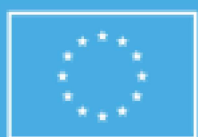


PERFECT

Guidelines for
Schools,
teachers
and students



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INTRODUCTION


These guidelines are a result of the PERForming and Sharing of Local Histories Project (PERFECT Project) and its main goal is to provide support for school and other education institutions as well as stakeholders of the participating schools who have not been part of the project but are interested in implementing the PERFECT approach in their own settings.


The PERFECT Project has brought together schools in Malta, Austria, Italy and Romania with organisations with Europe-wide or global experience in the field of inclusion, dealing with diversity and implementing (inter)cultural projects. PERFECT aims at contributing to the innovation and quality of primary and secondary education by developing and testing a teaching/learning strategy based on collaborative cultural production and intercultural exchange also applying a meaningful, stimulating and interactive use of digital technology.

THE OBJECTIVES OF PROJECT PERFECT ARE:


To stimulate and support the development of autonomous learning and basic research skills, creative thinking, collaborative attitudes and skills through the creation of cultural products based on local history;


 To organise and reward digitally enhanced international collaboration of partner schools by supporting the exchange of good practices and cultural products originated locally by students' groups, interacting among them through digitally supported project work;

 To develop a review of the experiences conducted and produce a set of methodological instruments to support the replicability and dissemination of the PERFECT "open model" of action;


 To set up and promote a network of primary and secondary schools committed to participate in exchange of cultural products developed by their students and in a European Festival.

PERFECT HAS THE FOLLOWING MAIN DEVELOPMENT AREAS:

 Cultural exchange: collaboration between schools of different countries allows pupils and teachers to share and learn about different experiences in diverse sectors. This leads to the identification of similarities, differences and new inputs and outputs;



Didactical innovation: by sharing experiences, teachers and, more in general, schools, can get to know innovative ways of teaching/learning and can therefore put them into practice in their local realities.




Openness to multiculturalism: through cultural exchange, teachers and students have the opportunity to find out about other people's traditions and cultures, which can lead to feelings of cultural respect and understanding of other countries' cultural heritage.

A Handbook has been developed for those who wish to reproduce the cultural projects piloted during the project's lifetime. It supports the implementation of local cultural projects that have two distinctive features:




they focus on a historical figure of local and wider importance

and




their final products are based on the performing arts.

THE CURRENT GUIDELINES SERVE A DOUBLE PURPOSE



they guide those who have not been part of such a performing art project to understand how they are good tools for inclusion and how they fit the global education innovation trends by pursuing a whole school approach;

and



they guide educators – professional and non-formal alike – in developing their own arts projects based on the PERFECT principles going beyond performing arts or the historical figure approach (even beyond the humanities field)



Arts for
intercultural
learning
and
other
learning
purposes

Article 27 of the UN Declaration of Universal Human Rights provides that “everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.” There is a good reason for highlighting the right to arts and also for linking this right to sciences. While the focus of education has recently been mostly on science subjects and disciplines, there is a growing interest in arts and humanities for a number of reasons.

One is the current high interest in physical and mental wellbeing as well as the discourse on social-emotional learning and the supporting of it as the main purpose of school (rather than focusing on academic learning). In recent years, arts for intercultural understanding have gained more interest with the growing number of migrants – both internal and external – in the European Union. In a 2017 report published by the European Union entitled *How Culture And The Arts Can Promote Intercultural Dialogue In The Context Of The Migratory And Refugee Crisis* the authors highlight that artistic expression is important in self-definition and identification, and they also help others grasp and appreciate differences. Thus, arts projects are ideal for expressing one’s values and identities while they are also highly suitable for promoting diversity and intercultural understanding.

An art project is an excellent tool to prove to the students, your colleagues, and the wider school community that with careful planning it is indeed possible for everybody to participate. It makes it possible for students whose talents are not in fields traditionally celebrated by the school to have a highly satisfying learning experience that may also boost their classroom performance. Since an artistic project needs people to perform a diverse set of roles you can find a suitable job for nearly every student. There will be creative people who are good at writing or making props and costumes, others will have the opportunity to show off their

technical skills with music or lights, yet others will enjoy being on stage, etc. Very often an opportunity to show such non-school-like talents raises the social status of a student, and subsequently even their classroom results may increase. Another area of interest is STEAM.

The addition of art to STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) education makes science, technology, engineering, and maths experiments more entertaining and approachable, thus more attractive for students who are at risk of disengagement with STEM. At the same time, art’s integration into the STEM curriculum goes beyond student engagement and interest. Utilising project-based learning that incorporates art can help create a foundation while giving students opportunities to tackle real-world issues with a team.

The PERFECT Project develops a holistic method to work out key transversal competences (cultural awareness and expression, citizenship, multilingual, digital, entrepreneurship, personal, social, and learning) through a transnational experience. Students create a cultural product (drama or musical theatre, an exhibition including students’ works, a multimedia product, etc.) that includes historic research, literature and art history, music, performing arts and digital skills. It starts with a local celebrity or historical episodes connected to local history. There is collaboration in the development of parallel cultural products and sharing of resources for learning.

All learning takes place with the students’ participation. There are different levels of participation. We refer to Hart’s (1992) Ladder of participation to understand how participation

varies from projects totally controlled by students to projects totally controlled by adults. In the Perfect Model students' participation is on various levels. All levels are somehow advantageous to the learner as long as the teacher fills the different roles as needed.

PERFECT also takes a competence framework as the basis of its methodology. The Joint Research Centre of the European Commission has provided guidance for professionals on transversal skills. PERFECT adopts the LifeComp framework as its basis. LifeComp Conceptual Reference Model, which focuses on the Personal, Social and Learning aspects, is the basis of the PERFECT Project. Competences are listed in detail with relevance to formal/informal art education.



THE WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH



A whole school approach (WSA from now on) belongs to a learner-centred vision of education, within the frame of a communitarian sense of learning and development. International bodies and their declarations introduce WSA as a key factor for quality education as well as for building up an inclusive system which provides education for all.


The UNESCO defines WSA as the educational process that “involves addressing the needs of learners, staff, and the wider community, not only within the curriculum, but across the whole-school and learning environment. It implies collective and collaborative action in and by a school community to improve student learning, behaviour and wellbeing, and the conditions that support these”. The focus of this international organisation on WSA goes back to the UNESCO Guidelines on intercultural education in 2006 which recommended the use of approaches that connect the school to the community and identified the importance of parental involvement in WSA and community schooling to foster tolerance in children. The most up to date UNESCO’s reference to WSA can be found within the statements on SDG4 and the policy recommendations on how to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030.


The WSA, as a perspective for inclusive and sustainable schools, cannot be implemented without considering some key preconditions. Without these preconditions, it is unlikely that a WSA might take place. The most remarkable precondition is to have a sense of community. Sometimes the sense of community is previous to a WSA implementation. On other occasions, the community is the outcome of a WSA process. Nevertheless, WSA and community sense go together to achieve inclusion and sustainability.


The generation of a sense of community can be achieved through WSA that is developed simultaneously from different dimensions. Without a doubt, formal education appears as one of the most important, the school becomes an ideal framework for that. However, we must also be aware of the rigid structure of the school (timetable, curriculum, architecture) as a strong limitation.


WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH PRINCIPLES

A WSA shares the same basic principles as community education. These principles guide the essential dynamics of the school, trying to take advantage of the potential, and limiting the effects of the aforementioned rigidity. These principles are:

 **Community.** Education goes beyond the school, therefore the community becomes an essential part of what happens inside and outside the school. A WSA is somehow a “whole community approach”.

 **Horizontality.** The participation and decision-making processes, as well as the participatory dynamics run by the several stakeholders (educators, educational professionals, families, participants, and administrations) must be transformed from pyramidal to horizontal relationships framework. In a WSA your role in the community plays a secondary position.


 **Osmosis.** The WSA participatory processes integrate both internal school processes (formal and non-formal) and external dynamics rooted within the community.


 **Belonging.** A WSA requires that schools become the meeting point of the different stakeholders engaged and it must give a sense of belonging to all of them.


 **System of relationships.** A WSA should promote both a quantitative increase of stakeholders and bonds and a qualitative improvement of their relationships.


SOME WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH CHALLENGES

A WSA in action regarding these principles is affected by gaps and contradictions that must be taken into account since they might become negative barriers for a successful implementation of WSA. The more these challenges are achieved, the better a WSA will be implemented:

 The “community outsiders” challenge. Urban dynamics and territorial mobility often mean that professionals do not belong to the community where they are working, they just stay in the community during their working hours. For sure, they play an essential role for achieving successful school activities: they are competent for leading them, and they also bring fresh knowledge from other contexts, since the community itself may not have it. However, there’s a risk they act as “community outsiders”: they “stay” sometimes, but they are not “there”, and this fact might create constraints for a WSA. To avoid that, they should learn and make a cultural effort to understand each other in order to prevent this risk. An accommodation process is necessary by both sides for mutual benefit.

 The “social class” challenge. A WSA seeks equity and wishes to improve the lives of those community groups that are at social risk. But this does not exactly mean that this approach is only implemented with these social risk groups. A WSA needs to start from a pre-condition: social melting regardless of the participants’ standard of living, the knitting of bonds among all the community members as a guarantee that school processes can help structure social life in terms of social cohesion. This challenge is rather focused on the social differences among schools than on the gaps inside school communities.

 The “digital” challenge. The use of ICT to establish the communication and socialisation channels of a group may significantly transform dynamics and interpersonal relationship formats, but is it always in favour of a WSA? What is sure is that we have to question whether a community can be virtual, and consequently can be an active subject of a community education process. A hypothetical virtual community breaks the barriers of time and space. It allows the relocation of relationships and the de-synchronization of exchanges. It facilitates interconnections to infinite levels. We cannot dodge the question of how and when to use social networks to promote a WSA.


 The “sustainability” challenge. A WSA process may begin; resources are activated; the first results are obtained; but a minor event may block the development of the process itself and all its benefits. The social systems generated by WSA processes are hypersensitive


to changes in starting conditions. Long-term WSA processes are extremely complex. The worst consequence is not so much in the process itself, which gets interrupted, but in future ones that can be given. A community that has failed in the development of a WSA only realises short term negative effects, and a lack of trust in future similar processes remains with community members.


A WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH IS A PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

One final dimension to be pointed out regarding a WSA is participation. Participation is the essential component to make it happen. Participation promotes a democratic citizenship for all, and the school is a privileged space where these participatory dynamics may take place, but as we have already said, this participation can only be effective if it goes beyond the school structure.

A WSA requires the assumption of a more holistic approach, and implies at least the implementation of three strategies:

 To reformulate the sense of participation by all school stakeholders - The need to reformulate the sense of participation should lead stakeholders to understand participation as a personal value, a significant social behaviour and valued by all citizens irrespective of their personal background. Understanding participation as a personal value allows us to move away from the dependency-autonomy tension, in favour of a principle of positive interdependence among others. This interdependence should be seen as the basics for living together.

 To reconstruct the already existing participation spaces to accommodate stakeholders' participation - The need to rebuild the spaces to participate let us understand participation as a remarkable political principle. This is revealed as a basic condition of a model which aims for "intercultural citizenship".

 To rethink participatory dynamization strategies that facilitate the involvement of all the stakeholders - The need to rethink the strategies to promote the participation of stakeholders pushes us to understand such participation as a social strategy of action, a method of facing common projects beyond education. The purpose of this social strategy is to develop a network of partners and actions that allows us to deepen the fight against exclusion and build "social cohesion".

This three-dimensional perspective can become the ground for an innovative understanding concerning participation, a new perspective that should lead to strengthening WSA at schools:

Funds of knowledge: It refers to the historical accumulation of abilities, bodies of knowledge, assets, and cultural ways of interacting from migrant families' households, and how educators use them as a resource to enhance their students' academic progress.

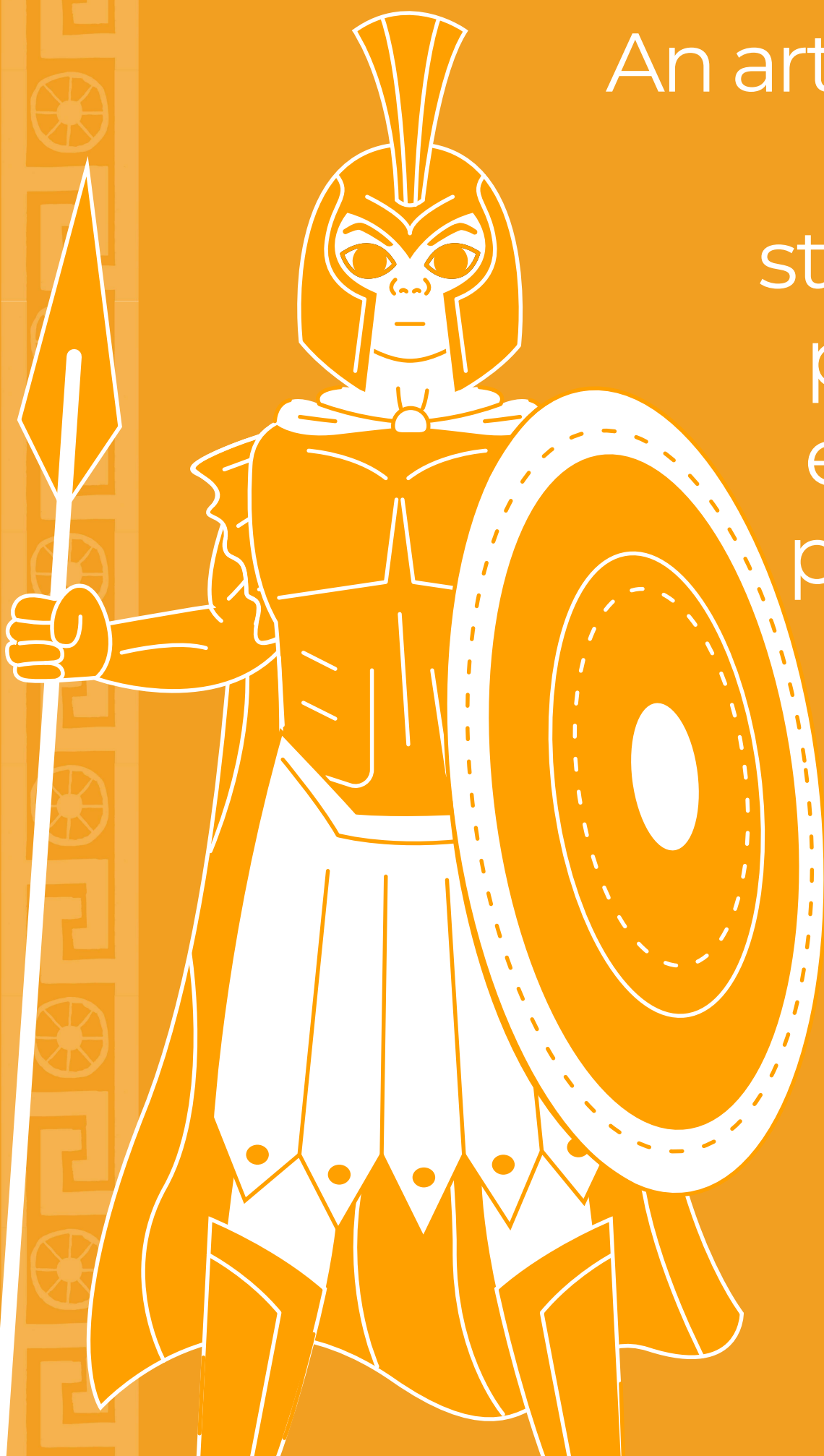
Learning communities: It refers to the cultural and social transformation of a school, aimed at achieving maximum instrumental learning for all students, with respectful social interaction regarding diversity among everyone and the maximum participation of the community stakeholders (parents, organisations).

SOURCES

This chapter contains excerpts from research done in the European Education Policy Network on Teachers and School Leaders in 2022 by Miquel Angel Essomba Gelabert and his team

https://educationpolicynetwork.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Deliverable-2_2_Whole-schoolsupport-and-networking-for-school-success-for-all.pdf


If you want to learn more about the whole school approach, you can do an online course also providing the possibility of receiving a certificate that could be acknowledged as part of the continuous professional development obligations of teachers here: <https://microvetvle.eu/course/view.php?id=33>





An art project
led by
students,
parents,
external
partners

Implementing the WSA in developing art projects means that the project might probably be best led by students, parents, artists, researchers, etc., but not teachers. However, school professionals are still responsible for the educational process, and thus it is important to consider how best to support a project that is not led by teachers. Teachers need to become facilitators of learning and assume a leadership role: enabling, supporting, and constantly monitoring project implementation and the learning process. This might be strange at first as it is very different from the traditional teacher role. Teachers traditionally create and implement learning materials, while facilitators support learners through the process and help maximise their education.

A GOOD FACILITATOR WILL MOSTLY:

 Act as a mediator: Facilitators often work in group settings. By acting as mediators and encouraging a healthy discussion, they're able to increase participation, fostering new ideas or solutions.

 Engage in active listening and problem-solving: Understanding how to best help someone requires reliance on strong active listening skills. By narrowing down the specific challenges an individual is facing, facilitators are able to help find a solution.

 Use preparation or engagement techniques: Even though facilitators aren't required to have background knowledge in a subject, proper preparation is crucial for facilitation. Arriving prepared with activities and strategies to keep students and other participants engaged can streamline learning, encouraging individuals to invest in the process. When a project is led by students, it means that it is built on acknowledging child agency. Child agency means that children are capable of doing a wide range of things, usually much more than adults assume they can. It means that they are able to and thus may choose their way of acting, thus contributing to the construction of their social and cultural context.

Skills and concepts like critical thinking, decision making, the consequences of a decision, democracy, cannot be taught in theory, they need to be learnt through practice and error. If children are allowed and supported to exercise their agency from an early age, they will be much more confident in them as they grow older. If children are included in the decision making for their own environment, they will feel ownership and will adhere to the rules much more.

If you let your students assume their agency when designing your school arts project, you provide them with a safe space where they can develop the abovementioned skills. It is difficult to let go of the illusion of complete control.

Professional educators and parents often make decisions for children with the intention of keeping them safe, protecting them from harm and the negative consequences of bad decisions. While these intentions are noble, they don't allow children to learn and to make their own mistakes when the stakes are low and thus leave young people unprepared when they turn adults and there isn't anyone making decisions for them anymore. The role of adults is to involve and facilitate, to give them tools, to help them consider options or point of views they have not thought about, to make sure that everyone is heard.

It is important to know the background of the students in your school. Their family, their social status and their heritage have a lot of impact on how they view hierarchy, what values they respect, and how comfortable they are with making decisions and facing the consequences. In order to make sure that every child is equally able to express their opinion and to participate, you need to be aware of these differences, and adjust the tools to accommodate them. It is essential to have a respectful and trustful relationship with parents too, so that children are not trapped between clashing values and practices.

Parents are your most obvious resource and partners, and in the case of diversity present in a school parents are most likely to engage with schools in cultural activities. It is quite easy to understand why such activities allow them to bring their comfort zone and school closer together. You must be aware that for parents coming from backgrounds that are different from that of the teachers, school is often a place that is in their panic zone, where they don't feel comfortable and even welcome. By engaging them in art projects as leaders or collaborators you can build bridges between family and school, majority and minority cultures, different nationalities, religions, etc.

Apart from parents, you should also consider engaging other family members. For example, grandparents are more likely to have time and they also have rich life experiences that you can build on.

Local communities and local organisations can provide space, time and knowledge that might be missing in your school. Implementing a WSA, a local cultural NGO or community centre might be ideal for leading your project given their experience, expertise, and the availability of suitable space. You can read more about considerations about engaging these actors in your cultural project in the Handbook

Arts project beyond PERFECT

moving the
focus
from
intercultural
learning and/
or historical
figures



While the specific feature of the PERFECT project has been focussing on intercultural learning and a historical figure, art projects can be successfully organised around other objectives and topics. As choosing a historical figure might have difficulties and unforeseen consequences (you can read about this in detail in the Handbook), it might be more practical to choose an everyday person and use their context as the basis of the art project.

This can be celebrating a role model, e.g. somebody coming from a socially disadvantaged background and becoming educated. It can be a member of the school kitchen staff and children can become familiar with the hard work they do every day to provide their meals.

It can be a resident from the old people's home that has had an adventurous life, but nobody left to tell it to. While this necessitates certain changes in the research phase, it can also make it easier in a way, because several specific examples can be worked into a general atmosphere to paint the scene. It can also be beneficial from the point of teaching the children the importance of civic duties: if anyone can become a hero(ine) one must act in a way to deserve it. It also helps balance the adoration of one-day celebrities and make children realise the value of consistent hard work.

Following the idea of the everyday hero, it is also possible to choose an unusual venue: the marketplace, the riverside, a park, or a factory building. Students should understand that art can be found and made anywhere: not just in the elegant palaces of theatres and concert halls where one has to dress up nicely, but in the mall, the street, the public square, as well. If they can populate the places they know well with the characters of their imagination they will also learn to appreciate these places more, will take better care of them and will have a stronger sense of belonging.

Creating art projects can be an excellent way to explore the environment with fresh eyes, but also to call the general attention of locals to unused buildings, neglected city parks or environmental problems. Instead of collecting signatures to protect a site, one can show how useful a place can be to the community by giving it a new purpose as the locale of an art production.

Art projects can help students who do not enjoy reading the compulsory literary texts by turning these stories into plays or creating cartoons or video clips from them. When working on such a project it is necessary to read the original work, as well, but it might be easier with a specific purpose in mind.

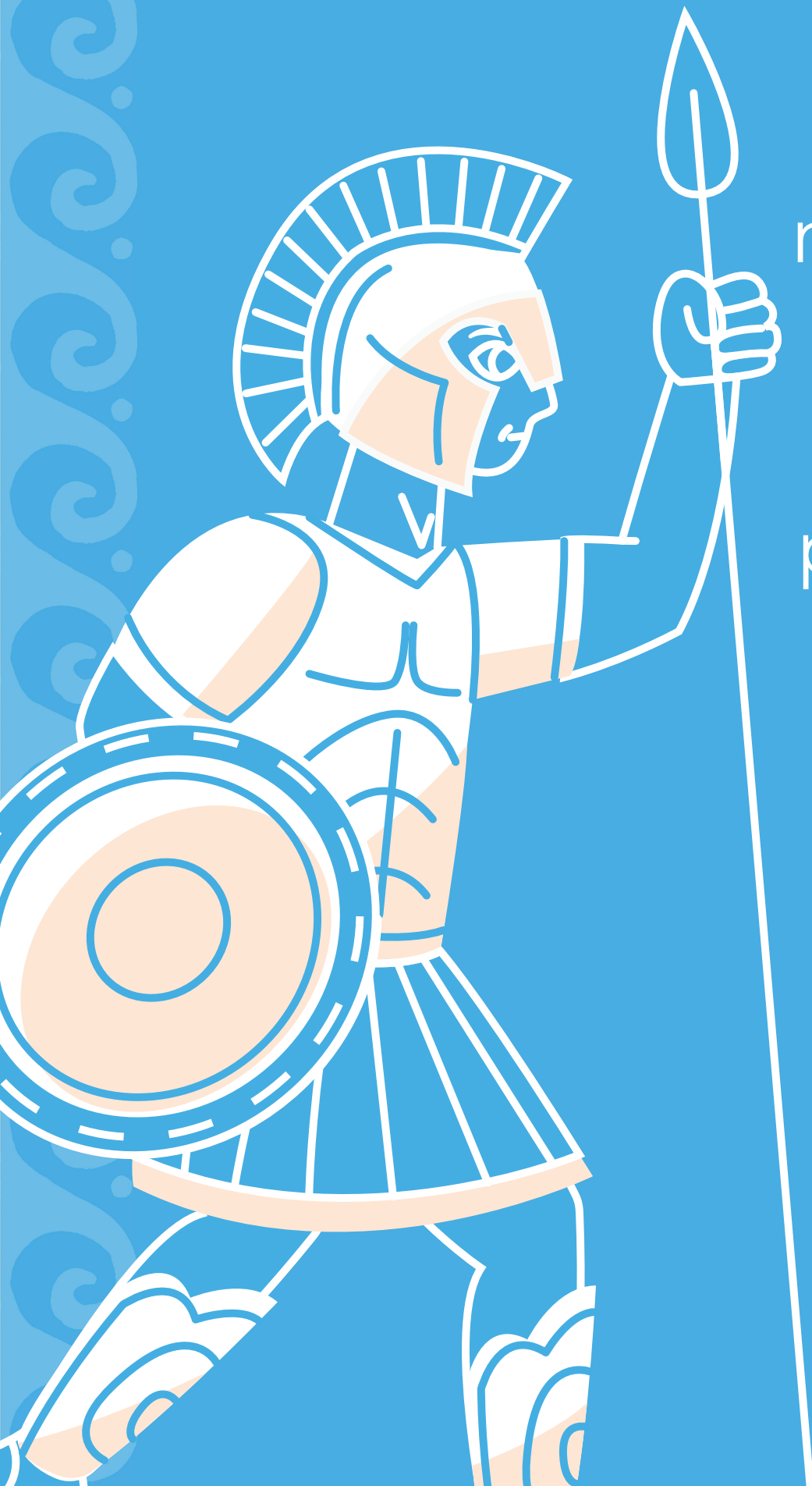
Students who are interested in science experiments but are not very much into arts might enjoy showing off their knowledge by becoming part of the technical staff of a production and creating science-based elements of the show. This is also true of children who are experts when it comes to computers but could use a lot of help with developing their soft skills. By becoming part of an art project, they will have a sense of belonging and they will experience effective teamwork.

Project members might also have a T-shirt with the same logo (designed by one of the participants) or badges, caps that show they are members of the same group.

The most important point is to experience the creative process: how the freedom of individual expression is controlled by teamwork and how this disciplined creativity takes form in art. Students have the opportunity to be heard and seen, but also to be part of something bigger than their own ambitions.

PERFECT in other art forms

moving the
focus
from
performing
arts








While the PERFECT project focuses on the performing arts (theatre, music, dance), it is possible to create art projects based on other art forms. The list below is far from being comprehensive, but it aims to give ideas to stakeholders who are interested in creating an art project. You can read more about this in PR1, the Conceptual model and competence framework for intercultural cooperative cultural production.

All forms of the visual arts (e.g. painting, drawing, graffiti, crafts, landscaping, modelling, woodwork, sculpture, collages, clips, movies, video-mapping, photography) can be ideal as long as you have the expertise (or can find expert local, for example an alumni or a parent, help) to guide the students.

Literature (prose, drama, or poem writing) can be easily linked to any of the performing arts and also to various forms of visual arts. As all students can write, but not all of them can play a musical instrument or draw well, literary endeavours are often not taken as seriously or rigorously as other art forms. Teachers/mentors should encourage students to be fastidious in their works: e.g. for a poem it is not enough to find words that rhyme.

Storytelling is a methodology used relatively frequently and it is also a fashionable approach. The “story” is typically composed of the following (not necessarily all) elements:

-  A topic that is often scientific or technical (e.g. a rechargeable battery);
-  A use case (e.g. the battery could power a car, an electric bicycle, or be applied for energy storage);
-  Personas (e.g. a teacher, a science promotor, a salesman who want to sell an electric car);
-  Scenarios, meaning the situation when a given topic and use case/s are presented in a specific context by a persona (e.g. a teacher introduces a project to the students);
-  And finally, a story that may use specifically adopted elements of one or more teaching methodologies and can be presented in any art form that makes it possible to present the story.

Cuisine and gastronomy can also be considered as an art form and if a food project focuses on local products and specialities, it is an excellent way to build a community. Serving and presentation of the food also necessitates the use of various other art forms (visual design, literary composition) and can be combined with music or photography.

Collecting ideas and recognizing skills and interests of the future participants should be a decisive part of starting the project. Teachers/mentors should not start a project that caters to their own preferences and then force the students to comply. Unfortunately, art projects are very often the pet projects of well-meaning teachers who are eager to do everything and take care of all the details, exhausting themselves. To avoid such a scenario, read about the child participation principles in the Handbook. Teachers/mentors should also focus on the transversal competences and soft skills of the students, not just the individual disciplines, as the aim of the project is not to raise professional artists, but to use art as a way of developing the students. Peer learning and group work are inclusive processes that are ideal for such development.





The importance of background research



These guidelines concern art projects that have a distinct educational goal, supporting curricular or non-curricular learning outcomes other than artistic ones

– not l’art pour l’art. Thus, it is important that the project is designed in a way that gets the facts behind the project right. This means that while the actual production is often much more fun and also the visible part, research is the most important element of the process. Your students may not be familiar with the necessary scientific research methods, so professionals have to make sure they are equipped with basic research skills. You can support them in it as a teacherresearcher, but you may also consider engaging a scientist with some teaching skills. However, the research itself should be done by the students.

RESEARCH IS IMPORTANT IN ORDER TO...

-  Establish what needs to be learnt,
-  Differentiate between facts, opinions, and beliefs,
-  Understand any controversies around the chosen topic, but also
-  Support the development of critical thinking skills that are essential in life.

It is also important that the research part is well designed. Students need to understand the difference between primary and secondary research and must start with secondary research in their project. Since a lot of information and research evidence is available on the internet, this activity also gives a good opportunity to develop digital skills, especially search and verification of information. At the same time, the research phase of the project may also provide a good opportunity for students to explore a library and try research using physical books.

It is very often enriching to also conduct some kind of primary research, mostly qualitative research in the form of interviews or group discussions. Whoever is supporting students in this need to revisit their own research skills, too.



The art
project's
relevance in
connection to
trauma,
resilience and
well-being

Further possibilities: STEAM projects











People in the 21st century need different skills than even a few dozen years ago. This constitutes a necessity for a deep change in the current education system, which is not designed to develop these skills, thus constituting a major challenge for modern education. Technological advances and globalisation make interdisciplinary learning necessary. The acronym STEM has been used since the turn of the century for a then revolutionary interdisciplinary approach that does not only abolish boundaries between traditional school disciplines or subjects but combines academic concepts with real-world experiences in the field of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. STEM in itself helps make connections between school, community, the world of work, and global realities.

In order to thrive well in the 21st century society, the young generation must be equipped with new skills such as creativity, communication, entrepreneurship and teamwork. For this, the STEM approach is not enough anymore.

The reality of education also needs to reflect on the fact that STEM in itself might not be attractive enough for some students. The inclusion of Art has been the solution that is also directly related to the emergence of many new creative professions (and transformation of existing ones), and to the emergence of complex problems people are dealing with on a daily basis – at work or in their private lives. This is how STEM turned into STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Mathematics).

There are several ways to create STEAM projects. In most cases, they require a collaborative approach to teaching, a strong cooperation between the artist or arts teacher and the scientists or science teacher(s).

This list below is far from being extensive, but it will provide you with a few examples that can be considered as the bases of STEAM projects:

-  The concept of time is connected both to mathematics/physics and music/dance.
-  When you dance you also create physical experiments (e.g. levers and rotational movement).
-  Geometry can be easily combined with dance moves and various artistic movements (cubism, futurism).
-  The creation of robots cannot be separated from the observation of the movements of the human body.
-  Acoustics is an important element to consider in any performance.
-  Stage machinery can be fascinating for students interested in physics.
-  Some knowledge of chemistry is necessary both for painting and gastronomy.
-  Biology is the basis of landscaping and any nature-based art.

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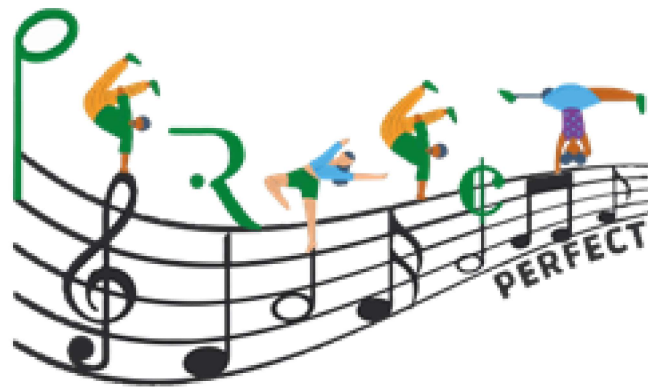
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Guidelines for Schools, Teachers and Students

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