

Getting the EYP Bug

An Introduction for Teachers



It's already been 10 years now that I've been going to EYP sessions. When I started teaching at Münchenstein in 1998 a letter was passed on to me by the principal, asking if I was interested. It was an invitation for a National Session by the European Youth Parliament. I got some information about the organisation from the internet (www.eyp.ch or www.eyp.org) and could motivated some of my history students to form a delegation. Not knowing what I could expect from an event like this and with rather little information on how to prepare, I signed up my delegation for the Swiss

National Conference of EYP.

It was the start of a long series of participation. Almost every year I kept returning with delegations, which often also qualified for international sessions (a jury picks some delegations for international events). So my students had the opportunity to travel to Porto, Prague, Helsinki, Durham and Thessaloniki, meeting other young people from all over Europe and exchanging opinions with them.

What made me come back to EYP again and again? There are several points worth mentioning:

The sessions are all organised according to a similar scheme. At the start there is teambuilding, an activity supposed to bring the students "in touch" with each other. In their committee groups (they work together with kids from other schools or countries in committees with different topics) they had to solve specific tasks in which the fun-factor was predominant. The game always succeeded in forging a team out of 10 individuals. The social competence of the students was developed and I saw many reserved and shy students opening up to the challenge. I liked that.

In the presentations in the evening the delegates had to present their delegation, their school, region and political opinions in a short presentation of max. 8 minutes. This activity has always been a great challenge concerning their creativity. They also had to go up on stage and perform their presentation in a foreign language (French or English) in front of a huge audience. This was new for most of them and a good opportunity to improve their representative skills. I liked that.

The topics for committee work are communicated to the delegates about a month or two before the session. They can decide on a committee to work in and the topic. Then they start preparing, collecting material, reading texts, researching in the internet, reading newspapers and much more. As the official languages of EYP are French and English, students have to prepare everything in a foreign language, which makes the sessions very suitable for English, French or immersive history classes. So, my students were able to practise their language-skills in a non-school environment, taking fear of making mistakes from them. They chatted away in English and French about political, social, economic, and of course private matters.

They learned that they could express themselves in this foreign language and developed confidence into their skills. I liked that.

Mostly the committee topics are different aspects of one major political, social or economic theme, which made it possible for me to prepare my delegates in history classes, to a certain extent. This always made my history lessons more topical and students were motivated to work. Apart from that, the sessions were a great opportunity to develop the topics further, to exchange opinions with their peers, to discover new aspects and details, to interlink their topics with others. I saw them working and discussing voluntarily until late at night on a free weekend. This is the best motivation and reward for a teacher. I liked that.

There always are certain events and receptions with local (adult) politicians. Delegates have to dress up for this occasion. The delegation-ambassador will have to make a speech, addressing the assembly and the special guests. This gives the students the feeling that this EYP session is not only a fun-weekend but that they are recognised by “real” politicians. These events and the dress code are able to provide the necessary seriousness to the sessions, which are always a good combination of serious work and fun. I liked that.

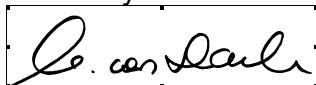
In the General Assembly students also get acquainted with Parliamentary procedures, motions and resolutions. They have to wear suits. I never thought that simply wearing a suit could change somebody’s behaviour. Well, it does. Delegates learn how to criticise and attack other motions for resolutions while simultaneously respecting the work other delegates did. During breaks they prepare attack-, defence-, and sum-up speeches for which they have to go up to the podium and address the assembly. They learn how to stand up for their opinion, even if there might be critique. They get introduced to the world of Parliament and politics and due to the unique atmosphere at EYP sessions they love it, and I liked that.

It is great to observe that most of my former delegates have remained interested in politics after these sessions. Some of them have joined the board of EYP Switzerland, now organising sessions for other students. Others have joined political parties and have run for elections, some of them even successfully. EYP sessions offer more insights, practise, experience and application of skills than any school lesson will ever have. EYP sessions have a long-term effect. I like that.

I have also met teachers from all over Switzerland and Europe and could exchange all sorts of things with them. This has always been a very enriching experience and a great pleasure. Every session has been a unique and wonderful experience. That’s why I keep on coming back.

I hope that these lines can inspire and motivate you to join a National Conference with some students of yours. If you have any further questions, feel free to contact the board of EYP Switzerland. They will be glad to help you.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, enclosed in a rectangular box. The signature appears to be 'M. von Dach' in a cursive style.

Matthias von Dach

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