

WE ARE EUROPE

Fact Finding Report

Summary of the Teachers' Statements

Five countries participating in the WE ARE EUROPE project have presented Teachers' Statements and KWL Grids as a result of the brainstorming in the schools. What follows is a short summary of these results.

1. General information

Twelve schools are involved in the project: two from Austria, Portugal and the UK, three from Estonia and from Poland.

A total of 37 teachers and 1300 students will take part in the testing and implementation of the project. Here is the breakdown by country:

Austria – 8 teachers and 220 students;

Estonia – 4 teachers and 146 students;

Poland – 6 teachers and 390 students;

Portugal – 6 teachers and 240 students;

UK – 13 teachers and 303 students.

The teachers teach various subjects: from Languages, Geography, History and Citizenship Education to Mathematics, Science, Biology, Music, Art and Sport. They represent a mix of very experienced and young less experienced teachers.

While in most of the participating countries the schoolchildren are a homogeneous group with regard to their mother tongue, which is the official language of the country, in Austria it is striking that many pupils have a mother tongue different from German. In one of the Austrian schools for example, 49.9% of the children have a mother tongue that is not German. In some classes, the number of children with a different mother tongue is even above one-half.

In Estonia there are some pupils from Russian speaking families and some other bilingual variations are presented (Estonian-English, Estonian-Swedish).

In one of the British schools participating in the project the proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is higher than average. A significant number of children in the school (23%) have Special Educational Needs (SEN) and the school has a specially resourced provision for special educational needs. The number of children who speak a language other than English has grown over the last 5 years and mainly includes children from Poland whose families have settled in the area.

1. Interests of the children

To the question “What are the interests of your pupils?”, most of the teachers have answered that they are quite varied: from music and sport to computer games, TV, Books, etc.



For example all teachers in Austria confirm that the children from their classes are interested in sport, nature, everyday life, music, art, theater but also in nutrition, creative work, computers, history, fashion, playing chess, and reading.

The younger children in Estonia are interested in children's entertainment and educational sites in other countries, like Moominland, Legoland etc. Many of the Estonian pupils like sport and there are also pupils learning music and art as extracurricular activities.

Older children in Estonia have cutting edge IT competences. They are also fascinated by culture (designers, authors, musicians, cinema, and arts).

All teachers from the UK involved in the project point out that the children from their classes are interested in a range of sports, including football, tennis, swimming, rugby, netball, gymnastics, Tae Kwon Do etc. Some are involved in teams and organizations outside of the school.

Music, Drama and Dance are also listed as popular pastimes in many classes. Hobbies such as horse riding, fishing and rock climbing have been mentioned by teachers in Years 5 and 6; some children in these Year groups are also described as having more adult responsibilities such as providing care or working with parents in the family business on weekends. Television and film have been mentioned, as well as computing and gaming.

2. Knowledge about the EU and the other countries participating in the project

According to the teachers, the majority of the children in the classes participating in the project have little, modest, moderate, insufficient, or poor knowledge about Europe and the EU. They know the names of the countries and are able to identify them on a map. They know the names of some capitals and can identify some words from different languages.

There are, of course, some children whose knowledge is satisfying, because they travel abroad with their parents more than their peers do and they are more interested in European countries. The majority of children expressed an interest in Europe and in the EU, yet there are some who are not at all interested.

The children in nearly all the countries struggled to answer many of the questions on the initial quiz; in the section of the KWL grid that asked *What do I know?* many left the section blank or put minimal information. Some influence of recent history teaching about World War I and II can be observed, with listed facts that have a direct link to these events. Some teachers have emphasised that there is lack of knowledge among the children even about their own country.

For example, although there were children in Austria who had difficulties in answering the Quiz, about one third of them had knowledge about the map of Europe. This included the location of different European countries on the map, the capitals of the different countries and in addition some knowledge on each country: what language is spoken there; some dishes from the project countries; sportsmen/sportswomen were also known; how many countries are members of the EU; how many official languages there are in the EU; how many people live there. In total, about 50% of the responses to the quiz in Austria were correct. On sport, the correct answers were about 75%.



The country that Austrian children seemed to know best is the UK, as the majority of them study English as second language; children also demonstrated a better knowledge about the neighboring countries - e.g. the Austrian children knew much about Poland. Less well-known are Estonia, Finland and Portugal, i.e. the countries that are away from Austria. In addition, the children from Austria have comparatively good knowledge of the countries their families come from.

The children in Poland who have travelled with their parents have better knowledge about Europe. So did the children in Estonia. The children in both countries were familiar with capitals, flags, geographical location, places of interest, national languages, famous individuals and sightseeing. The children in Estonia and in UK knew well the names of the football stars and other sportsmen.

Many of the children in UK found it difficult to identify what they know about the UK. Concerning the other countries, the children in the UK found it difficult to identify things they want to learn, with many writing very brief responses around aspects raised by the quiz. Some did identify a wide range of areas they are interested in learning about, and this is reflected in the KWL grid summary.

If we compare the school curricula in each country with the knowledge of children, we see a big discrepancy between what is planned to be taught about the European Union and the actual knowledge of the children. School authorities have included much information about the European Union in the school curricula. What then is the reason for this poor knowledge among the children? One reason might be the lack of sufficient information for teachers and the way this information about the EU is presented to children.

According to the teachers in the UK, there are many ways that knowledge of Europe is shared and celebrated, although it is acknowledged that one of the reasons for being involved in the project is that much of the work is about countries further away. In one school it is also noted that, despite the growing number of children from Poland, not much is currently being done to enable the sharing of cultural information within the school.

Teachers in the UK listed several activities, strategies and events that contribute to children's knowledge:

- Theme days around countries and cities across the EU (e.g. Spanish / Barcelona day) when pupils learn about food, art, sport etc.
- Links with a school in France: pupils share similarities and differences
- History lessons, particularly when covering the topics of World War I and World War II
- Different languages (not just European) represented around the school in the form of signs, labels and posters
- Explicit teaching of another language (French) for all pupils
- Displays, e.g. posters with flags linked to a World Map
- Design and Technology topic of work around Great British Fashion
- Sports Days (teams represent a country)
- Research projects linked to international events
- RE lessons including faith visits to different places of worship
- Annual Arts Festival
- Online resources e.g. Education City



In the KWL Grid from the UK, pupils' misconceptions have also been included to indicate where specific teaching can be used to address them.

What all the teachers have confirmed and what allows a conclusion to be drawn from the KWL Grids filled in by the pupils, is that children are willing in general to get to know more about the European Union and its member states.

3. To the question what they would like to know, the children have given long lists of topics.

Most of the children are interested to find out:

What does EU stand for?

What are the national anthems and flags?

What food do they have/eat? Is there a national dish?

Clothes from different countries, fashions and make-up.

What are the schools like?

What sports do they have in the different countries?

The children in Austria have said they are interested in the landmarks, culture and symbols typical for the other countries; they are also interested what going to school there is like and whether there is war or peace. This is another striking question concerning the children in Austria. The traumatic stress of the children coming from areas of wars will not be easily overcome.

In Estonia, the younger children would like to compare the environment in different countries, to know the animals and climate in other places, and the food. The older children would like to know more about the educational systems, everyday life, national foods and national costumes. They enjoy history, linguistics, politics, economics, geography and fashion.

The children in Poland would like to know more about the cuisine in other countries, about nature and interesting places to visit, about sport (an interest indicated mainly by boys), everyday life, school life, fashion, music, cars and modern technologies, history and fairy tales.

The Portuguese children would like to know more about: culture, religion, music/singers/concerts, cinema/media, monuments, customs and traditions, how many languages are spoken in the country; they would like to try typical food and cuisine; they would like to know more about clothing and traditional costumes; festivals and celebrations; celebrities; favourite sports; climate; natural resources; flags.

The children in the UK would like to know:

What films the other countries have? What games do children play? How did Europe get its name? Where are these countries? What is the largest European country? The smallest? What shape is Austria? Why are countries shaped the way they are? Where is Estonia? What countries are near each other? Who are their leaders? Are the people rich or poor? How many



end up homeless? They would like to learn about qualities and equalities; the different currencies in these countries; about art and culture, bands and music; and languages across Europe (they would like to learn some of these other languages).

In addition: How old do you have to be in order to get a driving licence? Types of animals; weather, climate and seasons in the different countries. What are the capital cities? What are the countries' best attractions? Population in Europe and across the countries; landscapes and different environments, e.g., how many mountains are there in Europe? How many rivers? What seas surround Europe? Is the law the same? The people's lifestyle and personalities, like where they live/how they live. What religions do they believe in? What are their countries' history, traditions and festivals? Hobbies. Architecture. Who is the best athlete? Who is the best football player? Who invented skiing? And the first sports car?

The children in UK wanted to know the answers to some specific questions such as:

Do they have a monarchy? Time differences? Do they drive on the left or right? Why do people leave their country (in particular Poland)?

5. The suggestions made by students on how they would like to learn about Europe and the feasibility of such suggestions

While for the Portuguese children the Internet comes in first place, the British children would like to learn more about the other countries through films. It is interesting to note that film appears in all KWL Grids in one of the first places. Visual images are very important for all the children. Then come pictures or photos from different countries, PowerPoint presentations, theatre and books. Furthermore, children would like to travel, to visit the other countries, to meet the local people. These appear in KWL Grids from all the countries.

Some children would like to taste the food from different countries. The Polish children would even like to try cooking food from different countries. The British children want to try on clothes from different countries.

Many children would like to learn about the others by doing, for example doing research work, making oral presentations, making Power Point presentations, cooking food from different countries, making music or singing together.

They would also like to learn more through group work. Working in groups is more attractive for children.

All agree that learning the language of a country is very important.

6. How they will present their country to somebody who knows nothing or very little about it:

Children in all the participating countries want to present their flags and their national symbols, their famous sportsmen and -women, their fairy tales, music and dances, big cities or places worth visiting, food, landscape, mountains and seas, their fashion, etc.



However, there are also some very specific topics indicated by children as a way to present their countries:

For example, the Polish children want to present the Polish Nobel Prize Winners, old castles, Polish history, Poland in World War II, Polish amber jewelry, Polish universities, Polish national parks (aurochs in Białowieża), Polish agriculture and mines.

7. How can these data be interwoven within the curricula of teachers?

The brainstorming in the schools and the Teachers' Statements have been collated at the very beginning of the project and the further work on the outputs, such as the selection of the resources, tips for educators and activities with schoolchildren, will take the opinions of the children into close consideration.

The lesson plans will be developed with the wishes of the children in mind. Lessons will be created on topics children would like to know about and in the ways children would like to get the new knowledge. The methodology used will take into consideration the children's opinions.

