The use of social media
for democratic participation (SOCMED)

Promotion of student councils through social media

by

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Brief description

The materials described in this training unit (TU) last for 3 ½ hours with a 2-week online preparation period. The TU focuses on promoting students' councils and democratic participation through social media. The target group includes school leaders, teachers and trainees involved in student councils in schools.

Keywords: Social media, student councils and democratic participation.

Expected outcomes

✓ Readiness to adopt the values of human rights, and democratic citizenship as the foundations of living and acting together (A_HR_2)
✓ Willingness to work together with others and become actively involved (A_COOP_2)
✓ Ability to draw on other's diverse expertise and experience for the benefit of the group's work (S_COOP_2)
✓ Understanding that every group has a power structure (K_COOP_2)
✓ Participants will understand the importance of social media to promote student councils and democratic participation.
✓ Participants will be able to critically analyse the current status of student councils and have clear ideas on how to improve.

Activities

	Duration	Methods used
Activity 1: Online group building	2 weeks	Online preparation
Activity 2: The virtual fact about myself	30 minutes	Icebreaker
Activity 3: Mind map	60 minutes	Group work
Activity 4: Ideas for actions	100 minutes	Pair work, group work
Activity 5: Evaluation	20 minutes	Plenary discussion

Background and context

In Hungary, trainee teachers spend a semester in public schools as interns to do their teaching practice. They teach 2 to 4 lessons a week and get to know diverse areas of school life e.g. the work of student councils and social media as a tool in educational practices. This TU is therefore based on these two topics. It was developed by Márta Ispánovity and piloted on six intern teachers in a workshop called "Introduction to the work of the student council". The development took place in Hungary and the piloting period was in March 2012.

Activity 1: Online group building

Duration: 2 weeks

Expected outcome
- ✓ Participants will understand the importance of social media to promote student councils and democratic participation.
- ✓ Knowledge about the relationship of self and group (K_SELF_3)

Methods/ techniques used
- ✓ Online communication and preparation

Resources
- ✓ Facebook
- ✓ Preparatory task

Practical arrangements
- ✓ Establish a free online and closed virtual space for participants such as a closed Facebook group.
- ✓ Collect participants' e-mail addresses.

Procedure

Step 1: **Preparatory task**
- ✓ Send participants an e-mail about the Facebook group and the online preparatory task.
- ✓ Add participants to the Facebook-group.
- ✓ Welcome participants.
- ✓ Upload the preparatory task on Facebook two days after opening the group and ask participants to upload their preparatory task 2 days prior to the training.
- ✓ Encourage participants regularly to upload their task.
- ✓ The preparatory task:
    1. I kindly invite you to upload your profile and introduce yourself briefly, both your personal and professional background.
    2. Do you have any experience in student councils as a teacher, school leader or learner?
    3. Describe your vision on student councils: what is an ideal student council like?
    4. Describe briefly the major programmes and projects that student councils organize?
    5. Why are student councils important?
    6. How can social media support the work of student councils?
    7. How can this Facebook-group support our learning process?
    8. Describe your expectations for the training course.

Step 2: **Debriefing**
- ✓ Start online debriefing 2 days prior to the training and take it up again when you meet face to face:
    - How can social media help the preparations of a project in the early stage when people do not know each other?
    - What is the role of this online preparation for your learning process?
    - Did you manage to establish some social contacts in the preparation period?
    - Do you have suggestions for a different preparation process for the training?

Step 3:
- ✓ The trainer consider if the coming training reflects participants' expectations.

Tips for trainers
- ✓ Make sure that you always address the participants by name when you write to them online to create a more personalized positive learning experience.
- ✓ React regularly and encourage participants to ask for support.

Activity 2: The virtual fact about myself

Duration: 30 min

Expected outcome
- ✓ Participants will understand the importance of social media to promote student councils and democratic participation.
- ✓ Willingness to work together with others and become actively involved (A_COOP_2)
- ✓ Knowledge about the relationship of self and group (K_SELF_3)
- ✓ Ability to draw on other's diverse expertise and experience for the benefit of the group's work (S_COOP_2)

Methods/ techniques used
- ✓ Icebreaker

Practical arrangements
- ✓ Flexible settings with open space and chairs in a circle.

Procedure
Step 1 (20 min): **Warm up**
- ✓ Ask participants to form a circle sitting on chairs.
- ✓ Stand in the middle of the circle.
- ✓ Start by saying your name and one true statement concerning your use of the Internet and social media. E.g.: "I'm Anna and I'm an active Facebook user". Then ask everyone who can relate to or agree with the statement to stand up and find a new seat. Try to find a seat for yourself and invite the participants who do not have a seat to repeat what you did with another statement.
- ✓ This procedure is repeated until every participant has stood in the centre once.

Step 2 (10 min): **Debriefing**
- ✓ Ask questions about the online preparation:
  - What was the aim of this activity?
  - Did you manage to get to know each other online?
  - What is the difference between getting to know somebody online and face-to-face?
- ✓ Discuss the expectations from activity 1 and how they will be meet in the training.
- ✓ Repeat some of the online debriefing questions to continue the discussion:
  - How can social media help the preparations of a project in the early stage when people do not know each other?
  - What is the role of this online preparation for your learning process?
  - Did you manage to establish some social contacts in the preparation period?

Activity 3: Mind map

Duration: 60 min

Expected outcome
- ✓ Participants will learn about the main projects and programmes of student councils.
- ✓ Participants will be able to critically analyse the current status of their student councils.
- ✓ Understanding that every group has a power structure (K_COOP_2)

Methods/ techniques used
- ✓ Mind mapping
- ✓ Group work

Resources
- ✓ Flipchart papers
- ✓ Markers
- ✓ White board

Practical arrangements
- ✓ Settings for group work.

Procedure

Step 1 (10 min): **Grouping**
- ✓ Split the group into micro-groups of 4 participants by asking them to stand in a line according to the date of their birthdays without talking : one end of the line is January 1st and the other end is December 31st
- ✓ When participants found their place in the line, take the first four to form a micro-group, then the second four people to form the second micro-group, and so on.

Step 2 (20 min): **Student councils mind map**
- ✓ Distribute flipchart papers and markers.
- ✓ Ask the micro-groups to analyse the tasks and programmes that they know that student councils participate in by creating a mind map.
- ✓ Invite participants to look at the preparatory task on Facebook and integrate the main conclusion from the online work in the analysis.

Step 2 (15 min): **Word rotation**
- ✓ Ask two participants form one micro-group to share one of their outcomes. One of them describes orally the outcome and the other writes the outcome on the white board.
- ✓ Then do the same for the next micro-group and ask the writer to add one of their outcomes to the mind-map on the white board (they should not repeat what the other micro-group has already said).
- ✓ This is repeated until every micro-group has taken the floor and one full mind map is on the white board.
- ✓ Take a picture of the outcome and post it on Facebook.

Step 2 (15 min): **Debriefing**
- ✓ What are the main conclusions of this analysis?
- ✓ How do student councils develop democratic participation in educational practices?
- ✓ Have school councils and democratic participation changed since you were a student?
- ✓ How do you see student councils develop in the future?

Tips for trainers
- ✓ If the participants are not familiar with mind mapping you can show them an example here: http://www.study-habits.com/images/mind-mapp.JPG (26.01.2015).

Activity 4: Ideas for actions

Duration: 100 min

Expected outcome
✓ Participants will understand the importance of social media to promote student councils and democratic participation.
✓ Participants will be able to critically analyse the current status of student councils and have ideas to improve their practices.
✓ Understanding that every group has a power structure (K_COOP_2)
✓ Understanding of the roles and functions of social and political actors (K_COOP_1)
✓ Readiness to adopt the values of human rights, and democratic citizenship as the foundations of living and acting together (A_HR_2)
✓ Willingness to work together with others and become actively involved (A_COOP_2)
✓ Ability to draw on other's diverse expertise and experience for the benefit of the group's work (S_COOP_2)

Methods/ techniques used
✓ Pair work
✓ Group work

Resources
✓ Posters/Flip chart papers
✓ Markers
✓ Post-its in different colours and shapes equal to the number of pairs.

Practical arrangements
✓ Settings for group work.

Procedure

Step 1 (15 min): Preparation and grouping

- ✓ Play lively music and ask participants to walk around the room freely.
- ✓ Stop the music and ask participants to form groups of 4.
- ✓ Give the groups 5 minutes to discuss their positive experiences of students' councils.
- ✓ Play the music again and ask participants to walk around freely.
- ✓ Stop the music and ask participants to form groups of three but not with the same persons as before.
- ✓ Give the groups 5 minutes to discuss their negative experiences of students' councils.
- ✓ Play the music again and ask participants to walk around freely.
- ✓ Stop the music and ask participants to form pairs.

Step 2 (15 min): Pair work

- ✓ Distribute flipchart paper and markers to the pairs.
- ✓ Ask participants to create a T poster after the model below with the positive and negative aspects of students' participation in educational practices:

Positive aspects	Negative aspects

Step 3 (20 min): **Traveling exhibit**
  ✓ Provide the pairs with post-it notes. Each pair gets different colours or shapes.
  ✓ Rotate the posters among the pairs and ask each pair to write one question on the other pair's poster. Give the duos maximum 2 minutes per poster.

Step 4 (30 min): **How to make changes?**
  ✓ Merge two pairs into one micro-group.
  ✓ Distribute new flipchart posters and markers.
  ✓ Ask each micro-group to create a concrete solution from the previous analysis in step 2 by giving suggestions to go around the obstacles and promote solutions.
  ✓ Invite the micro-groups to focus on these questions when designing their solutions:
    • What is the main aim of the change?
    • Who will participate?
    • What will be the main steps?
    • What kind of social media tools will be used and why?

Step 5 (20 min): **Problem solving and debriefing**
  ✓ Give each micro-group 2 minutes to present their outcome.
  ✓ Discuss in plenary:
    • How can we go about change regarding student councils?
    • What issues or educational practices should students actively participate in?
    • At what age should school start to activate and promote student councils?
    • How can students' participation help to solve conflicts?
    • In what way is it possible to adopt this activity to your own practice?
    • How can social media support the work of student councils?
    • How can schools use social media to improve educational practices? How is it related to democratic participation?
    • How can schools use this student feedback for further development?
  ✓ Show following YouTube video: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gKECezmhQyI (26.01.2015)

Tips for trainers
  ✓ Try to stress the potential benefits of democratic participation.

Activity 5: Evaluation

Duration: 20 min

Expected outcome
   ✓ Give overview of the learning process for further development.
   ✓ Readiness to learn from challenges   (A_SELF_4)

Methods/ techniques used   ✓ Evaluation
Practical arrangements   ✓ Open space.

Procedure
Step 1 (30 min)
   ✓ Create a circle with the participants and discuss following
        • Did the session today add to your learning?
        • Can you describe the feelings you had during any of the activities?
        • Which activity was most useful?
        • In what ways will this training change your thinking or practice?
        • In what ways can we use social media for student participation?
        • Did your attitudes towards student councils change?
        • Any other comments, ideas or suggestions?

Tips for trainers   ✓ Encourage participants to use the created online social space for further communication, networking, knowledge transfer and innovation.