European, Global and Intercultural Dimension in Curriculum Development

Preschool education

The National Framework Curriculum for Preschool Education in Austria defines a number of educational areas which every preschool educational institution has to take into account. Some of them aim to make children open to other societies and cultures and teach them the value of multilingualism. This should ensure that pupils show interest in travelling to other countries for learning and/or work purposes.

- “Emotions and Social Relations”: In this educational area children should learn to deal with their emotions, develop socio-communicative competences (such as the ability to cooperate and deal with conflicts, accept tolerance and responsibility for oneself and others, etc.) and the ability to empathise and build relationships.
- “Ethics and Society”: Ethics deals with issues related to the value and dignity of people. In a pluralistic and democratic society, collectively shared basic values are an essential prerequisite for being able to act responsibly and participate in social processes constructively.
- “Language and Communication”: Language forms the basis for shaping social relationships and participating in cultural and political life. Linguistic competence is the key to a successful educational biography. Continuous language promotion represents an interdisciplinary task in elementary educational establishments. Children are supported in many different everyday situations so they acquire linguistic competences in their first and second language and differentiate between them.

School education

In the school legislation, the teaching principles and also in the curricula of all school types, reference is made in many places to the global, European and intercultural dimension.

According to § 2 of the Austrian School Organisation Act [1] (Schulorganisationsgesetz, SchOG) [2], all Austrian schools are to

- endow pupils with the ability to think for themselves,
- foster open-mindedness towards other people’s political opinions and world views,
- put young people in the position to participate in Austrian, European and global economic and cultural life,
- uphold fundamental human values like peace and freedom and
- contribute to the fulfilment of joint human responsibilities.
Teaching principles

Of the total of twelve teaching principles which have to be taken into account in all subjects, two of them explicitly refer to the European/intercultural dimension:

- **European citizenship education**: The aim of European citizenship education is to ensure pupils have a reflected awareness of Europe. Teaching this in school lessons needs to be done with the example of various European topics with consideration of the living environment and world of experience of the learners. Here it is not only a matter of teaching knowledge such as pure institution knowledge and European law but rather also specific aspects of European political education, such as political judgement or political capability. The curricula of all Austrian schools include intensively dealing with the process of European integration and Austria’s role in the European Union.

- **Intercultural learning**: Intercultural learning became a fixed component as a teaching principle in the curricula of all general education schools at the start of the 1990s. In the curricula of the other school types there are also many intercultural references. This teaching principle aims to make a contribution to mutual understanding, to the recognition of differences and similarities and to the reduction of prejudices.

In most other teaching principles there is also regularly reference to Europe and to the world overall – for example in “citizenship education”, “media education” and also “economics education and consumer education”.

Curricula

In the curricula of the individual school types there is also reference to the global/European dimension – either in the general educational objectives, in the general didactic principles or in the educational and teaching tasks of the individual subjects. The following examples should illustrate this:

- **General educational objective of primary schools**: Young people are encouraged to become healthy, industrious, loyal and responsible members of society and citizens of the democratic federal Republic of Austria as a Member State of the European Union. They are to be guided towards independent judgement and social understanding, and led to appreciate the political and ideological thinking of others, to participate in the business and cultural life of Austria, Europe and the entire world, and to contribute to the common tasks of humankind in a freedom- and peace-loving way. Intercultural learning aims to enhance the mutual understanding and esteem of pupils, enabling them to appreciate things they have in common with others, and thus reduce prejudice. Based on experiences gained in classroom and extramural activities with people from other European countries, especially from a neighbouring state to the pupils’ province, the intercultural learning activities are intended to stimulate European awareness and cosmopolitanism.

- **General didactic principles in lower secondary schools**: According to the guiding principles of new secondary school and academic secondary school (lower level) curricula, education processes have to be seen against the background of rapid social change, particularly in the fields of culture, science, business, technology, ecology and law. As European integration and economic internationalisation progress, intercultural interaction is of growing significance. Fostering open-mindedness by dealing with regional, Austrian and European identities is of particular importance in this context. Mutual respect and acceptance are important educational objectives and form an integral part of intercultural learning.

- **Educational and teaching tasks in selected subjects of academic secondary school**: In the curriculum “history and social studies/political education” it explains that the “objective of teaching is therefore to develop a reflected and (self-)reflective awareness of history and
politics among the pupils and to raise awareness of the importance of democracy and human rights as well as basic European values as defined, for example, in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and the associated social and legal order” [More] [6].

- The curricula of the many vocational education and training programmes at the upper secondary level also contain provisions which aim to promote the international and European dimension. According to their mission statement, schools of business, for example, are committed to internationality by focusing on economic, political and cultural developments in all areas of teaching and paying attention to national and European framework conditions and also global connections. For the 13th grade at colleges of business administration educational standards for the area of “internationality” [7] have also been defined, which include those core competences which all students should have obtained by the end of this grade.

Partnerships and Networks

Programmes and initiatives at pre-primary and school level

Owing to regional conditions, the composition of kindergarten groups may vary considerably in terms of cultural/ethnic backgrounds. Kindergarten teachers always have to take this fact into account, which is why they are prepared for multicultural settings during their training and in-service training. Some kindergartens participate in EU programmes.

Kindergartens further encourage early foreign language learning in a playful way, which is well accepted by parents and children. This is also done in a form suitable for children and integrated into the daily kindergarten routine.

Following conflict resolution, non-violence and human rights, Global Learning has been selected as a new focal theme to be addressed by the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF) [8].

The “Vielfalter Initiative” [9], which was launched by Western Union and the intercultural centre Interkulturelles Zentrum with support from the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF) [8] in 2008, supported initiatives and projects dedicated to the themes of multilingualism, intercultural competence and giftedness in many different areas. The aim is to stimulate a positive discourse and to raise awareness within society and to make the possibilities of cultural diversity visible on a lasting basis.

The Vielfalter Initiative was aimed at schools, teachers and kindergartens, early childhood educators, and also associations and private initiatives which, in the broadest sense, deal with the promotion of diversity, multilingualism and intercultural education and want to implement a project. By 2015 more than 180 projects had been supported.

For the successor programme please see here [10].

Global Learning

Global Learning is understood as an educational response to the processes of globalisation. It tries to enable learners to find out and reflect on their own location in the complexity of worldwide society, and to grasp the causes and interrelationships of social and economic developments. Furthermore, students are expected to draw their own conclusions and develop their actions. Seminars and events on Global Learning have been initiated and supported for several years by the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF) [8], in cooperation with NGOs and university colleges of teacher education. Materials and concepts for in-service training of teachers
have been prepared. All activities take place in the context of European and global developments in this field. There are service websites – e.g. for teachers and youth workers – with background information and materials: **globales Lernen (Global Learning)** [11], **baobab** [12].

**Global Education Weeks**

In the context of the Global Education Week International – organised in 36 Council of Europe Member States –, a **Global Education Week (GEW)** [13], especially for schools, but also for the general public, has been organised every year in Austria by the **Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF)** [8], in collaboration with NGOs since 1999. Every year the GEW offers the possibility at the European level to deal with global developments in detail within the framework of events: globalisation, sustainable development, human rights, fair trade, peacekeeping and conflict resolution, gender, global environmental issues and intercultural learning are at the centre of this Council of Europe initiative. The overall objective of the GEW is to raise and deepen awareness of global issues.

**GENE (Global Education Network Europe)**

The purpose of **GENE** [14] is to support national structures in their work to improve the quality and increase the provision of Global Education in Europe. GENE achieves this purpose through networking, peer review and learning, strategy sharing, support, policy advice; and through policy research. It brings together ministries, agencies and other bodies that develop national policies and provide funding for Global Education in European countries. Starting in 2001 with six national institutions from six countries, GENE has grown to facilitate the sharing of policy learning of more than 30 ministries and agencies and other bodies from 20 countries, through the regular GENE roundtables and networking mechanisms. The **Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF)** [8] and the Austrian Development Agency are members of the GENE network.

**Bilateral and regional educational cooperation**

Economics, politics, and culture are tightly interwoven on an international level. Hence international cooperation is of growing importance. Globalisation and demographic changes in societies require the **Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF)** [8] to pursue a foreign policy that is suitably adapted to geopolitical regions and to topics of relevance not only to the Austrian education system but to society as a whole. This work takes place in the context of new forms of geostrategic networking and regional cooperation. A decisive role in the development and functionality of these networks and active regional cooperation is played by a dynamic, bilateral education policy that promotes exchange and cooperation in the area of basic and advanced education among European and non-European countries.

This cooperation is supported by

- formal interstate agreements (such as cultural treaties, memoranda of understanding, joint declarations, cf. website [15]),
- by exchanges of experience among experts,
- and by visits on the political level (ministers, high-ranking delegations),
- and also to a greater extent through joint projects and institutional partnerships.

Against the backdrop of increasing globalisation, strategic bilateral cooperation complements cooperation on a multilateral level (international organisations) and thereby simultaneously generates synergies for the national education sector.
The Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF) also sets a regional cooperation priority in the form of education cooperation with the states of Eastern and South Eastern Europe on the levels of education policy and strategy. Building on the long-standing engagement in the leadership of the former Task Force Fostering and Building Human Capital of the Regional Cooperation Council (16), BMB cooperates with the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (17) and thus promotes exchange among countries of the Western Balkans and the EU.

In the scope of the "EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR)" with fourteen participating states (of which nine are EU Member States) the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF) is jointly coordinating the priority area "To Invest in People and Skills" with the Federal Ministry for Labour, Social Affairs, Health and Consumer Protection (BMASGK) (18) and the Republic of Moldova. This priority area focuses mainly on education policy and labour market issues.

As part of the Central European Cooperation in Education, BMBWF is involved in regional partnerships with neighbouring countries in Central Europe. These partnerships constitute an important interface between bilateral cooperation and exchange on the EU level.

**Source URL:**

**Links**
[8] https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/institutions-1_en#inst4
[16] http://www.rcc.int/
[18] https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/institutions-1_en#inst7