

Teaching resources to overcome boy specific challenges in primary schools

This package of teaching resources for primary school education is the outcome of the COMENIUS project entitled "Small Heroes in Trouble: Boys Searching for their Identities", which has been supported by the European Commission. These materials have been developed in order to familiarize interested practicing primary school teachers as well as students training to become primary school teachers with approaches that are targeted towards teaching boys and are concerned specifically with boys.

Basis for the selection of chosen topics were country specific surveys about pedagogical aspects in regard to working with boys in nine European countries. The surveys were conducted in Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Germany, Estonia, Spain, Hungary, Poland and England.

The particular country surveys include statements about the current situation of teaching with boys in the quoted countries and refer to the academic and sometimes also to non-academic contexts. It deals – as far as the situation of the particular countries allows – with goals, contents, methods and with selected topics in the area of "Gender-reflecting work with boys in Theory and Practice", such as migration, physical education and youth movements. One of the most striking examples of these country surveys demonstrate that in most of the Eastern European countries of the EU participating in this project so far no effort has been made and it has not been considered as a necessity to create appropriate pedagogical approaches for teaching with boys. On the contrary: analyses of selected primary school curricula and textbooks reveal the complete lack of gender specific approaches. For instance they do not deal separately with THE BOY ('he') or THE GIRL ('she') but only with the CHILD, in which the personal pronoun for neutral gender, the "it" dominates.

The results can be consulted in the publication „Pedagogic Approaches to Learning and Teaching with Boys – A European Survey.“ Besides the country surveys an empirical analysis has been conducted. This study aims to analyze the current situation of teaching with boys from a comparative perspective and also offers a comprehensive view about the over-all European situation. The publication can be summarized through the following statements:

- It only offers a survey about the current state of teaching with boys in the analyzed countries.
- Gender-reflecting pedagogy for boys does not refer to ALL THE boys but to the majority of boys.
- The publication focuses mainly on academic contexts and deals only partially with extra-curricular aspects.
- This publication is concerned for the work with boys in the 6-11 age groups as these groups are enrolled in the primary school system in all of the participating countries.
- This book does not deal with all of the European countries. Rather surveys have been conducted only in those countries that participated in the project.

An important basis for specific themes of the prepared materials were on the one hand country surveys and analyses of the curriculum and textbooks in the specific countries – that are considerably different from each other – and on the other hand the results of the empirical study.

It became clear that especially in Eastern European countries there are only a few materials that enable gender-reflecting treatment of boys in the classroom and that an

appropriate sensitivity towards gender questions to the present day does not exist. In order to ease the access of teachers who do not have any experience with gender-reflecting teaching, general topics have been selected. The selection of the main topic areas is also supported by the fact that all areas (however with a different emphasis) have been integrated into the curricula as well as into textbooks on the primary level in the school systems in the participating countries. As a result of these curricular requirements teachers of the participating countries have to deal with these subjects anyway. With the aid of the prepared materials these topics can from now on also be treated from a boy specific angle and point of view. The selected topics can for instance be found in the social studies curriculum (Heimat- und Sachunterricht) of many of the German federal lands, in the „wereldoriëntatie“ of the Belgian primary schools and in the key stages 1 and 2 in the national curriculum of Great Britain.

Interested teachers can find in this package teaching materials to the following main topics:

1. Body and Health
2. Sexuality
3. Identity and Self Concepts
4. Dealing with Aggression
5. Behavioral Differences, Special Needs
6. Culture and Society

In this handout activities that are most likely carried out by boys with pleasure are connected with activities that from different reasons should mainly be discussed with boys. However it has to be clearly stated that most of the activities can also be carried out by girls. The boy specific component lays in the approach that the topics are connected with the specific interests of boys, their particular psychological developmental stages and social behavioral patterns (in the primary school years).

Each of the topic areas contains five different modules and respectively activities. In order to ease the ways through these topic areas and modules, it is advisable to read the introduction to the topic areas. In each of the six introductions not only a short theoretical background to the topic areas is rendered but in the same way the five modules of the topic areas are summarized in a brief format. This way the teacher has easy access to a rough overview of the material. This is important in view of the fact that on the one hand the modules deal with different topics and on the other hand they are organized arbitrarily. This means that for instance the fifth module of the topic areas could have been placed as the first one in the package as well. The organization and the sequence of the modules are also variable. The respective modules are not built upon each other. Due to this organization of the material it is important to offer the reader a quick guidance.

Each of the modules follows the same structure. They consist of a **first** part that offers a practical guidance, of a **second** part that contains in a draft form the theoretical background to the actual topic and of a **third** part including prepared worksheets for classroom teaching (however not for all modules). In the printed format of these teaching materials the above mentioned three parts are strung together. On the project's website www.grimus.or.at/helden the teacher can choose from the following four data files:

1. Practical instruction for action and didactic options for action
2. Theoretical Background
3. Worksheets
4. Full version

To 1: The practical instruction for action deals for each module with the following points:

- Background and keywords
- Similar topics
- Materials
- Duration, time
- Number of participants
- Age
- Goals
- Short explanation
- Reflection
- Variations

The background and the key concepts offer a brief and introductory overview that paves the way to the selection of the module activities. It refers the requirement (mostly) from a pedagogical and/or social point of view and shows how a given activity could and should stay in the focus of gender-reflecting approaches.

Under the category **similar topics** it will be referred to topic areas that more or less have to do with the activity. The teacher finds these topic areas partly also in other topic areas in this collection of teaching materials.

The singular activities assume the availability of a variety of **materials**. At a glance it becomes clear, what kind of materials are needed in order to carry out an activity.

There is also information about the **duration (time) of an activity**. The duration of the activities ranges from a few minutes up to several teaching sessions.

Besides the duration of the activities, **the size of the group** can serve as an important piece of information for the teacher who is looking for an activity. None of the activities require an unusual group size. The suggested group size in the demonstrated activities ranges from a few boys up to a whole school class.

It has been stated in the introduction that the target groups of these projects are students training to become primary school teachers and practicing primary school teachers who are working with boys in the 6-11 **age group**, thus with boys who attend a primary school. Most of the activities have been designed for boys in the 8-11 age group. Activities for younger boys can be also found in the package, however they are rather underrepresented.

The category **goals** describes the main objectives that are to be achieved through the activity. The teacher has the chance to compare these goals with those on his/her lesson plan and this way to choose a fitting activity for his/her purposes.

The activities include almost exclusively exercises and games. The **short description** presents the exercise or the game in a brief format. Some of the activities consist of several steps whereas others do not.

The next section called **reflection** contains mainly questions that help the teacher to evaluate the activity together with his/her pupils.

Most of the modules in the section "Practical instruction for action and didactic options for action" entail also **variations**. If an activity finds general appeal by the boys, the exercise/game can be repeated in a varied form with the aid of the included variations.

To 2: The **theoretical background** implies a technical analysis to the selected activity. It is not necessary to read the theoretical background information in each case. Its function is exclusively to explain the different theoretical standpoints of the respective topics in a concise form and to place the game or exercise into a bigger thematic context. It has to be noted that its goal is not to offer a detailed document but rather a summary

of the technical analysis from a theoretical point of view. Therefore the theoretical background contains mainly literary references as well as interesting and relevant internet sites that can be stimulating and inspiring in the realization of the activity.

To 3: Most of the modules contain **worksheets**. In regard to their language they have been tailored towards the standards of language use by boys in the 9-11 age group.

To 4: As it has been explained before the **full version** of each module has been included into this publication. The teacher can also choose this option on the website.

In addition the author team would like to emphasize that the presented modules suppose to serve as supporting teaching materials that are to be used with already existing and familiar contents and are to serve as inspiration for more engaged gender-reflecting teaching. It concerns a collection of topics, as it has already been explained earlier, that correspond – as far as possible - with the national curricular contents and textbooks of the participating countries.

Before teachers start to delve into the material, the author team would like to draw the attention to the following aspects in regard to the content of the teaching resources:

1. In the primary schools of the participating countries coeducation and coeducational upbringing and teaching takes place. This means that teachers do not only teach gender homogenous groups but groups of pupils in which boys and girls learn together. Teachers have only in the rarest cases the opportunity to focus exclusively on girls or boys. Therefore most of the prepared materials are designed so that they can be used with girls as much as with boys. Nevertheless the main focus is the appropriate gender-reflecting pedagogical approach towards boys. The teachers have to be aware of this. Particularly the questions in the reflection part demonstrate the differences and similarities between boys and girls. A number of modules – such as “Let’s do gender” – have been prepared and designed exclusively and specifically for boys. To be sure it requires the arrangement of some basic conditions, which definitely asks for a dedicated teacher.
2. Leaving the school-building (classroom) for the certain selected activities often proves to be difficult in praxis due to legal and organizational issues. This aspect has been taken into consideration in the preparation of the modules. Therefore it is not a coincidence that most of the modules were conceived with the aim that they can be conducted in a regular classroom. This also means that many of the planned activities that would address the increased motor activities of boys have been dealt with only partially in these teaching materials. In order to conduct the activities that require comprehensive physical actions the teacher should use the opportunities and facilities that his/her school offers on an individual basis.
3. The teacher plays the most important role in the realization of the prepared modules. The activities require an increased engagement from the teachers in order to realize the goals of the modules. This does not only mean the creation of an appropriate framework. In equal measure the teacher has to be broad-minded and open towards gender-reflecting issues as they have to be integrated into his/her classroom instructions and into the realization of the activities. The authors hope that the prepared resources will contribute to the development of such an awareness-raising among teachers, students and pedagogical staff.

The authors wish you good luck and lots of joy while working with these teaching resources.