

A Model of Community Living and Working together towards Tomorrow's World

Our purpose towards a world worth living in:

Profound changes in our social order are a challenge to consciously take responsibility for man and nature, for oneself and the world.



Children for tomorrow's world

Since it was founded, apart from God's word, the Steyler Missionary Community has stood for the well being of all creation, the socially disadvantaged, for worldwide solidarity, as well as dialogue with members of other religions and cultures. These are guiding principles which the Erlebnisschule also follows since it was founded in 1995 as a school for children and teenagers. As tenants of the St. Gabriel Mission since 2003, the school continues to live according to these principles within the community and beyond. While tirelessly engaged in bringing up young people towards a pacifist oriented life with high social competence and an awareness of global responsibility, sustainable economy and a respectful approach towards man and nature, the Erlebnisschule acts as an important interface, working closely with others including organisations and businesses within St. Gabriel's premises, which share these guiding principles.

Pedagogics and values of the Erlebnisschule with an integrated nursery school:

The Erlebnisschule is a Protestant institution based on Maria Montessori's educational approach. As part of the school's further development, particular focus is given to personal development based on the "Being Human" Model as defined by Alicia and

Solihin Thom, as well as the educational reform approach of Rebeca and Mauricio Wild and an interactive life. Holistic learning takes place in heterogeneous age groups of 3 to 6 year olds (Nursery), 6 to 9 year olds (Primaria I), 9 to 12 year olds (Primaria II) and 12 to 15 year olds (Sekundaria I).

With holistic education in mind, one endeavours to offer young people educational support while at the same time providing the opportunity to develop into responsible, lively and creative, critical and questioning, self-confident and socially competent adult human beings. They learn best through experience and emotional involvement in the context of projects. Depending on their level of being able to take responsibility, they work independently or accompanied by adults within the premises of St. Gabriel in close cooperation with firms such as the **Bindery, the Book Shop, the Organic Farmer**, as well as the **Educational Centre Dorothea**, the **Caritas home for refugees** and **St. Gabriel's missionary brothers and sisters**. Until recently they worked with a **Senior Citizen day care centre** run by the **Hilfswerk Niederösterreich** (cooperation with the Diaconal senior care centre in Gallneukirchen is being planned)

Projects that the Erlebnisschule engages in relate to peace education and include dialogue with other cultures and education towards a sense of global responsibility beyond home borders out into the world. Examples of this are our cultural exchange programme with a partner school in Spain and a school in Nepal as well as integrating aspects of indigenous culture into the school curriculum by Bolivian educator, Jorge Ramos Coca.

Sustainable management in the “Monastery Farmer’s” purely organic farm:

Children experience a respectful approach to nature in the so-called „**Monastery Farmer’s**“ farm. Leaseholders of the mission’s previous vegetable garden, Johannes Kleedorfer and Katharina Neuninger, now run an exemplary organic farm on the premises where for many years monks cultivated a large variety of fruit, vegetables and herbs. This enterprise shows how running a purely organic farm can actually work on the edge of a large city. The main University of Vienna, the Viennese University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences and the Academy of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Life Sciences in Graz, have developed an interest in their work as a good example for research purposes.

Cooperation between the Monastery Farmer and the Erlebnisschule enables the children, particularly from Primaria II, to experience Biology hands on during their „Research Project“ and to acquire knowledge of the principles and significance of a functioning eco system.



A research group with the Monastery Farmer



The „Farmer Project“ which includes parents, provides both children and adults the opportunity to learn skills based on the principles of farming vegetables and fruit as well as raising chickens. There are plans to extend this project in the autumn of 2014, by acquiring goats for milk and cheese production while transforming grass into fertiliser for the farm.

The “Breeding Project” enables children and parents to experience both natural and artificial breeding of chickens, ducks and geese.



Children with chicks and hens –the Breeding Project

Children are given jobs for all these projects according to their abilities, which they carry out with a sense of independent responsibility and where they can directly assess the results of their actions.



Students of the Erlebnisschule helping with the apple harvest

At the farm, children also learn how integrating immigrants properly can work well. Brajic Begzudin, a refugee from the Bosnia war, employed at the St. Gabriel missionary laundry, has leased a small piece of land next to the farm to produce vegetables for his own use. Children experience how he and the Monastery Farmer actively exchange information about farming, comparing methods from their different cultural backgrounds and learning from each other. They learn in practice to value the meaning of mutual neighbourly cooperation.

Strengthening social competence by working with socially disadvantaged people:

The Erlebnisschule is actively engaged in cooperating with the ***Dorothea Educational Centre***, which has new premises within St. Gabriel's compound. The centre supports youth from socially disadvantaged backgrounds between the ages of 16 and 24, to individually find their way into the work force. The St. Gabriel branch runs two home economics groups; one focused on working with textiles and the other on gardening. These allow the youth to acquire many practical skills.

Through cooperation between the centre and the Erlebnisschule some youth get work experience as apprentices at the nursery and the school. By interacting with nursery and school children they increase their social skills and with that, strengthen their chances for further professional development. On the other hand these activities are enriching for nursery and school children. They also get to experience mutual neighbourly support between the Missionary Farmer and these youngsters from the centre, who help out in the farm and in exchange get advice about garden economy.



Apprentice Victoria with Nursery School children

In addition, the social services organisation ***Hilfswerk Niederösterreich*** until recently ran a ***Day Home Care centre for senior citizens*** and the relationship built with the school over several years between young and old, was particularly meaningful. To build this relationship, the Erlebnisschule organised music presentations with the children at the day care home providing a framework for children to interact with the elderly.

Children were able to develop a feeling for older people and their lives, while touching their hearts with music and reviving memories of their childhood and youth. The Erlebnisschule intends to continue this kind of cooperation with another elderly care centre.



Music and flowers gathered by the children bring tears of joy

Another thing the Erlebnisschule is engaged with is trying to build interactive cooperation with **Caritas Wien-Niederösterreich's Refugee support programme**. The Erlebnisschule plans to develop interactive projects with them and provide places for refugee children.

Nurturing an old Craft:

The Erlebnisschule also has a keen interest in nurturing and maintaining old Crafts, which the children can get to know. The Mission's own printer firm had to be closed down years ago, however there is still the **St. Gabriel Bindery** that provides the children with a good example of an old craft. Christine Weiner who runs the firm, offers opportunities for the children to get to know this craft by joining in and carrying out small projects for themselves, such as binding books out of project work they have done in the school.

Peace Education, Religion and living Ecumenical Christianity

Peace education and Religion are an important part of the Erlebnisschule. Important and valuable dialogue and cooperation towards strengthening faith takes place between the Protestant Erlebnisschule and the **Roman Catholic monastery Societas Verbi Divini**, with the brothers and sisters at the St. Gabriel mission centre. Father Franz Helm is our special point of reference and was instrumental in finding rental premises within St. Gabriel for the school. Father Franz Helm and Protestant Pastor Arno Preis, who have been actively involved in the ecumenical movement for a long time, accompany the children throughout the school year and work with the Erlebnisschule preparing ecumenical services.



Father Franz Helm with Nursery School children



Mass with both Father Franz Helm and Arno Preis

Together with the Erlebnisschule team and children, they identify themes that are currently relevant to ongoing life at school and that relate to issues that parents and children are dealing with. This is therefore a meaningful experience for all. In this way children can be involved in creating their own church service, participate through singing, acting or reading and in this way experience being fully integrated.

Dialogue and Exchange with other Cultures:

Dialogue with other cultures is an important requirement towards developing a sense of awareness for global responsibility. With our teacher Jorge Ramos Coca, the children have a unique opportunity at the Erlebnisschule to get to know and experience aspects of an indigenous culture, which Jorge is able to convey in an authentic way. Listening to his stories, singing and playing music together touch the children's hearts deeply, so that they naturally develop an interest for his and other cultures.



Jorge sings Bolivian songs with the children



Jorge shares experiences with the children about life in his culture

Additionally, since 2010 the Erlebnisschule offers students of the Sekundaria (8th and 9th grades) a **Cultural Exchange programme** visiting a school in Spain. Partnership with the Virgen de Mirasierra School allows the students to spend approximately two weeks in this Spanish grammar school, while living with host families of other students at the school. In return the same Spanish students visit our school and families for two weeks. Close relationships have been formed through this experience, which has given them a good picture of each other's cultures and deepened their foreign language skills.



Students from Colegio Virgen de Mirasierra with Erlebnisschule students.



Another important aspect of cultural exchange is experienced through the 'Nepal project'. The Erlebnisschule and Kanasugi English Boarding School (K.E.S.B.) in Tikapur, Nepal have had an intercultural exchange relationship since 2010. This private school tries to support other poorer and socially disadvantaged communities to provide school education. The aim of this project is on the one hand to be involved and on the other hand to visit each other and have a respectful approach in getting to know each other's cultures by engaging in our different life styles and getting to know new customs and songs. This last year an Erlebnisschule family visited the Kanasugi School and were received with great hospitality.

Children of the Erlebnisschule make things, which they then sell at the Christmas market organised by the Protestant primary school in Karlsplatz, Vienna. They raise funds to cover the yearly school fees for 19 K.E.S.B. students. This support is particularly for girls who otherwise would often not have the chance to be educated.



K.E.B.S in Tikapur, Nepal



The Headmaster of K.E.B.S. visiting the Erlebnisschule



Letters arrive from Nepal for students of the Erlebnisschule

A living church in St. Gabriel:

Living and working together on the missionary premises with these various institutions, the farm, Dorothea education centre, elderly care such as the Hilfswerk Niederösterreich one, St. Gabriel Caritas Refugee Support and the Bindery, creates a micro cosmos for nursery and school children, which is invaluable towards developing their personalities. It can also provide a good example for other educational institutions.

„When we nurture a holy approach to the small world we have been entrusted with, we can help the soul's holy essence towards achieving its potential in the district of creation within which we live, and in so doing we provide our area with a space to tune into God and then let God in.“

From the book – Real life is all about Encounters – A Hundred words from Martin Buber“