

Project Week (Grade 8)

Establishing a School Parliament at Labyrinth Labyrinth Laboratory School

In autumn 2021 the Labyrinth school enhanced its democratic culture by organizing a special project week in the grade 8. Its main aim was to give the students the opportunity to find the best tool to participate in making decisions and changes at school in an effective and systematic way. It was intended to increase students' participation in school life, to empower all the classes at school, and to hand over more responsibility. This goes hand in hand with the Labyrinth vision – the development of social and civic competence in order to help the students to become active citizens in the future. To be the citizens who will know that they can create their own future and can be part of social and political life. During the project week the eighth graders initiated the foundation of the School Parliament. As a result, this one week long process enabled this newly founded institution to be rooted in students' real needs and visions.

The 8th grade was chosen for this project not only because it is the highest class at school but also because for the past two months they had been learning about topics of identity and power in their lessons of social science. First about their own identity and what it forms and afterwards about power symbols throughout the history – from the prehistoric times till today. In the project week the students were also developing some important life skills – e.g. listening, team work, planning, organizing, presenting, reflecting,

Day 1:

The first day of the project was motivational and it aimed to collect students' ideas about the purpose of education. What do they think their learning at school should be about? What are their wishes and needs? After warm-up activities the 8th graders created ideal students' profiles at the end of their studies at the Labyrinth school. They made posters starting with a person drawing and writing there what they would like to learn to know, to do and what kind of people they wish to be at the end of 9th year. Then every group presented their ideas and they discussed how they understood some words and concepts (e.g. to be respectful, responsible, to have general overview). Then an activity about their „ideal/perfect school“ followed – the outputs were mind maps with information about characteristics of schools which would meet their expectations and would provide plenty of space for their ideal learning.



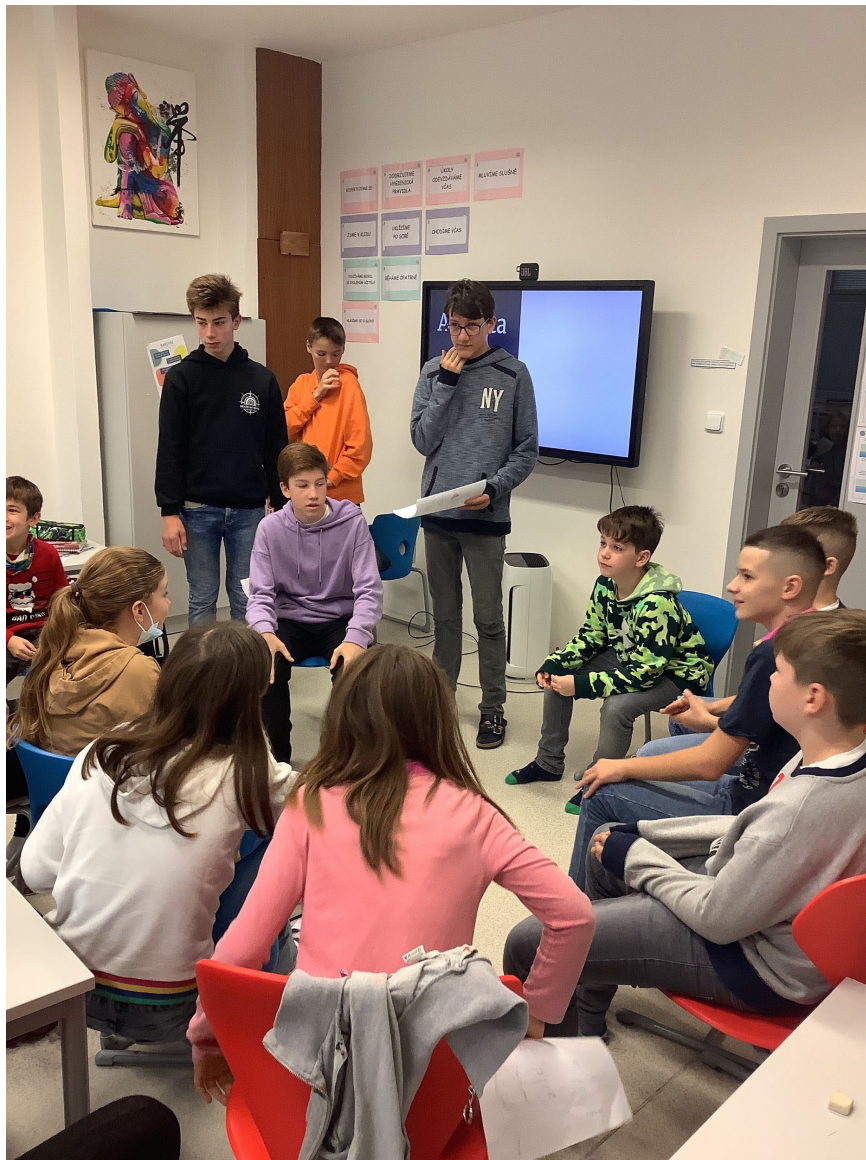
Day 2:

The following day the class revolved around various tools which students can use to influence the school life and to present their needs and wishes (e.g. based on their ideal student's profiles and mind maps from the previous day). The first activity was about mapping the current tools and then brainstorming some new ones. Every suggestion was discussed, analyzing their pros and cons. This led to the concept of the School Parliament. After the presentation on how it works at other schools, the students imagined what sort of parliament might be useful and beneficial for them. Various roles in the parliament were presented (e.g. the chair, the notetaker, the editor). At the end of the day the students defined criteria for selecting representatives from their class and did mock elections. Volunteer candidates made speeches presenting how they meet the criteria. This activity helped everybody assess the benefits and risks of the proposed selection of the parliament representative and, thus, the 8th grade could get prepared for spreading this topic in other classes.



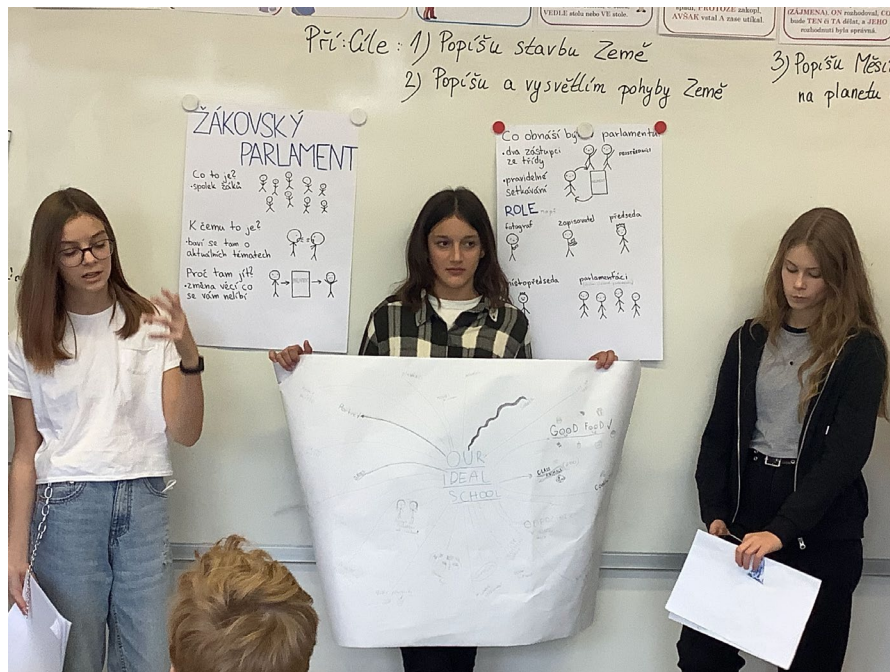
Day 3:

The project week continued with preparation for presenting the concept of School Parliament to students in other 15 classes. At the beginning the students were divided into 3 teams and each of them planned a scenario of a 30 min workshop. The task was to create a workshop in which children in other classes will learn about the School Parliament in an engaging way and will guide them through the process of defining criteria for their own future class representatives. What should the candidates be like? What should they do or shouldn't do? The teams were also planning the structure, the length of individual activities, writing down questions for discussion, how to activate the students, how to get feedback from them and how to check whether the message was understood. They also created visual aids – for instance online presentations or posters. When finished, there was a practical training session where each team presented their workshop. Then they heard feedback from their classmates consisting of appreciation and recommendation for improvement.



Day 4:

Now it's time to do the 30 mins workshops in other classes! The students from the 8th year presented the parliament there, led discussions with the students, motivated them to think about the changes they would like to see at school, and they also initiated the discussion about the characteristics of the class representatives. When the workshops finished, the 8th graders shared their feelings and reflected what they had learnt, what went well and what they would do differently next time. Then preparation for the next day was done – an overview of all the activities from the project week so that media outputs about the project week can be written on the last day of the project.



Day 5:

The day started with writing reports from the project week. First, the students learnt how to write media reports and wrote them (e.g. a text for school newsletter, for Facebook or local newspapers). Some of them were published later. Then a special guest, a political representative from the South Moravian Region came to school to talk about his profession and everyday life. Last but not least, students organized a celebration, i.e. they prepared lunch together, and had a very good time.

According to the feedback the structure of the whole week was evaluated as well-planned. The beginning of the project was based on students' ideas and concepts, then information was collected and analyzed, identifying the best form of school parliament for the Labyrinth School, after that mocking the elections and planning the workshops for other classes. The final reflection enabled the 8th graders to finish the project week knowing what they had learnt and developed, and, above all, with the feeling of success, achieving the foundation of the School Parliament at Labyrinth!

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