learning how to learn, learning how to apply knowledge, learning how to convey knowledge)
- Connections between theoretical-conceptual learning and learning through concrete actions and experiments

The continuous realisation of these didactic guidelines throughout all teaching

and the use of the adequate framework conditions at school are the pre-condition for the meaningful integration of projects into school education.

## General goals

The prime goals of project-centred education are:

- Autonomous learning and acting
- Realising one's own skills and needs and developing them further
- Developing the willingness to act and assuming responsibility
- Developing a mind that is open for the world and aware of social-historical problems
- Recognising and structuring challenges and problematic situations and developing creative approaches to solutions
- Developing communicative and co-operative competences and the ability to deal with conflicts
- Grasping and designing organisational contexts

## Characteristics of project-centred teaching

Project-centred education complies with the general educational school goals. The project method is designed as a way to realise the educational goals. The applied methods of teaching and learning should complement each other in a constructive way, but at times also represent a meaningful methodical contrast. This provides pupils with the possibility to realise the

particularities or possibilities of the individual methods, viewpoints, and procedures offered for solving the problems.

Project-centred education is seen as an interaction of as many of the following characteristics as possible:

- **Orientation by the interests of the parties involved**

The interests of pupils and teachers are of great importance for the selection of the topics. The selection of the topics not only depends on the contents, but also on the planned types of action. In many cases even the type of activity (e.g. producing a film) may have priority in the decision and the contents will only become “interesting” while work is already under way.

- **Self-organisation and autonomous responsibility**

The goals of the project, the type and method of learning and the assessment criteria are laid down jointly. Teachers and pupils acquire all the information needed and from this deduct the necessary planning. Acquiring planning strategies, resource management, and the finding of methods of how to pass on acquired knowledge, skills, and abilities to others as well as the constructive-critical evaluation of one’s own performance and that of others are explicit learning contents and goals.

- **Goal-oriented planning**

The joint definition of learning and activity contents is a prerequisite for reasonable project execution. These requirements also apply to the discussions, planning, and consent on planned activities, types of work to be used, the time available, and the various responsibilities.

- **Interdisciplinarity**

Project-centred education always focuses on one specific topic, problem, for the

management and solution of which the adequate disciplines shall be used. Project-centred education shall help to learn “networked thinking” and holistic approaches. The acquisition of these skills is promoted by the analysis of the problem from different points of view and an interdisciplinary approach to the topic, but may also be mastered within one single subject.

- **Acquisition of social competences**

Joint work on one subject or also the intention of jointly achieving a common objective generates the necessity of testing new forms of communication to be able to acquire new knowledge together and from one another. Communication and co-operation, strategies for solving conflicts, co-ordination amongst groups, handling criticism, evaluation and control, etc. thus become fields of learning. Social and technical learning objectives are of equal importance.

- **The external effect**

Project-centred education tries to influence realities inside school and outside. Pupils actively take part in designing the social environment.

- **The role of the teachers**

In addition to their specialist competences teachers also play an important role in providing assistance with the structuring of planning and decision-making processes and the necessary didactic and organisational set-up, the conveyance of competences regarding work processes, and the awareness building of group-dynamic processes as well as the support of reflection processes.

- **Involving many senses**

The meaningful connection of physical and intellectual work, of the acquisition of awareness and application in practical

activities as well as the involvement of a great number of senses are an important quality of project-centred teaching.

## Central phases of project-centred teaching

### • Project idea/identifying topics

It is important to awaken the interest of all the parties involved and to have enough time so that teachers and pupils can agree on a topic they want to elaborate or a problem they mean to solve.

### • Defining goals and planning

The definition of the goals also shows the different interests, allows to discuss sub-topics and to define a result to be achieved. The existing framework conditions and resources must be analysed and considered in the planning process, the competences of the individual participants must be defined.

### • Preparation time

This time helps to acquire a wealth of information, necessary working materials, plan excursions, discussions with experts, watch films, etc. During this preparation work the necessity of organisational or material changes of the project plan might become apparent.

### • Project execution

During this phase most of the contents work is handled. Pupils realise the planned projects in various social formations and with as much autonomy as possible, teachers are available as co-ordinating advisers and experts as well as “conflict managers”.

During this phase it is of essential importance to exchange experiences and interim results during (brief) reflection phases, discuss problems that have occurred, take co-ordinating measures, and

verify the progress of the project as well as the emotional state of the project team.

### • Project presentation/project documentation

Project-oriented education is characterised by a clearly defined completion. It provides all those involved with the possibility to present the results to the others and possibly also to a larger public. The decisive factor for the choice of the completion of the project must be the possibility for the pupils to experience both recognition and criticism through their presentation and to create a situation where the results of the project can be communicated. The documentation is part of the project and an essential basis for the presentation, PR work, reflection, and evaluation. Therefore it should provide information on all important results, stages of the working process, and experiences of the project team.

### • Project evaluation

The evaluation serves the purpose of verifying the project results and enhancing the quality of future projects. The identification of goals during the planning stage is based on the following issues: what do we want to achieve for what purpose and by what means?

Throughout the process and at the end of the project these goals are systematically evaluated on the basis of the assembled data with respect to their realisation and implementation.

During the project reflection phases participants discuss their experiences and the current processes. Project reflection is an imminent element of the evaluation. It is always the task of the participants, but, in order to avoid “blind spots” in their own perception, in some parts of the evaluation it is absolutely necessary to also include views from outsiders (“critical friends”, project partners).

## Legal bases and provisions

Quotations from laws and ordinances are included in all of the following legal principles on teaching as part of the practical guidelines for the project ordinance.

### Teaching

Project-based education complies with the tasks of Austrian schools and teaching as defined by law.

- **School Education Act (Schulunterrichtsgesetz/SchUG)**

One of the provisions of §17 (1) SchUG states that teachers must convey the knowledge taught in the respective subject in a realistic manner and with reference to topical situations in line with the state-of-the-art. Teachers furthermore must aim to trigger a joint educational effect of all subjects taught and in so doing consider the development of the pupils and choose the adequate methods. As part of this process pupils must be encouraged to autonomous action and team-work.

- **Curriculum ordinance**

Project-centred education is based on

- the general educational goals,
- the general and specialisation-related didactic principles,
- the provisions for the individual subjects as laid down in the curriculum,<sup>1</sup>
- the educational principles.

The goals of the educational principles can best be achieved through the joint effects of many or all subjects. Project-based education is one of the most ade-

quate ways for the concrete implementation. Educational principles are partly regulated by principal ordinances.

### Organisational measures

The fulfilment of the goals of project-based education may require a temporary change in the usual organisation of the school. This in particular includes changes in the curriculum (§10 SchUG) for the duration of the project, disrupting the class community, involvement of external participants, and re-locating classes to venues outside the school premises. The latter has no effect on the number of school events provided for in the school event regulation.

Project weeks (§13 SchUG) and school-related events may also supplement project education or build on this basis. The planned organisational aspects of the educational project must be co-ordinated with the school management.

It is also helpful to establish a good working relationship with the parents (school community committee, parents' association, class forum, school forum) and with the trainers of apprentices in enterprises (for part-time vocational schools) as well as to provide information to fellow teachers and the school management already during the planning phase.

### Supervisory duties

A summary definition of the teachers' supervisory duties and some comments are contained in Ordinance 10.361/115-III/4/96 (MVBl. 109/1997) of the Federal Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs. If projects are re-located to premises outside the school the principles adopted by the above-quoted ordinance are also applied. Considering the supervisory duties (which might no longer apply under spe-

<sup>1</sup> Special provisions apply to the realisation of projects in the individual disciplines and subjects at the technical and vocational schools and colleges.

cific circumstances as from year 9) and the principles of the autonomous activities of the pupils it must be made sure that

- pupils work autonomously within a certain, clearly defined location and within a specific period,
- pupils have been warned against possible dangers,
- the supervisors can always be contacted by the pupils (defining a meeting point),
- the pupils' physical and intellectual maturity and possible dangers are always taken into account, and
- pupils while working autonomously are not alone, but work at least in pairs.

To ensure the pupils' safety and if this seems advisable for the tasks of the school pupils may also be supervised by other adequate individuals (e.g. parents) instead of by the teachers (§ 44a SchUG).

### **Performance evaluation and assessment**

Performance (§3 and §4 of the Performance Evaluation Regulation) by the pupils as part of project-oriented education must be considered for assessment. Adequate forms of assessment must be aimed for in the holistic learning method of project-based education. This is necessary as project-based education is based on a re-structuring of the working co-operation between teachers and pupils as well as the holistic nature of learning and teaching processes and topic-related work beyond disciplines.

#### **Download:**

Homepage of the BMBWK

<http://www.bmbwk.gv.at>

Bereich *Bildung – Unterricht und Schule*

**Publisher:**

Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Kultur  
Doris Kölbl, Abt. I/4  
A-1080 Wien  
Strozzigasse 2/5

**Available from:**

AMEDIA  
A-1140 Wien  
Sturzgasse 1a  
Telefon + Fax: 01/982 13 22, E-Mail: [amedia@cso.co.at](mailto:amedia@cso.co.at)

**Homepage / Pdf download:**

[www.bmbwk.gv.at](http://www.bmbwk.gv.at)  
Bereich *Bildung – Unterricht und Schule*

Vienna, September 2001

**Graphic Design:**  
Maria Martina Schmitt  
1080 Wien  
[mms@nexta.at](mailto:mms@nexta.at)