

SML - Schuhe machen Leute – Are you what you wear?

- A project week with the artist Louie Gong from Seattle -

Situation

Young people with a multicultural background have to cope with particular challenges in adolescence – one of them the search for their own identity, not only in an ethnic context but also in a sense of belonging. Supporting this search helps young people to build up a positive self-image which combines all facets of their origin and of the society they live in. Unfortunately, multiple identities and several senses of belonging are still perceived as a very strong deficit; young people feel they have to decide: either to assimilate in the sense of living what's understood as a 'German' life or to distinguish themselves by making a show of being a 'foreigner'.¹

Applicants' Aims

The applicants' aims are to empower multicultural grown ups and young people to develop their own identity by using modern techniques and methods suitable for the target group.

Aims of the project

The following are the aims of the project:

- communicate a positive self-image of young people with a migratory background
- communicate several ways of dealing with discrimination and racism
- create a specific product (a pair of Vans they designed themselves)

¹ See project results of our project '3-2-1Mut! – Empowermenttrainings für Jugendliche mit Migrationshintergrund'

Target group

This project targets young people with a migratory background between the age of 13 to 18 years:

- recently immigrated young people from 'German as a Foreign Language/Second Language' classes
- children from binational families
- children born and raised in Leipzig whose parents are immigrants

The recruitment of the participating pupils who mostly attend preparatory classes for German as a Foreign/Second Language will be organised by the Competence Centre for Language Training at the Mittelschule Apollonia von Wiedebach in Leipzig which is in charge of coordinating these classes. Contact has already been established and the project has been discussed with Ms Bluhm, manager of the Competence Centre.

Methods and Schedule

Using the methods developed during the three years of our model project '3-2-1 Mut! Empowermenttrainings für Jugendliche mit Migrationshintergrund' and the accompanying workshops for parents, the inter-cultural trainer duo Siri Pahnke and Tom Bailey together with Louie Gong will host a project week for young people. They will use methods from the field of empowerment training like biographical work, anti bias and forum theatre. The aim is to put self-efficacy to the test and to become aware of the different – and not only ethnic – affiliation and belonging by strengthening self-confidence and developing social skills in a peer group.

During her travels to the USA in Summer 2010, Anja Treichel, manager of the Association for Binational Families and Partnerships in Leipzig, got to know Louie Gong and his work in Seattle. Louie is not only a freelance artist (www.eighthgeneration.com), he is also actively involved in non-profit work and board member of the MAVIN Foundation (www.mavinfoundation.org). Louie himself has a multicultural background and has developed a method that allows young people to combine cultural elements from their cultural heritage with elements from the US pop culture. The VANS company provides him with white shoes that young people can design with permanent markers using elements of their cultural heritage, of course with the help and expertise of Louie by their side.



During the process of designing the shoes, the topics identity and culture are discussed. We have used the same method during our empowerment project in the module identity: The topic was brought across by creating a radio feature, a radio show and a video, a way appreciated by young people. The similarities between the conveyance of the topic and the creation of a creative product gave rise to the idea of organising a workshop together. Contact with the US Consulate in Leipzig has partially made this idea possible: The Consulate has formally invited Louie to Leipzig within the scope of the 'speakers program' and will carry the costs for flight, accommodation and professional fee for Louie.

Expected Results

Apart from the effect that young people, strengthened in their identity, will begin to see their multicultural background not as a deficit but as a resource, the workshop week will have the following effects:

- The general public will see the topic transculturality not as an issue but, because of the character of the workshops as a cool event, transculturality will become the modern expression of a changing society. The participants who under other circumstances are regarded as 'problematic young people' who 'can't speak proper German' become protagonists of a culture which creatively combines different elements.
- our and Louie Gong's concepts will be introduced to the general public and expert audience. Topics which up to now have been just out of sight of the public eye like 'mixed cultural heritage' (USA) and the urgently needed paradigm shift from paternalism and victimisation of young people with a migratory background towards empowerment and the organisation of a responsible life with a creative leeway opened by the young people themselves are brought to the centre of attention and send signals not only into the migrants' communities but also into the majority society (wuch indeed is one in Leipzig).