



Video Conference

at the State Hospital School Munich – A School Project

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Educational concept:

A video conference link entitled 'digital classroom' has been set up between the Hospital School Munich (HSM) in the Children's Hospital in Schwabing and both a grammar school [Gymnasium] and secondary modern school [Realschule] in Munich with the financial support from the city of Munich and a variety of foundations. The video link enabled young people to become involved in lessons in the partner schools in subjects which cannot be taught by HSM teachers.

- The HSM does not provide teaching staff and specialised classrooms for Physics and Chemistry. The video link allowed pupils to participate in lessons in these subjects and also to experience fascinating introductions to new topics accompanied by experiments.
- The primary aim of this new form of tuition is to reduce the volume of school work missed by pupils in hospital as far as possible and to lessen the anxiety of those children who may be concerned about falling behind in their school work. This should prevent these pupils from feeling the burden of having to catch up on missed lessons following their discharge from hospital which could potentially create psychological pressure and thereby impact their recovery and successful therapy.
- Reintegration into the normal school environment should be made easier for these individuals.

Significance of this project for participating pupils:

- The pupils in hospital acquire substantial specialised knowledge and are also able to make a contribution to classroom activity through this knowledge.
- Social and personal competences are nurtured and developed which will for example enable sick pupils to gain confidence in standing up in front of a strange class and making a contribution to the lessons.
- Pupils in the partner schools are given the task of integrating the sick pupils into their class and clinic pupils are simultaneously presented with the challenge of becoming integrated into the new classes.
- Pupils cooperate on topics relating to discipline, attention, active participation and other areas.
- The topic of ill health can also be covered during lessons.

Significance of the project for participating schools:

- School development (new form of tuition, opening up of the school, accommodation of a guest pupil)
- upgrading of computer facilities
- Contact and cooperation with external institutions
- Assuring and improving the quality of lessons



How video conferencing works: a film project

We will now let all participants explain how this project worked in practice:

- pupils in hospital
- pupils in the partner school
- teachers in the partner school

For this purpose, a film project was created in which the script, texts, scenes and performances all originated from ideas from the pupils in hospital.

Development of film script

Questions for hospitalized pupils

- What were your initial thoughts when you found out that part of our school concept involved participation in video conferencing with a different school in the subjects Physics and Chemistry?
- Do you enjoy being able to participate in lessons at the partner school?
- Have you perhaps also gained personally from this new form of tuition?
- Do you feel that you have profited from this video conference link?

Questions for pupils at the partner school

- What were your initial thoughts when you found out that you were going to participate in a video conference link with us?
- Do you think the hospitalised pupils are brave to participate in the video conference?
- Does the video conference link have an influence on lessons? If so, what are the effects?
- Have you benefited from participation in video conferencing?
- Do you enjoy being able to help us participate in your lessons? How can you help to ensure that lessons are successful?

Questions for teachers at the partner school

Mr Schaper, you are the organiser of the 'digital classroom' project at the Thomas-Mann-Gymnasium.

- What were the significant criteria for the interest of your school in participating in this project?
- What did you and your colleagues experience during lessons involving the sick children?
- Do you see benefits from the project for your pupils?
- Do you have any suggestions for improvements for this project?

Filming begins

The intention was for these questions and answers to be addressed in discussion sessions. Individual pupils were allocated specific roles and the manner of speaking and order of the text was rehearsed. The discussion sessions were filmed despite the lack of previous film experience on the part of pupils and teachers. We really enjoyed this process, but it produced very static scenes with far too much text.



A large number of the participating pupils had since been discharged and we were left with incomplete material and new pupils who did not in any way share our enthusiasm for this project.

At this point, we were joined by Mr Fütterer, cameraman and scriptwriter for the German TV company PRO 7, who was being financed by our charitable 'Friends' Association" to supervise a film project with our pupils. He gave us an introductory lesson on camera technique and on working with a film script. This sparked interest in several pupils who immediately continued to work on the script and came up with really nice scenes. When we were ready to begin filming the scenes, only one pupil spontaneously volunteered to operate the camera and only one other pupil was willing to act in the film. The other pupils could not be convinced to participate and I was concerned that we would not be able to complete this project.

On the next Monday after the weekend, things began to change and a second pupil volunteered to act in the film. The three girls now began filming the scenes all on their own. We got to see the result the following day: it was so good and we were so enthusiastic that our good mood spread through the rest of the class and in the end all pupils became interested in acting in the film.

Filming had to be completed within a two-week period with two hours allotted to this project per day. This necessitated substantial extra support from us teaching staff during the final editing phase.

The film

The video conference link: pupils' comments

The latest method for children in hospital to follow lessons actively! Originates from Latin: videre = to see and conference in the sense of coming together.

"During our first video link session, our concentration was more focused on the new environment and the reaction of the class than to the lessons themselves..."

Many young persons are shy, particularly the chronically ill who have few friends as a result of their illness: they are frequently unwilling to speak up and suffer from loneliness, in particular within their own age group. Through the web cam, they see and hear other pupils without having direct contact with them which makes it easier for them to speak.

The video link provides us with contact to lessons in the external world and therefore also returns an element of normality to our lives. Despite our current difficulties, we have the opportunity to avoid falling behind completely at school, to maintain contact with normal life and build up relationships with persons beyond the confines of the hospital. The healthy young people also get to know their new fellow pupils and develop a sensitivity for other people's health problems and certain types of reactions.

The primary advantage of participating in a video conference link is further personal development. This form of tuition substantially increases self-confidence in adolescents; they need to introduce themselves to a new class, present themselves confidently and positively and deal with the feeling of being the centre of attention. If they have any questions on lesson content, they require courage and nerves and have to overcome their nervousness in contributing their own ideas and points of view to lessons.

With time, I became progressively more secure, gained confidence and even looked forward to the video conference lessons.



We learned new working methods, teaching and learning techniques and thereby developed a more open attitude to change. We were able to develop our own opinions on the effectiveness of these new learning techniques independently without any preconceived ideas. Initially we were very much prejudiced against the idea of the video link, but our attitude changed with our experiences, we became more open for new areas and lost our fear of the unknown. This means a lot for people with psychosomatic disorders.

Anyone who thought they would get away with passive listening and copying notes during the video conference links had to think again: it is vital to cooperate actively with great commitment. You have to show yourself, you are seen and heard. Even completing the worksheets to the topics needed active individual research.

The teachers involved in the conference link make special allowance for the pupils in hospital and go to great lengths to explain everything in great detail so that pupils are able to follow the lessons without difficulty.

The continuous experience of 'genuine' lessons facilitates the transition back to our home schools. Class size and atmosphere, substantial background independent work also play a role here, also the experiments in Physics lessons.

Prior to lengthy therapy as an in-patient, school and school grades play a prominent role in discussions between parents and schoolchildren. It is a relief to know that it is possible to participate in normal lessons at an external school as pupils frequently fear that they will otherwise miss fundamental topics which could jeopardise their further school career.

By Lorena, Leonie and Nadine

Conclusion (Developments in the creation of a film)

In conclusion, we would like to underline that the essential result of this film was not merely the specialised knowledge acquired, but above all the growth of personal competences of the pupils involved. Anorexic adolescents are often wary of speaking in front of a small group; they require time to rediscover their creativity and imagination, discover completely new aspects of their personality.

Nicole who shot the entire film made an enormous effort, particularly considering the weight of the camera itself. She has gained a new idea for a professional career. The two leading actresses Nina and Leonie have surpassed themselves. Other pupils initially resisted all efforts to become involved in the project, but gradually lost their shyness and even went as far as trying out an acting role.

Our primary experience as teachers was to see how differently individual pupils reacted to this new teaching method and what profound influences this project had on the development and growth of their social and personal competences, particularly regarding self-confidence.

If we return to our original aims of the video link project which we formulated in our teaching concept, we now realise that we have to alter the order of essential points.



Significance of the project for participating pupils:

- The acquisition of specialised knowledge which was originally at the top of the list is now on an equal footing with the acquisition of social and personal competences.
- Acquisition of social and personal competences
- Integration of sick pupils into a class
- Cooperation between the pupils of both schools
- The topic of 'being ill' as a teaching subject

The culmination of all good projects must be duly celebrated: we celebrated an Oscar award ceremony with our pupils.

Postscript:

Several workshop participants provided us with very positive feedback, in particular about the fact that three female pupils involved in this film project had been invited and gave highly authentic and detailed reports on the video conference, and answered the questions of participants very well.