



The Ideas Office
Children counsel children
A Guide



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A central requirement of UNICEF is the encouragement of dialogue between cultures. The key to mutual understanding is education - also a priority of UNICEF. The dialogue between cultures is a requirement of the UN convention on the rights of the child. This convention is - with the exception of Somalia and the USA - in force all over the world. It is moreover the basis of the work of UNICEF.

The aim of education is “the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin” (article 29).

Editorial

Dear Teacher,

Dialogue is one of the most important requirements for peaceful coexistence. To promote dialogue is the aim of UNICEF Switzerland and Orange Switzerland. For this reason, in spring 2004, UNICEF Switzerland and Orange Switzerland set up the Orange Award which is endowed with 50 000 francs. The aim of this award is to render an enduring contribution to the dialogue between cultures in Switzerland, and thereby to integration.

The Orange Award, which is also an important part of the “Corporate Social Responsibility” programme (CSR) of Orange Switzerland, was advertised for the first time in May 2004. 10'000 individuals and corporate bodies were invited to submit projects. A highly qualified jury declared the “Ideas Office - children counsel children”, of the Evillard/Leubringen school, Biel, the winner. The Ideas Office, Biel, is a starting point for children with problems. It is an advisory board which is run by children.

The Ideas Office fulfils the wish for participation and effectivity in an exemplary fashion. Therefore the prize money ought not only be used to sponsor the project, but also to further the idea. This guide is a first step to the creation of other Ideas Offices in Switzerland. May it stimulate you, dear teacher, to consider an Ideas Office at your school.

With best wishes



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CEO Orange Switzerland



The Ideas Office - Children counsel Children

Children counsel children - this formula precisely describes the Ideas Office. The Ideas Office is a starting point for children who have problems. It originated in the bilingual school Leubringen/Évilard in Biel. Besides the usual difficulties between groups of children, such as fighting and bullying, the language groups faced each other with icy silence. In 2002, in order to contribute towards an expanded dialogical exchange between the cultures and to reduce the tensions at her school, the teacher, Christiane Daepp, brought the first Ideas Office to life.

Since then, troubled children can deposit their worries in a letterbox. Voluntary counsellors invite them to come and discuss their problems. Together the children look for a way out of the distress. They come to an agreement and take suitable measures. A check ensures that the measures have been carried out and that the solution is lasting.

The Ideas Office quickly developed into a place where children with adjustment problems could communicate and integrate. They came independent of origin, language, gender or religion. French-speaking Swiss, who had never voluntarily sat down at the same table as German-speakers, now come to them for advice.

The Ideas Office is a place of reconciliation. It can act as a valve in a school or district. It relieves children, parents and teachers, contributes to a good atmosphere in the classroom and school, and strengthens the competences of the children who counsel other children.



Why an Ideas Office? - Children are good counsellors

The Ideas Office is based on the principle that children can best stand by other children. In the light of their own experience, they are experts in the problems of their peers and often find better solutions than adults do. At the same time, they also sense when the help of adults is needed.

Children have abilities - and want to use them.

The Ideas Office is a place which encourages children to put their abilities into action. In the search for solutions to problems of other children, the gained experience at home and with friends finds more use than in regular lessons.

Children need responsibility - and want to bear it.

In the Ideas Office children are taken seriously. Children seek participation and contribute their share within the community. If responsibility is given to them, they assume it with sincerity. If they reach the limits of their abilities, they look for help in books or the internet or turn to their siblings, parents or teachers.

Children gain awareness - and therefore educate themselves and others further.

Through their work in the Ideas Office, children experience what it means to contribute to the well-being of another child and of a whole group of children. Their sense of responsibility grows and therewith their respect towards weaker children .



What it needs to open an Ideas Office

An Ideas Office can be set up in any school or community. It needs good leadership and a minimum of infrastructure. What is required:

1. Space for the consultation - even a quiet corner is sufficient.
2. A letterbox by the classroom door.
3. Forms for registration and invitations.
4. Counselling tools, such as the protocol for individual counsellings as well as the protocol for class counsellings
5. One folder for empty forms, one for pending cases and one for completed cases
6. A class or a group of children, that are willing to take care of the Ideas Office during one hour per week.
7. A teacher that looks after the Ideas Office, hence gives advice and support to the children if needed.

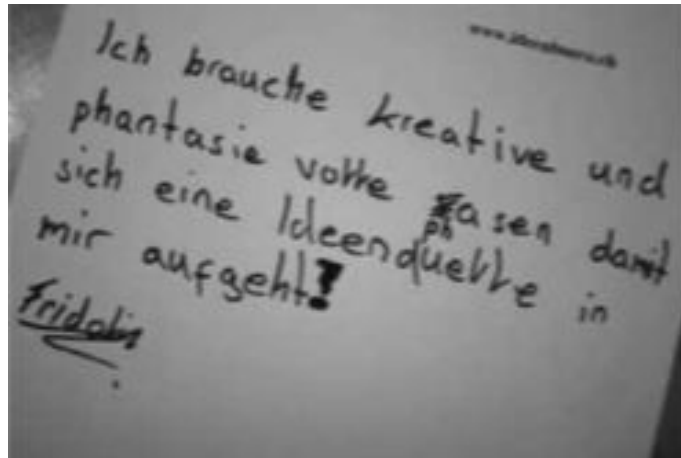
In order to establish a new Ideas Office into existing structures, it is advisable to engage not only the teaching staff but also the school management and, in the community, those responsible for social and youth welfare questions.



How to set up an Ideas Office

The impulse to set up an Ideas Offices in most cases comes from a teacher.

1. The teacher wishing to introduce an Ideas Office addresses the idea and intentions to the teaching staff. Moreover, the chosen class - ideally the most senior in the school - gets oriented.
2. Once it's clear which children take part in the Ideas Office, they introduce themselves to all the school classes. They inform the others about their activities and hand out application forms. These should be available in every classroom.
3. The future counsellors make a list of their strengths. Who has what competences that are valuable for the work in the Ideas Office?
4. Groups of four or five children are formed, whose qualities supplement each other.
5. A rota for work in the Ideas Office is created.
6. On the door there is a sign pointing out the activities and the opening hours of the Ideas Office. A group photo together with the text "Today there for you in the Ideas Office" draws attention to the counselling group.



Guidelines for counselling in an Ideas Office

A teacher or a staff member of the association "ideenbüro.ch" explains to the becoming counsellors how to guide through a one-to-one or a class counselling. There is a counselling protocol that leads through the session. This protocol contains the four central questions, which have stood the test in taking stock of problems of all kinds.

Question 1: What is your problem exactly?

Question 2: What is your aim?

Question 3: What have you undertaken so far to solve the problem?

Question 4: What has prevented you from solving the problem?

Such consultations are first conducted amongst the counsellors. Afterwards rules of conduct are worked out together. However, there are certain rules of conduct that are irrevocable in counselling sessions. For example:

- Each child must be taken seriously, independently of sympathy or antipathy.
- Each child is allowed to give his or her own opinion, even if it doesn't coincide with that of the counsellor.
- Confidentiality must be respected.
- In difficult cases a teacher should be informed. This exception to the rule of confidentiality is agreed upon together.

Ideas Offices are alterable. It is desirable that they continuously develop and adapt to the respective circumstances.



Function of Counsellors in an Ideas Office

1. The counselling group empties the letterbox to see whether registration forms have been deposited.
2. They discuss and allocate the cases between them. Once a case has been designated, that respective counsellor is responsible for its completion.
3. The children seeking advice are given a written invitation. The counselling session itself takes place a week later.
4. The child seeking advice informs the teacher about the class she or he will miss due to the counselling session.
5. The invited children are fetched from the class and accompanied to the Ideas Office.
6. The counselling session is conducted in a structured manner according to the counselling protocol.
7. The minutes of the discussion as well as observations and ideas of the counsellor, are filed in the folder of pending problems.
8. After two weeks, counsellors and advice-seekers examine the success of their endeavours. They discuss whether further discussions and steps are necessary to solve the problem or if it's resolved.

Once a year the Ideas Office publishes a newspaper. If there are no problems pending, the counsellors write about problems they have observed, and possible improvements towards a better school climate.



Experience with the Ideas Office in Leubringen/Evilard

Relief of Teachers

Thanks to the Ideas Office, no longer every school problem lands on the desk of the teachers. However, an adult in charge should be available if necessary. Their help will only be asked for if the Ideas Office children decide that it is the best possible solution.

Bridge to the parents

The Ideas Office acts as a bridge between school and the parental home. Parents can approach the Ideas Office directly with school relevant topics. This increases closeness between them and the school with its possible challenges.

Encouragement of learning climate

The opportunity to deposit problems anytime into a letter box and knowing that they will be listened to has released pressure from pupils. Their energy can strengthened flow towards learning.

Effect on integration

Language groups, which in the bilingual school in Leubringen/Evilard had never voluntarily sat around the same table, now engage with the problems of the other culture. French-Swiss pupils involve German-speaking counsellors, which has a conciliatory effect.

Gain in competence

Children with counsellor function develop a differentiated problem consciousness. They decide whether a one-to-one or class-counselling is more suitable. They also assess if they can solve a case by themselves, or if they need help.

Improvement of school climate

The participatory approach of the Ideas Office and its integrative effect improve the social climate beyond the counselling sessions and classrooms. Counsellors take responsibility for themselves and for the children seeking advice during breaks, free time and also after school.



What children learn in an Ideas Office

- Children practise reflecting their actions. One counsellor speaks about how he acts much fairer in sport and games since he has learnt about the consequences of unfair behaviour based on his engagement with the Ideas Office.
- Children practise changing perspectives, which is the first rule for counselling. Every opinion is allowed to be shared and must be listened to.
- Children learn to log the counselling protocol and to evaluate the sessions. A report is made after every session and after 3 months the collected experiences are jointly collected and evaluated.
- After an introductory period that is accompanied by a teacher, the pupils take over the leadership of the Ideas Office. They establish the agreed upon rules and take on responsibility for their implementation.
- For decisions that affect the whole school the Ideas Office enables participating in the opinion making.



We want to open an Ideas Office

The introduction of an Ideas Office usually takes place in the following three parts and is carried out by a so-called “multiplier” of the association ideenbuero.ch.

Introductory presentation

The Ideas Office is introduced to the teaching staff. In order to successfully launch an Ideas Office, their consent is important. The introductory presentation addresses the following:

- . What is an Ideas Office?
- . History - how did it come into being
- . Advantages of an Ideas Office
- . Round of questions
- . Organisation
- . Counsellings (procedures, guidelines)
- . Steps of integrating an Ideas Office

Implementation Part 1 with school class(es) (about 1.5 hours at the school)

- . The class(es) as well as the involved teachers or school social workers learn about the Ideas Office in depth
- . The implementation is planned out with the pupils
- . Pupils wishing to become counsellors apply for the Ideas Office

Implementation Part 2 with school class(es) (about 1.5 hours at the school)

- . The tasks on the to-do-list (provided by the Ideas Office) are allocated among the counsellors
- . The groups are formed
- . The counselling will be practiced (one-to-one as well as class counsellings)

Prices

The implementation of an Ideas Office takes around 4.5 hours for the multiplier. One hour costs 200.-. This amounts to a total of 900 Swiss francs. Further offers such as fostering creativity or evaluating an existing Ideas Office can be booked on our [website](http://www.ideenbuero.ch).